



CALL TO WORSHIP

PRAYER

HYMN Let Every Christian Pray

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

Almighty God, you poured your Spirit upon gathered disciples creating bold tongues, open ears, and a new community of faith. Today, however, we often hold back the force of your Spirit among us. We don't listen for

your word of grace, speak the good news of your love, or live as a people made one in Christ. Have mercy on us, O God. Transform our timid lives by the power of your Spirit, and fill us with a flaming desire to be your faithful people, doing your will for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WORDS OF BLESSING

Fear no more! The power of God's Holy Spirit has set us free from the prison of doubt and fear! Now is the time to shine with the light of God's love, given to you by Jesus Christ. Remember that Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING Acts 2:1-14, 22-24

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴ 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.

²² "... Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

INVITATION TO THE SERMON

O God, open my heart and mind and soul to hear your word as if for the first time. Help me experience anew the surprise and joy that your presence in the word can bring. Amen.

MEDITATION

I worked throughout my college days as an undergraduate in order to pay for my education. For two of those years I worked in a nursing home – that's what we called them in those days – as a nurse's aide. It was hard work but I thoroughly enjoyed the residents. My assignments included both patients with good cognitive ability as well as those who were impaired.

There was one patient that I remember well. She was a petite woman who only spoke Spanish. I don't recall her given name only that she was known to one and all as "Mama." Mama was confined to a wheelchair as one leg was immobile. Mama's needs and demands were minimal which she usually was able to communicate with gestures but every now and then, usually two or three times a shift, this transmission proved to be inadequate and she and the staff were frustrated. For a little woman she sure could make a loud noise. Although I don't speak Spanish, I often wondered just how many inappropriate words she knew.

Many of the staff quickly gave up and moved her to rant in her room. Although she wasn't usually my patient, I remember on more than one occasion going into her room, kneeling down next to her chair, taking her hand and quietly repeating, *mi amiga*, the only Spanish words I knew because I heard her say them many times when addressing the staff. *Mi amiga, mi amiga, mi amiga*. It never failed. As though I turned on a switch, she stopped screaming and would look into my eyes, take my hand and press it to her lips and cheek. Then I would take her to the bathroom and she would be fine. The woman had the bladder the size of a pea.

Somewhere, across whatever chaos and division was between Mama and I, she had felt heard. Acknowledged – in her language and in the universal language of love. This was the miracle of Pentecost. The barrier of language was broken down and the universal language, God's language, was spoken.

Throughout history people's inability to communicate to each other has divided us. So for people to somehow come and stay together, something dramatic must happen. In fact, since human efforts to fully unify people have proved largely futile or temporary, we might add that something dramatic must happen *to* us.

Acts 2 begins its account of the first Pentecost by reporting that Jesus' disciples are united, "all together in one place." Yet that sounds a lot like Luke's description of them forty days earlier on the first Easter evening. Luke 24:33, after all, describes Jesus' frightened disciples as "assembled together."

So we almost get the sense that Jesus' disciples have just moved in a clump, first to the site of Jesus' ascension, then to the temple and then to a room in Jerusalem. Now, on the day of Pentecost, Jesus' followers are again, perhaps still, "all together in one place." Their unity physically separates them from the other Jews who have come to celebrate Pentecost, the Festival of the Harvest where the first fruits are given to God at the temple as well as celebrate the giving of the law to God's chosen people through Moses. It isn't just the walls of a place, however, that separate these Jews from each other. After all, they've come from what the author Luke calls "every nation under heaven." So though they've gathered to thank God for the spring harvest, they can't understand each other. Though these Jews have assembled to remember God's gift of the law at Sinai, they can't even talk to each other about it.

While the Romans have dispersed these Jews throughout the known world, their faith in God has temporarily drawn them back to Jerusalem. Yet Luke reports that they now speak a startling variety of languages. So these people who share a common faith in God don't share a common language. While they can babble at each other, they can't understand each other.

This, however, wasn't always the case. While Genesis 10:5 says Noah's descendants spoke a variety of languages, Genesis 11 also suggests that they also somehow spoke some common language. At Babel, however, God confuses proud people's language. As a result, people can no longer understand each other. They eventually speak the languages of the Parthians, Egyptians, Libyans and others.

