

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Acts 2:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." <sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> '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. <sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

**Commentary**

When the fragile circle of Jesus' earliest followers found themselves separated from him, they probably responded in a variety of ways. Perhaps, some searched for hope while others withdrew and still others become cynical. However they responded, the absence of Jesus from the community threatened to become the crisis that would destroy the fledgling church. But at the same time that the church experienced the painful separation from Jesus, it also experienced a powerful manifestation of his continued presence, as depicted in this and the other lectionary texts for this week. The Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 broadcasts the extraordinary message of new life – sudden, unmerited and irresistible new life! And it tells the story of this new life in the most expansive way imaginable. It is as if not even the most lavish

use of human language is capable of capturing the experiences of that day, and that is precisely the emotion this text wishes to convey. This “birth of the church” occurs on the festival of Weeks, also known as the Feast of Pentecost, the end of the celebration of the spring harvest during which devout Israelite families praised God for God’s grace and bounty. But it was also the beginning of another period of celebration, lasting until the Festival of Tabernacles, in which the first fruits of the field were sacrificed to God. Among some Jews, it was also a time of covenant renewal. So, Pentecost is a pregnant moment in the life of the people of God and in the relationship between that people and God. It is the moment when gestation ceases and birthing occurs. It is more than a time of completion; instead it is both an end and a beginning, the leaving behind of that which is past and the launching forth into that which is only now beginning to be. The Holy Spirit has been promised, and is now realized in a manner far surpassing the expectations of even the most faithful disciples. What is being born is nothing less than new life for the church. And no one is excluded from the display of God’s grace. What happens at Pentecost is a massive outpouring of God’s energy that touches every life present.

### **Reflection**

Where do you see the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in your life, your community and your congregation? How do you recognize the Spirit’s presence and power? How do you respond? What have been some Pentecost-like events in your life and your church?

### **Romans 8:22-27**

<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. <sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

### **Commentary**

As with much else in the Bible, we have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to domesticate the extravagance of Romans 8. We tend to hear the groaning of creation in terms of *human* grief, and the Spirit becomes little more than a messenger who conveys to God the wishes of God’s people. By comparison, Paul understands the cosmos itself to be in crisis, its demise imminent. He looks to God and to God alone for the renewal of the cosmos. The birth imagery of verse 22 suggests not merely that creation gives birth to more creation but that creation now waits for the birth of something utterly new. In verse 23, Paul makes it clear that believers also groan along with creation, even as they already have the “first fruits of the Spirit” and they have also hope in the future. The text allows two very different interpretations. Verse 23 can be read to suggest that *since* believers have the Spirit, they groan along with creation; i.e., it is *because* Christians have the Spirit and hope in God that they long toward the future. In this sense, Paul’s comment here recalls the various Gospel stories that praise those who are ready for the future to break in and lament those who prepare only for the present life. Alternatively, verse 23 could be interpreted to imply that the presence of the Spirit and the presence of hope do not immunize Christians from groaning in labor pains as they await the future. In verses 26

and 27, the Spirit becomes intercessor for believers. The spirit knows the prayers of human beings *and* the Spirit is known by God. Because of that dual knowledge, the Spirit somehow intercedes, turning both toward God and toward needy humankind.

### **Reflection**

Some transitions are accompanied by “groaning” and waiting. Have you ever experienced a time of intense waiting as in the birth of a child or the return of a loved one? What do those memories suggest about the urgency of Christian hope and expectation?

### **John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

<sup>26</sup> "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup> You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. <sup>16:4b</sup> "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup> But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. <sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

### **Commentary**

This conversation between Jesus and the disciples revolves around his coming departure and the confusion this creates among the disciples. He repeatedly warns them that they will be hated and persecuted by the world, but he promises the coming Advocate as an “advantage” for these dangerous times. The Advocate will testify on Jesus’ behalf. The testimony of the Advocate is also linked to that of the disciples. The linking is critical for the church, whose testimony always remains fragile and inadequate, constantly in need of divine support. Without the Spirit, the church becomes a voiceless, irrelevant institution. But the witness of the church is always subsidiary to that of the Spirit, which means the church has no cause for boasting or bravado, as if its missionary endeavors were guaranteed success. The church remains a servant body, constantly seeking to discern and live and speak in line with the Spirit’s witness. Furthermore, the Spirit will expose as wrong the world’s way of doing things. The world has its own definitions of sin, justice, and judgment. It rewards those who measure up to its standards and punishes those who transgress them. Jesus defied the reigning structures and ended up as one of those punished by the world. The destiny of his loyal followers will be no different. But the Spirit will pull back the curtain on the world’s unbelief and show its leadership to be no longer powerful but condemned. Finally, Jesus’ promise that the Spirit “will guide you into all the truth” is not a guarantee of infallibility. Nor are the disciples given special tools to unlock all the mysteries of God. Instead, the promise is that the Spirit will make

available again and again to the church no more and no less than the same transforming reality known in the Jesus of history.

### Reflection

1. Jesus advised his disciples that “it is to your advantage that I go away.” What do you think he meant by that statement? If you had been one of the disciples, would you have found that comforting?
2. When have you seen your church guided by the witness of the Spirit? When have you seen it act without trying to discern the witness of the Spirit? What have been the results?

### Responsive Psalter

### From Psalm 104

- <sup>24</sup> O LORD, how manifold are your works!  
**In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.**
- <sup>25</sup> Yonder is the sea, great and wide,  
**creeping things innumerable are there,  
living things both small and great.**
- <sup>26</sup> There go the ships,  
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
- <sup>27</sup> **These all look to you  
to give them their food in due season;**
- <sup>28</sup> when you give to them, they gather it up;  
**when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.**
- <sup>29</sup> When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
**when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.**
- <sup>30</sup> When you send forth your spirit, they are created;  
**and you renew the face of the ground.**
- <sup>31</sup> May the glory of the LORD endure forever;  
may the LORD rejoice in his works—
- <sup>32</sup> **who looks on the earth and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains and they smoke.**
- <sup>33</sup> I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;  
**I will sing praise to my God while I have being.**
- <sup>34</sup> May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
for I rejoice in the LORD.
- <sup>35b</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul.  
**Praise the LORD!**

### Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**