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Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Day of Pentecost Acts 2:1-21

May grace and peace be yours in abundance! Amen

This week I participated in a conference call with Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp as they considered their options for the remainder of the summer. They provided us with three options, one that looked something like camp as before, but with many new procedures in place as well as the elimination of some key components of camp, like all camp worship.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> option was based on the formats they have in place when separate groups reserve space there, like family reunions and retreats, and again it was similar but different.

The third option was to eliminate gathering for camp altogether, provide some virtual resources for families and congregations, but their main focus would be to work on projects around the camp property and to plan and dream for next year as they live into new ways of doing camp that will now be forever changed.

On that phone call one person spoke up and said, "Maybe this is an opportunity for the camp to take a sabbatical, a time of rest and study and dreaming about the future." He saw this moment as a turning point in ministry for camp, and that we should pay attention to this moment to make the most of it.

This era of Covid-19 is a turning point for the whole world. Every aspect of life will probably never go back to "business as usual." My sister-in-law is a dean at a university and because she doesn't do any direct teaching, she will now be doing all of her administrative work from home until the end of 2020, at least.

And today's worship service is evidence that the future of congregational worship and our life together is so different, it may never be quite what it once was.

Today we commemorate the Day of Pentecost. This reading from Acts is the same every year. We know about the disciples waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the rush of the mighty wind, and the tongues of fire that empowered them to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in every language that was represented there that day.

Today I'd like to focus on Peter's sermon, which was really a reminder of God's promise that was at that very moment being fulfilled. The promise comes from the prophet Joel.

'In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.  
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

It is not just pastors and bishops and missionaries who have some special word to speak from God. “I will pour out my Spirit upon ALL flesh,” God declares. Young and old, men and women, those with power and those with no worldly power.

Pastors and church staff, council members, adults, teens, children, those who have been members at Zion for a long time and those who have just recently started worshiping with us—God is pouring out the Spirit on all of us, inspiring us to see visions and dreams of new possibilities for being God’s people in this place and time.

It is in times of upheaval or major transition that we are given an opportunity to make new choices, to change directions, or simply see ourselves and the work God places before us in new ways.

I remember a young man from the church I served in Washington who was preparing to graduate and go off to college. That summer I took a group of kids to Pacific Lutheran University for a youth gathering and this boy connected with a great group of kids from other places. He had not been one of the most popular kids in his high school class. He had friends, but was one of those that didn’t really stand out.

The group he met at this retreat saw him in a new way, which helped him see himself in new ways. He was fun! People liked him! He had something to offer that the people who had known him a long time somehow didn’t notice. This young person left for college with a sense of joyful anticipation that this new season of his life could be different. He could make different choices based on this new vision of himself.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter saw himself in a new way. He had been Jesus’ follower, a disciple who listened and learned from Jesus. He had once been fearful, denying who Jesus was and his relationship with him. He questioned Jesus’ resurrection when the women ran back from the empty tomb to tell the good news on that Easter Day.

Then Jesus showed up! He met with Peter and the other disciples—including the women who were part of that group. He ate with them and prepared them for the changes that were coming. So, after Jesus ascended into heaven, Peter and the others gathered to pray and to wait for the coming of the promised Spirit.

And when the wind of the Spirit blew through them and empowered them to speak the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ, they spoke! And Peter was emboldened to see himself in a new role, taking command of the multi-ethnic crowd and proclaiming God’s promises that were now coming into being.

What if Zion Lutheran took this moment in history as our opportunity to see new visions and dream new dreams for ourselves? What if this season of distancing and online gatherings was a chance to receive God’s Spirit—to see God’s vision of who we might become and to dream of new ways to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and serve the world?

It is clear from the way we are seated and the masks people are wearing and the way we will serve communion today that returning to worship as it once was might someday be similar but will also likely include changes that will stay in place going forward. We will continue to worship, in one form or another—or in a combination of forms!

And as we forego our committee meetings and the gatherings that used to direct the ebb and flow of our community, let us ALL open ourselves to the movement of the Spirit to breathe new life into this congregation and, through us, to the community around us.

Let us open ourselves up to those whose voices we don't normally hear. Last week in our Bible study on 1 Peter, we wondered together about who might read that particular passage differently that we would.

What if there were teenagers involved in that study?

What if there were people from a more urban setting who are experiencing the pandemic differently that we are?

What if we had a mix of races in our conversations?

This pandemic has opened the church to using technology in new ways. It has also put the focus of worship back in the home. The Spirit of God has moved us out of the walls of our building to be the church in new ways.

May we catch God's vision, and dream God's dreams, and carry the Good News of Jesus Christ for all people into a world aching for God's salvation.

Thanks be to God! Amen

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

*A brief silence.*

O God, we call on your spirit of unity, giving thanks for our callings. Activate and utilize the diverse gifts present in your church, in the young and the old, in men and women, boys and girls, that we would reveal your love for all.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of life, present in air, wind, humidity, storms, and oxygen in our atmosphere, breathing energy into all things. Heal with your breath the whole creation, especially those who struggle to breathe and those fighting the coronavirus.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of righteousness. With wonderful diversity of languages and cultures you created all people in your image. And yet, this has been another difficult week in our country as racial injustice continues and anger leads to violence. Free us from prejudice and fear, that we may see your face in the faces of people of every race. Wherever we as a people are divided, unite us. Wherever we are prideful, humble us. Give each one of us a heart for justice and empathy. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of healing. Bless nurses, doctors, midwives, chaplains, counselors, and hospice workers as they care for those in need. We pray for all who long for comfort especially Jessie, Harriet, Don, and Oleta. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of hope. As you have led your saints in all times and places, stir in us the desire to follow their example, leading us from death to new life in you.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**