

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

June 5, 2022 (Day of Pentecost, Year C)
Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:14-17, John 14:8-17, 25-27

In West Texas during the Depression. Mr. Ira Yates was like many other ranchers and farmers. He had a lot of land, and a lot of debt. Mr. Yates wasn't able to make enough ON his ranch to pay the mortgage, so he was in danger of LOSING his ranch. With little money for food or clothing, his family (like many others) had to live on a government subsidy.

Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those rolling West Texas hills, he was no doubt greatly troubled about how he would pay his bills. Then a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease contract.

At 1,115 feet they struck a HUGE oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many FOLLOWING wells were more than TWICE as large. In fact, 30 years AFTER the discovery, a government test of one of the wells showed it STILL had the potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day. 30 years LATER!

And Mr. Yates owned it ALL. The day he purchased the land he'd received the oil and mineral RIGHTS. Yet, he'd been living on government aid – a MULTIMILLIONAIRE ... living in POVERTY. The PROBLEM was that he didn't know the oil was THERE, even though he OWNED it.

At times, you and I are a lot LIKE Mr. Yates. We are heirs of a vast treasure, and yet we live in spiritual poverty. We're entitled to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and its energizing power, and yet we live unaware of our birthright. We gather today on Pentecost Sunday to REMEMBER just how RICH we really are.

Paul says, "We are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Now, THINK about that, "joint heirs with Christ." That means that we're not only FOLLOWERS of Christ; we are BROTHERS AND SISTERS with Christ. So what HE has ALSO belongs to US. His power is our power. His Spirit is our Spirit.

Jesus says that the Spirit of God abides with us, and is IN us. It's INSIDE us! And he says that we will do works of power GREATER than he did. That's our birthright. We are POWERFUL, and it's time we REALIZED that.

Acts says, "Suddenly, from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting....All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." This is why wind is one of the classic symbols for the Holy Spirit. But it actually appears much, much EARLIER in the Bible. In the Old Testament, Spirit, wind, and breath all come from the same word. They're interchangeable. It was the wind/breath/Spirit of God that moved over the waters of creation. When God created Adam, God formed a person out of the earth, but it wasn't ALIVE until God breathed into it the BREATH of life, GOD'S OWN SPIRIT. In Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, it was God's Spirit from the four winds of the earth that breathed upon those bones. They were lifeless, dead, until God BREATHED His spirit into them, and RESTORED them to life.

You have the SAME Spirit, the breath of God, INSIDE you. The wind that swept over creation swept over YOU when you were baptized. It's the same Spirit that inspired the disciples, that turned their fear into peace and confidence, courage and strength, and 3,000 people were converted that day. And "you will do GREATER works than these," Jesus says. You have the SAME Spirit inside you, so imagine what YOU can do.

It wasn't by the disciples' OWN power. On their own, at the beginning of our reading from Acts, the disciples were just sitting around WAITING for something to happen. GOD changed that.

In some ways, a disciple is like a balloon. [*illustrate this with a real balloon*] A balloon is "dead" – it has no life. It just lies wherever you put it. It doesn't move. It doesn't have any power.

Now take a "dead balloon" and do what Jesus did—blow into it. (*Blow it up*) What happens? It's full of hot air! The church was created to breathe IN the Spirit, and be INSPIRED by the Spirit to act on God's behalf. But the church has been WAITING to EXHALE far too long.

The same is true of people. We were created to BREATHE God's Spirit in. But what happens when a person STOPS breathing? What happens to a person if they breathe in, but NEVER breathe OUT? Eventually, they'll die. Just as the Spirit of God flows into us, it also MUST flow OUT of us.

This inflated balloon is pretty to look at, but it's still dead – it can't do anything until that power is released. But when the wind IS released, the balloon really moves.

(Release the balloon.)

I love doing that. You don't know WHERE the balloon is going to go; but you know it's going SOMEWHERE. Like Jesus said, we don't know where the Spirit COMES from or where it's GOING. It just GOES.

One of my favorite expressions about Pentecost is that it means that God is on the LOOSE. When Jesus was walking the earth, he was only in ONE place. You could keep on EYE on him. But when he sent the Spirit at Pentecost, God was on the LOOSE. He could be here; he could be there; he could be EVERYWHERE at once.

Jesus didn't give the disciples the Spirit so that they could stay behind locked doors in fear; he gave the Spirit to move us OUT into the world -- even if we don't always KNOW exactly WHERE it will lead us.

We don't know where the Spirit will TAKE us, but we do know what it DOES. It goes OUT. It flows OUT of us, in the way we treat others, in the way we speak to one another, in the way we LIVE OUT our new life in Christ.

This is your inheritance. You are children of God, and joint heirs with Christ. You are rich and powerful BEYOND imagination. That's your birthright, the birthright of ALL Christians. It's time you REALIZED it. YOU...ARE...POWERFUL!! You are mighty! You are a force to be reckoned with in this world. Don't let anyone EVER tell you otherwise. You are POWERFUL!!

Now go SHOW the world what JESUS can DO. Amen.