

Readings: Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17 [25-27]

We envision Custer Lutheran Fellowship to be like the Black Hills themselves, an inviting community in which God's Spirit blows through people – like wind through the pine – life that is forever new!

Grace and peace to you from the God of Pentecost – the God of fire and wind, the God whose Spirit blows through all creation bringing life that is forever new! Amen.

Today seems as good a day as any to recall our “vision statement” – what we at Custer Lutheran Fellowship dream for this community and this congregation. That we might be a place that mirrors, that reflects its surroundings... that just as the wind blows through the pine trees all around us, so too would God's Spirit blow through the people touched by this congregation bringing life that is forever new.

And so, we begin this morning with a simple question: *How is the Spirit blowing through your life?* I want to take a minute or two to let you talk about this question. It might seem awkward, you might feel a little uncomfortable, but in our Pentecost reading from Acts everyone talks at the same time and there's some confusion, a little awkwardness... so we'll use this as our guide.

Pair up in groups of two (three if you need to), perhaps with someone you don't even know, perhaps with someone you've known for decades; but pair up and talk about this simple question: *How is the Spirit blowing through your life?* If that question seems too broad or uncomfortable, then just talk about what excites you or what is inspiring you today. There's no right or wrong answer.

Think about that word: *inspiration*. It's the perfect word for this Pentecost Sunday – it comes from a Latin word that literally means: *to blow into* or if Spirit was a verb, *to spirit into*.

So what is inspiring you today? Shout out some of the things you talked about – just one word is fine or a phrase if you need to.

“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...raised his voice and addressed them...”

Did you know that we just had our own Pentecost here?

Wherever the question is asked, *How is the Spirit blowing through your life?* Whenever we wrestle with what inspires us, if ever there is a time or a place where we hear others *speaking about God’s deeds of power* in simple or profound ways, that’s Pentecost.

You see, stories in the bible don’t only happen thousands of years ago. Look around and listen up. Because the stories of the bible are happening all around us and every day. But it’s not just the story of Pentecost that happens today in our midst.

Take our first reading from Genesis 11. We sometimes call it, “The Tower of Babel” story, even though the story is as much about, if not more about building a city, as it is a tower. Notice at the end of the story there’s no mention of the tower. In verse 8: “So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they *left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel...*”

At any rate, this story from Genesis 11 is a sort of book-end to our Acts reading. One story is a reversal, almost a perfect mirror image, of the other. The Genesis story starts with everyone speaking one language. The Acts story starts with everyone speaking different languages. In Genesis God scatters people across the face of the earth and languages are confused so that there is no understanding. In Acts people come together from all sorts of places with hard-to-pronounce names, but then there is common understanding despite different languages.

It’s a different way of thinking about sharing the good news of God, isn’t it? It’s a different way of talking about God’s deeds of power, isn’t it?

Don't we usually do or think we need to do what the people in the story from Genesis did? If we want to share the good news of God, literally to *evangelize*, we build something. We build a church and tell people, "Come inside!" We build a program and tell everyone, "Come join us!" Maybe, if we're feeling really inspired, we tell a friend or co-worker or neighbor, "I took Jesus as my savior, you should to!"

But look how God works in the Genesis story. Look at the mighty deeds of the LORD... Sometimes God's work is not to build, but to scatter... perhaps like a gardener scattering seed across the earth.

I want you to dream with me for a moment. Suspend everything you know about the so-called "Tower of Babel" story and ask a question with me. What if the scattering and the confusing of language, wasn't a punishment... but a gift. What if the diversity of people, the differences of language and race, gender (perhaps even sexual identity?), our differences in the ways we think and talk, our differences in what we believe, in rituals and traditions... what if all these differences are not signs of sin or even punishment for sin, but gifts of God to God's people.

Because you noticed, didn't you that the Acts story isn't *quite* an exact reversal of our first reading from Genesis. If it was a true and exact reversal, then in Acts there would be just one language spoken and everyone would understand that language.

Whenever I've traveled outside of the U.S. – visiting my sister in Japan, traveling to Europe and the Holy Land in college, going to Nicaragua a few years ago... no doubt, it'll be the same when I'm in Colombia a week from today – I've always had this nagging thought. I'm actually embarrassed to admit it, but here's my thought – "Wouldn't it be just a whole lot easier if everyone learned English?!?"

My guess is that you don't have to even leave the borders of the United States to have this thought, of course. And this is the soft version of this thought. There's a much harder version out there that goes something like this – "If you're not going to learn *our language* or do things the way *we do them*, go home."

But let's be clear, this is not the way the gifts of God work in the Pentecost story from Acts. God works through God's people to bring the good news, to speak of God's great deeds of power, to *tell of God's mighty action in the world* are told and just as importantly heard in the native language of each. The Spirit comes to people on their own terms, in their own languages.

God takes our differences and makes them a gift. It's the same way that God takes our weakness and makes it strength. It's the same way that God takes our emptiness and fills us. It's the same way that God takes our brokenness and restores us. It's the same way that God takes our questions, like "What does this mean?" or "What inspires you?" and brings us a little Pentecost.

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If you envision Custer Lutheran Fellowship to be only what happens inside the walls of this building, my prayer for you today is that God would confuse and scatter your thoughts like a gardener scattering seed.

Because wherever the Spirit blows, wherever God's people are inspired – at home or in the congregation, at work or at play, in our waking or in our sleeping, in our living or in our dying – that is where this church, where this fellowship is.

This coming week this Fellowship will be scattered all across this community, all across the Black Hills in service to neighbors and all of creation. This week this Fellowship will be scattered even across another continent, all the way to Colombia (pray for us, please!), but know that you will be coming with us and you will participate in this scattering.

So thanks be to God for inspiration, for gifts of diversity, for the power of the Spirit scattering people and blowing through lives – *like wind through the pine – life that is forever new!*

Amen.