So we can imagine the cacophony that filled Jerusalem's rooms, streets and alleys on that first Pentecost. We can almost hear and see the chaos of people who speak at least fifteen different languages trying to communicate with each other. It reminds us of the chaos that reigned before God's Spirit blew order into the creation all the way back in Genesis 1.

It isn't, however, just language that separates people from each other. Sometimes even religion divides us. Some scholars suggest there were as many as ten or fifteen strains of Judaism already in Jesus' day. So it's certainly possible that some of those strains were represented in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost. But then God

graciously and miraculously both audibly and visibly responds to such brokenness. First God sends the sound of a tornado-force wind to fill the whole building where Jesus' followers are gathered. Then witnesses see what looks like a wildfire of flames spread onto each of those followers. Finally, they hear each of those disciples speak their own diverse languages. The barrier between them is then broken. The barrier of life and death was broken by an empty tomb. Now the barrier that segregated humankind from each other, separated and even identified, is leveled by a mighty wind that has the strength of and is God's love.

Listen to the list of those who heard the message – 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.

Such a list is a clear indicator that God does not just love and care for one small group of people, a small band of chosen people, but God's love is as big as all creation – for God so loved the WORLD! God's love, through the power of the Holy Spirit, was unleashed on the *whole* world.

We do so much to try to see ourselves as “us vs. them,” and “different” as “bad.” We have some trouble loving. Nothing may separate us from the love of God, but almost anything will separate us from the love we have for each other. You can think about nations, races, families, businesses and the truth is there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of love out there. Just look at the headline news. But that isn't how God sees it at all. God speaks love in any and every language. This is so clearly demonstrated in our first lesson this morning from Corinthians. Those Corinthians were a tough bunch of people. They fought amongst themselves constantly. They drew boundaries around who to follow, who was better, who was more important. You can almost hear Paul's frustration when he explains that all are important especially because they *are* different! But the Holy Spirit brings us all together. For God so loved the world. This is the message Peter proclaimed on that first Pentecost and is the message for the church now.

We still make barriers. We have literal barriers with the coronavirus as we keep ourselves behind closed doors and masks. This virus has also brought into the light other barriers that we have been living with as we see the effects of this virus having a greater impact on the poor and people of color. The financial toll seems to be disproportionately affecting vulnerable, low-income communities. Middle- and upper- class Americans can self-isolate, which might not be possible for low-income Americans who often live in densely populated housing. These same people also can't work from home as they have the lower wage paying jobs that require them to go to work in order to do their job. Others have had their job eliminated due to restrictions such as those working in the hospitality industry. People living in rural areas without adequate health systems may have a difficult time receiving a COVID-19 test request from a qualified health professional. As for people living in urban areas and are considered essential workers, they need safe public transportation in order to go to work and keep their job. Gaps in access to technology among students are complicating online learning. These are barriers we create.

Now before you get too down in the dumps, ok, further down than what you have been for the past 2 ½ months, there is also strong visible evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit at work breaking down barriers. Life is challenging right now on every level. We're bouncing between fear, anxiety, and uncertainty as coronavirus disrupts our daily lives and poses a threat to ourselves and our loved ones. But despite all of this—or, perhaps, because of it—some people have been exhibiting extraordinary kindness, as well as creating a new sense of community. [Neighbors are helping neighbors](#), doing what they can to make life a little easier for them or simply bring a smile to their faces. Some are going above and beyond for family members, while others are helping complete strangers, and those formerly content to stay on the sidelines are stepping up to pitch in.

This is the wind of the Spirit that is changing the world we are living in. Lives are changing and the way we look at the world is changing. Even, and especially, our language is changing to God's love language which is the universal language. Just look at a few examples:



We're constantly being reminded to wash our hands to help fight the spread of the coronavirus. But what about the homeless, who don't have regular access to water? Through his nonprofit, [Love Beyond Walls](#), Terence Lester and his team of volunteers have been placing portable sinks throughout Atlanta, Georgia. They also clean all the units and refill them daily with water and soap. When they first started, the reaction was immediate. "People started washing their hands and expressed gratitude for this opportunity they haven't been given," Lester wrote on his blog. "Since handwashing is a requirement, this is our small effort to protect people experiencing homelessness." The group has raised funds for 30 sinks through its "Love Sinks In" campaign and hopes to install 100 around the city.



