

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Sermon: The Spirit's Enduring Flame

Step into a sun-drenched Jerusalem street, where the air thrums with the voices of Pentecost pilgrims—Parthians in flowing robes, Medes adorned with silver trinkets, Elamites murmuring in dialects as varied as their garments. It's fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, and in a humble upper room, the disciples gather, their hearts pulsing with hope and uncertainty, like a meadow hushed before a storm. Suddenly, a sound like a mighty rushing wind roars through the house. Tongues of fire dance above each head, and these ordinary Galileans—fishermen, tax collectors, mothers, and merchants—begin speaking languages they've never studied. The crowd outside, a vibrant mosaic of nations, stands in awe, hearing the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection in their native tongues. This is Acts 2:1-21, the birthday of the Christian Church, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all believers, igniting a flame that burns in our hearts today, fueling faith and hope for the world to come.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was a rare gift, reserved for specific callings. Isaiah received it to proclaim God's judgment and mercy; David, to lead Israel with courage; Moses, to guide a wayward people through the desert. In Numbers 11, when two men unexpectedly prophesy, Joshua urges Moses to stop them. Moses replies with longing: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29). At Pentecost, God answers with breathtaking generosity. As Peter proclaims, quoting Joel, "In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). This is no trickle but a flood, drenching young and old, men and women, slave and free, shattering barriers of language, culture, and status, uniting humanity in the truth of Christ's cross.

This linguistic miracle is astounding. The Greek word for "tongues" in Acts 2:4, *glossai*, can mean human languages or ecstatic speech, but Acts 2:8 clarifies: each listener heard "in his own native language." Translation is a delicate craft. In the

1980s, Wycliffe missionaries in Ethiopia wrestled with Amharic, where a slight tonal shift could turn “light” into “life” or “God’s vow” into “God’s cow,” prompting chuckles in a village Bible study. One missionary recalled an elder’s grin as he corrected the error, yet the Gospel’s truth shone through. At Pentecost, the Spirit ensured flawless clarity, making salvation’s message a universal language, from the sands of Arabia to the markets of Rome. This was not mere communication but communion, the Spirit forging bonds across nations through Christ’s Good News.

Jesus prepared His disciples for this in John 14:23-31: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). The Holy Spirit, the Parakletos—the Helper, meaning “one called alongside”—is God Himself dwelling in us. He teaches, comforts, and empowers, as Jesus promises: “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). This is no fleeting spark but a permanent flame, sustaining us in faith, equipping us with gifts, and anchoring us in hope for eternity.

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, ending decades of division. In East Berlin, a small Lutheran congregation met in a dimly lit basement, under the Stasi’s watchful gaze. They whispered hymns like “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” their voices trembling yet resolute. A schoolteacher named Monika, risking arrest, led a Bible study, feeling what she called “a fire in my soul.” When the wall crumbled, their church flung open its doors, serving soup and sharing Scripture with a city reborn in hope. Monika’s group grew, welcoming former skeptics who found Christ amidst the rubble. The Spirit, as at Pentecost, gave them boldness to proclaim salvation in a world of fear.

What are these gifts of the Spirit? Acts 2 reveals bold proclamation, miraculous unity, and signs of God’s power. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, lists wisdom, faith, healing, teaching, and service. These gifts are not for spectacle but for building Christ’s body.

Coral reefs are a masterpiece of God’s creation. Each coral polyp, no larger than a grain of rice, plays a unique role: some form the reef’s skeleton, others filter nutrients, some glow to attract fish. In 2024, marine biologists studying the Great

Barrier Reef marveled at how corals adapt to warming seas, each polyp contributing to a thriving ecosystem despite stress. So the Spirit's gifts work in us: a teacher's patience, a pastor or member's visit to the sick, a quiet prayer for a neighbor—all build the Church. Your work, however small, is vital, woven into God's living tapestry.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, means both “spirit” and “wind,” a vivid image for Pentecost's “mighty rushing wind” (Acts 2:2). This wind reshapes lives, like a gale sculpting cliffs.

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0-magnitude earthquake devastated Haiti, killing over 200,000 and leaving millions homeless. Amid the rubble, a small Lutheran church in Port-au-Prince, led by Pastor Jean Paul, became a refuge. With their building half-collapsed, they set up tents, distributing water and bread. A nurse named Marie, a church member, tended wounds and prayed with survivors, feeling the Spirit guide her words. One man, holding a tattered hymnbook, found hope as she shared Acts 2:21: “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The Spirit turned their despair into a beacon of grace, drawing dozens to faith in the months that followed.

Nature offers another lesson. Monarch butterflies, delicate creatures weighing less than a gram, undertake a 3,000-mile migration from Canada to Mexico. In 2023, University of Michigan researchers studied how monarchs navigate storms and predators, guided by an instinct they cannot explain, to reach oyamel fir forests they've never seen. Each butterfly's journey mirrors the Spirit's work, equipping us with gifts of faith and endurance to travel toward the world to come. A mother teaching her child to pray, a coworker offering forgiveness, a volunteer serving at a shelter—these are monarch-like acts, fragile yet powerful, driven by the Spirit's guidance.

Jesus teaches us that the Holy Spirit works through his Word and Sacraments. As Luther writes in the Small Catechism, the Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth.” In Baptism, you received the Spirit, as Acts 2:38 promises: “Repent and be baptized... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Each time you hear the Word preached or receive Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, the Spirit strengthens your faith. This isn't

about earning salvation—Christ’s cross has secured that—but about living in the gifts He freely gives, sustaining you through life’s trials.

We all face storms—illness, loss, division. Jesus speaks to this in John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

This peace upheld a Lutheran congregation in Sendai, Japan, after the March 11, 2011, Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, which claimed over 15,000 lives. Pastor Tetsuo Ishikawa transformed his church into a refuge, sharing rice, blankets, and Scripture amidst aftershocks. A woman named Aiko, who lost her home, found faith as Pastor Ishikawa read John 14, her heart stirred by the Spirit’s promise of peace. She later joined the church, serving others with a quiet joy that radiated Christ’s love. That peace is yours, a bedrock amid life’s quakes, anchoring you until Christ’s return.

Pentecost is the Church’s birthday and your calling. The Spirit who empowered Peter to preach to thousands dwells in you. You may not speak Elamite, but you can share Christ’s love with a struggling friend, pray for a grieving neighbor, or serve in God’s church according to your Spirit-given gifts. In 2025, as division and fear grip our world—political strife, economic uncertainty, cultural clashes—the Spirit unites us in Christ’s body, giving hope for eternity. Your Baptism sealed His presence; your gifts, whether teaching, giving, or serving, build His kingdom. Trust the Spirit, as sure as a monarch’s instinct. Use His gifts, as diverse as a reef’s corals. Hold fast to hope, for as Joel proclaims, “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). The fire of Pentecost burns in you, lighting your path to the world to come. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Breight Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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