

Today is Pentecost Sunday. We have arrived at the end of the Easter Season in the Church. We are now entering the season of the Church where we celebrate the power of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, on Pentecost Sunday, Jane Rutledge would have decorated the sanctuary beautifully. We would all be wearing bright colors to symbolize the flaming tongues that descended on the disciples. But not today. Today is a different Pentecost. The sanctuary is mostly empty. There are no red streamers or balloons. There is no fellowship time after worship. Things are different for us during this time. All this change likely is making us feel uncomfortable, awkward, frustrated, maybe even disappointed that another church holy day has come and gone without our usual fanfare. And I wouldn't blame you for feeling that way. I have felt all those things myself. But today, if we learn anything from the Acts lesson for today, it is that the Holy Spirit cannot be contained in one room or one building. The Holy Spirit empowers us and moves us with a mighty wind. The Church must and will be forced out into the streets, where the people are.

The disciples were still playing it safe on the first Christian day of Pentecost. They were all in a house, hanging out together. They were leaderless. They were the Church without a mission. Many of them were still scared and anxious. After all, it's only been 50 days since Easter. It's not even been two months since Jesus was executed and rose again. Who could blame them for taking some extra precautions? Who could blame them for needing time to still process the events that just had happened? When you think about it, we have been under our stay-at-home order longer than the disciples had to process the events of Holy Week. But the Holy Spirit had other plans for the disciples, for the Church. The Holy Spirit was not going to allow the Church to remain behind closed doors forever. The Holy Spirit comes, not with a gentle knock, not with a quiet plea, but with a rushing wind and flaming tongues. That is so like God, to come and interrupt our plans and move us forward. This passage from Acts teaches us that the Church of Jesus Christ had and has a mission, to get outside of our comfort zones and out into the streets where the people are, and not even closed doors could stop the Church from being the Church. Not even the fact that these uneducated, first century Galileans who had never been out of their own region nor likely knew another language could prevent the good news to the whole world. When the Holy Spirit shows up, the Church is enabled to fulfill its mission to proclaim the Good News to everyone.

We need to pay attention to that message this morning, beloved Church. When the Holy Spirit shows up in our lives, the answer should be to follow wherever we are being led. But, I fear, even before COVID-19 and the resulting economic crisis, the Church's response to the Holy Spirit was, far too often, "not yet." Or maybe the response was, "but we don't have the money to do that.?" Or maybe the response to the Holy Spirit was, "we don't do that here" or "we can't do that. We're too old, or poor, or unknowledgeable." We as the Church were really good at coming up with excuses for why we might ignore the Holy Spirit's calling in our lives. Now, with COVID-19, everything has changed for us. We no longer have the ability to gather in person for worship. In one aspect, I am glad we are confronting the idol of the Church building. Far too many churches used to think that they had to preserve the church's building at the cost of the church's mission. Far too many people believed that the Church is what we did on Sunday mornings during worship. But, with the stay-at-home order, we have been confronting that idol. We realize that the Church is greater and bigger than our building. The mission of the Church was never about preserving the building. The mission of the Church of Jesus Christ has been and is and always will be proclaiming the good news to the whole world that there is newness of life. There can be and is restoration of life. There is healing and wholeness of life and it is for everyone, not just for a select group of people. The Church's mission is to go out into the community and transform the old system that perpetuate violence and murder. The Church's mission is to stand up against racism that kills. The Church's mission is to proclaiming healing and wholeness to people who have long been ignored and rejected by society. We have far too much work to be doing, First Presbyterian Church of Farmington. We can not ignore our mission. The Holy Spirit is banging at the door. The rushing wind of the Holy Spirit is knocking down the walls and the barriers that prevent us from being the Church of Jesus Christ. We have too much work to be doing to stay behind closed doors.

Over the next few weeks, as we continue to figure out what life is going to be like for us, I want to hear from you. The Church building may be closed, but the Church is still open for business. The lights might be turned off, but the flames of the Holy Spirit are lighting up our hearts. The doors may be locked

to the building, but it doesn't matter anyway because the Church is already outside proclaiming the Good News. I want to hear from you. What are some ways that we can proclaim the Good News to people in Farmington during this time? What are some ways that we can proclaim the Good News with our resources and our energy? When I was ordained and installed as your pastor, and when each of our deacons were ordained and installed, we were asked the following question: "Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?" Now is the time for us to fulfill that promise. Let us listen to the Holy Spirit and follow the Holy Spirit wind as it blows us into new places and new ways of being the Church of Jesus Christ. Amen.