Food banks, places of worship, and various agencies strive to treat clients with dignity, but asking for help isn't always easy. That's why Jeremy Lowe, from Wadsworth, Ohio, devised an alternative: Free Pantries. These birdhouse-like structures—which tell people to "take what you need, leave what you can"—serve as an anonymous way to give and receive food.

The idea came about the day that Lowe had to temporarily close his business, [Must Love Dogs Daycare & Spa](#), due to the crisis. He challenged everyone at work to do something kind for a neighbor, and following his own advice, Lowe and his son, Caeden, built ten free pantries and installed them around town. Now, nearly every day, he and his family restock six or seven of the structures. They receive donations through porch pickups and Facebook challenges under the hashtag #wadsworthstrong. Lowe's idea continues to grow with free pantries popping up in nearby cities and several states, including Michigan, Illinois, California, and Arkansas.



The night before restaurants were ordered to shut down, a local news crew filmed a story at “Irma's Southwest” about the potential impact on restaurants in Houston, Texas. Later that evening, after the story aired, two loyal customers enjoyed dinner at the restaurant, and instead of leaving a standard tip, they left \$9,500 to share between the restaurant's bartenders, servers, and kitchen staff. The next morning, operations manager Nick Galvan handed out roughly \$300 per person to help his staff make it through the week. And throughout this ordeal, the restaurant has stayed open, providing takeout service for the surrounding neighborhood. "People care about us, and for that reason, we have to do this for them," Galvan says.



After coronavirus cancelled their daughter's bat mitzvah party, a family turned the food into meal deliveries for people in quarantine.

Children's television host and Presbyterian pastor, Fred Rogers said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people helping.’” It is the helpers who are breaking down barriers, who are speaking the language of love, God's language of love, in the native tongue that can be understood by all. This is real love and it is God's gift, by the power of the Spirit, that is blowing all over the world.

Someone has said that Covid-19 is poised to become an extinction-level event for America's nonprofits. Cultural institutions have been forced to close their doors. Organizations working in and around public schools or in senior centers cannot provide services because their clients are not showing up. Fundraising events have been canceled. Many essential front-line social services -- e.g., operating [homeless shelters](#) -- cannot be delivered remotely and pose particular risks of infection, increasing the costs of keeping staff safe.

Unless government, funders and nonprofit leaders take immediate and decisive action, many nonprofits around the nation may just disappear over the next few months leaving those they serve and employ in disastrous circumstances. I don't think that's going to happen so long as you and I and others get caught up in the Spirit and speak God's love language. Amen.

PRAYER

For the gift of your Spirit in our lives and in our church...thank you God.

For the gifts you give to each of us to create your beloved community here on earth . . . thank you God.

For all of creation, that it may be honored and preserved and protected . . . thank you God.

For the leaders of our nation and all nations of the world, that they might be guided with wisdom and understanding and committed to act in ways that bring your presence and peace . . . come, Holy Spirit; come.

For all places where there are wars and rumors of wars, for those places where hunger gnaws, for those places ruled by oppression and injustice, for those places where hatred overcomes love . . . come, Spirit; come.

Where dreams have died and visions are squelched renew their spirits with your passionate fire . . . come, Spirit; come.

For all who are ill, whether in body, mind, or spirit;

for all who mourn, whether for the loss of loved ones,

the loss of a job, or even the loss of faith,

fill them with your Spirit of compassion and strength and healing, that they might know they are never alone...

Spirit, help me live as a follower of Jesus and reach out in love and caring.

For all that you have given and will yet give, thank you God. May I always be open to your Spirit. Amen.

HYMN We Are One in the Spirit

We are one in the Spirit

We are one in the Lord

We are one in the Spirit

We are one in the Lord

And we pray that all unity

May one day be restored

Chorus And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will walk with each other

We will walk hand in hand

We will walk with each other

We will walk hand in hand

And together we'll spread the news

That God is in our land *Chorus*

All praise to the Father

From whom all things come

And all praise to Christ Jesus his only son

And all praise to the Spirit

Who makes us one *Chorus*

BENEDICTION

As you enter a new week, may you experience God's presence. May you feel God pouring out the Holy Spirit over your head and your thoughts and the words of your lips, over your heart and your feelings and emotions and your compassion for all others, and over your hands and your feet as you put into action all that God commands you.

During this week, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. Amen.