

*Come, holy Spirit!*

How do you live when everything keeps changing,  
when nothing is what you expect it to be?

From the moment these men and women met Jesus, nothing was as they  
expected. He came along and summoned you from your livelihood and  
family and said, "Come and be my people, follow my lead now."

He then invited others to join that you wouldn't have been caught dead with.  
And you came to love them – who could expect that?

He could heal even the incurable; could cause food to multiply,  
make water become wine, and even walk on water ...

He went head to head with important, holy men constantly challenging him.

He taught with amazing authority about God, whom he called father,  
and taught that nothing was as you'd always been told it was.

You weren't supposed to get vengeance on your enemies – you were supposed to  
love them. And if someone stole from you, you were supposed to give them more.  
And you weren't supposed to judge anybody else – that was God's job.

There was not a moment when Jesus did the expected thing.

Then came the night you were all celebrating the Passover meal,  
and instead of the expected blessings over the bread and wine,  
he said these were now his body, his blood – and from then on, whenever  
you gather in my name, eat and drink me in the bread and wine. What?

And then this most powerful man allowed himself to become arrested and tried,  
sort of, and crucified – and at no point did he stop it. Who could expect that?

And three days later, when some women went to anoint his body for burial,  
it was gone, and angels said he was alive, risen –

and then people started seeing him here and there, and he appeared to you,  
saying, "I am risen. Death couldn't hold me, and it won't hold you."

And he taught again those lessons about how to be his people,

how to wield the power of God to bring wholeness and love and peace.

And just when you're getting used to having him back, he leads you outside  
Jerusalem, and as he's blessing you, up he goes, into the skies.

Who could have expected that? And you go on about your business, saying,  
“Okay – he’s taught us. We can figure it out.”

And you gather regularly for prayer and worship. This we know how to do.  
This we can control. We know what psalms to say when we gather for a  
religious holiday, what readings, what prayers. Let’s pray and worship.  
And... something happens that you could never have expected.  
*(Put everyone suddenly into breakout rooms for a moment, then back.)*

Who could have expected that? They could never have anticipated the rush of  
wind, the tongues of fire. But do we want the unexpected in church?  
Many of us crave familiarity in our expression of church. We crave comfort.  
And I believe from the bottom of my heart that that is not what God wants for us.  
God does not want us too comfortable. God does not want us cushioned.  
God wants us on the edges where Jesus was. God wants us on the margins  
with people who do not look like us, think like us, vote like us, love like us.  
God wants us boldly carrying love to people who are different from us.

Because God loves difference! We see this principle of diversity in creation –  
God separated the dark from the light, the sky from the water, the water  
from the land. He made different creatures, each unique and amazing.  
God made man in his image – and then woman, who was like, but not like, man,  
also in God’s image. We see difference in the way Jesus called fishermen as  
disciples, and then tax collectors, of whom the fishermen would have been  
very suspicious. And he said, “Now love each other.” And hey, we’re going to  
have dinner with all kinds of people you wouldn’t want to be seen with.”

God loves difference. Look what happened at Pentecost – did the Spirit cause  
everyone to speak the same language? Might have made sense, but...No!  
The Spirit empowered the disciples to speak particular languages of the travelers  
in Jerusalem for the holiday – because God loves difference. God prizes diversity.

I look forward to the day when we are together in person and here on Zoom,  
when we don’t all look alike, when our congregations are full of people of  
different ages, colors, economics, opinions – each one made in the image of God.  
Right here you can see how much God loves diversity – because each of us  
is made in God’s image, and yet not one of us is exactly alike.  
And God loves that! I believe we are called to love people different from us,  
because God loves them and God loves us and God loves difference.

I want us to make diversity our mission, because God loves it. And God loves us. God is always doing a new thing, the unexpected thing – leading us forward. That day, the disciples were accused of having hit the new wine and being drunk.

Peter said, that's ridiculous – it's only 9 in the morning.

But on one level those mockers nailed it – they had been hit with the New Wine, the new wine of the Spirit had been poured out on them like fire! And everybody could tell. When we're zapped with the Spirit of God, we know!

But what did Jesus say about new wine? He said you can't just pour it into the old containers – they used leather skins in those days, not bottles.

New wine is still fermenting, so it's expanding, and it pushes at the restraints of those wineskins until they can't hold anymore. And then everything is wasted.

No, Jesus says, "use some new containers for what I'm going to bring you.

New words to pray, new songs to sing, along with the old ones.

New people to love. Because I'm going to keep showing up in what's new."

There's nothing wrong with the old – in fact, Jesus called it; he said you go back to that old wine, so smooth, so easy, you won't want the new anymore.

But the new is where God is leading us. Always.

Where do you feel God's new wine pushing against your container?

We're not called to keep doing the same old same old – you know how they say one definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome.

Churches can be really good at that. And right now our models are crashing.

And God is inviting us into a future that is so exciting, and so vivid, and vital.

It'll have some features that are familiar, and some that are brand new.

Nobody wants the pain and global turmoil being caused by Covid-19.

Over 100,000 real people in just our country have died prematurely,

many preventably. Businesses are going under, unemployment surging, patterns of working and living being overturned. No one wants that.

AND... there are places where new life is popping up, especially in our churches.

We can't do church the way we've always done it. That's a gift, my friends.

Look at us! If I'd said, as I've wanted to for the past two years,

"We are now live-streaming our services," how many of you would have logged in on Sundays when you couldn't get to church?

How many of you would have told your friends? Now – look at us!

We're online,. Now we can worship with people from Canada and South Carolina.  
Now we can offer more courses on Sunday mornings.  
All kinds of things are possible now that have been hard for us to do.

And it starts with loving those who are different from us.

How about we modify our mission statement from

“Taking God’s contagious love into the world,” which isn’t very specific, to,

“Taking God’s contagious love to someone different from me.”

One of the most radical things that happened that Pentecost in Jerusalem

was that the message about Jesus was suddenly available to all kinds of people who didn’t look like his disciples. *“Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, ...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”*

Jesus still wants the Good News of his love to get out – and now through us.

Who can you think of, different than you, who needs God’s love?

God will show you if you ask. Seek them out.

Ask the Spirit to give you the language that helps that person hear love.

*“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.”*

And here we are. Who could have expected this?

Amen.

### **Luke 5:36-39**

He also told them a parable: 'No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, "The old is good."

### **Acts 2:1-18, 21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through 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.. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "