

Introduction to the Scripture:

As promised by Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the "power from on high," comes upon his followers as they are all gathered together in one place. This power appearing as "divided tongues, as of fire" and sounding "like the rush of a violent wind" is then interpreted by Peter as God's gift in accord with the words of the prophet Joel. These "tongues as of fire" are why the color for Pentecost is red.

Two things in particular are important in this passage. First, it is a fulfillment of Jesus' promise that the "power from on high" would come upon his followers to empower their witness. And second, the coming of the Holy Spirit happens to **all the believers** who are gathered together in Jerusalem. It is not a gift just for the Twelve, nor for men only, but it comes upon all who are there.

Scripture:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

The Word of God for the People of God.

## Sermon: A Faith that Sticks

Did you know that there are two main types of tape? A chemist at 3M explains it this way:

There is “initial stick” and “lasting stick.” Initial stick is what you find on masking tape, scotch tape or post-it notes. This tape doesn’t stay on very long; it easily rubs off and the rubber adhesive isn’t that good. That’s “initial stick.”

Lasting stick doesn’t seem to stick so well at first, but as time goes by, this adhesive gets stronger and harder. In fact, it gets so hard that after a while, you have to chip it off like hard cement. This is the kind of tape used in campers and airplanes and is made from a recipe of animal glues, resins and special chemicals.

I like this image of “stickiness” – especially “lasting stick” – and find it helpful when thinking about the Christian faith, especially on a day like today.

As I said, today is a High Holy day in the life of the church as we celebrate Pentecost, and our church as we celebrate the Confirmation of fourteen young people.

And it is my hope for all of you - not just those being confirmed - that your faith will be one with lasting stick, and not just initial stick. Many of you already know how rocky the road of life is – how unfair life can be, how unpredictable events can change your lives completely, how much things can change in the short span of a year. Who’d have imagined back in March or April or even May of 2020, that we’d be celebrating Confirmation on Zoom!

And if this year has shown us anything it’s this: For all that life will throw at you; for all that you will stumble over and through – you need a faith that sticks.

I want to share with you an email I received this past weekend from someone who is just a few years ahead of you (kids being confirmed) on the journey:

Even though I am considered as an adult because I am 18, I feel like I just turned 16. It's hard to grow up. I mean [it feels as if] I never had time to be a kid. But if I could go back to be one I definitely would. I kind of get mad when kids say that they want to grow up and be independent when they are upset, because they don't know what they are wishing for. But I guess we all do that sometimes. It's part of life.

Life is a roller coaster, and we all need something – or someone – to hold on to who will carry us through. And if our faith is the glue – the stickiness – well then, we need to stick to something / one. So often I hear people reflect on a tough time in their life and say, “my faith got me through it,” or “I couldn’t have made it without my faith.” And I always want to ask, “your faith in what?” or “your faith in whom?” Because we don’t have faith in our faith – we have faith in God.

Back in the olden days - and by “olden days” I mean the 16th century - the way young people were taught the Christian faith was through a teaching tool called a “catechism.” The word catechism is an ancient Greek word that means “to teach by word of mouth.” And catechisms in the Christian tradition are a series of questions and answers that parents could use with their kids to teach them the faith. They

are still used today - even the ones written in the 16th century - and some churches, like the Presbyterians have written new ones in recent years.

Anyway, today I want to share with you the first question of a catechism written in Germany in 1563. The question is this:

*What is your only comfort in life and in death?*

And the answer:

*That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ... He has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me....: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

That's who your faith sticks you to! Because

Only God can forgive the unforgivable – since with God there is no unforgivable.

Only God can free you from those who want to influence you in evil ways.

Only God knows every detail of our thoughts and heart and loves us more deeply for knowing it all.

Only God can promise us life with him after death.

Your only comfort in life and in death, really is your God. He will stay close to you, but you won't be so aware of Him if you don't also stay close to Him. And when you're stuck to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, your life will be better.

Better than what? Better than if you weren't stuck to Him. Better how? That you'll have to experience for yourselves. In the meantime, rest in the confidence and comfort of the Lord and aim high. Because you're not too young to make a meaningful impact on the world.

Remember Apollo 11? The first manned mission to the moon, (summer 1969). You may know this, but it's still astonishing - The age range (actual ages, not the average) of the personnel of Mission Control in Houston—the center responsible for Apollo 11 once it left earth's atmosphere—was 25 to 28. Though the oldest person in the room was the Flight Director. He was 35! The astronauts were the old guys in the program—they were 38, 39, & 40.

Reflecting on the youthfulness of the program, the Commander of Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong, said, "This new Space Age required people who understood digital computers and most of the people in that category were in their 20's."

Do we still expect such greatness from our young people today? How about in the church? Previous generations have certainly produced at a young age those who continue to inspire us (some even have changed history).

The two men who wrote the Catechism, I quoted from which is still taught in UCC churches today, were 26 and 28 when they wrote it.

Martin Luther was 34 when he nailed his 95 theses to the door in Wittenberg.

William Wilberforce was 32 when he introduced his first bill into parliament calling for the abolition of slavery.

Dorothy Day was in her mid-30's when she started the Catholic Worker Movement.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was 27 when he became one of the first to publicly call Adolph Hitler's authority into question.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was 26 when he stepped up to lead the Montgomery bus boycott.

When God sends his Holy Spirit to Mary and she conceives Jesus, Luke declares, "With God nothing is impossible." (Luke 1:37) The Bible is full of story after story which demonstrates this simple truth.

Many of us can tell similar stories – of how God and His Holy Spirit have accomplished the impossible in our lives. And some of us are waiting for the Holy Spirit to make their move in our lives.

Sure, we can do our part – staying connected to resources of the faith: the church, prayer, the Bible, Christian friends and mentors... But the faith that sticks is really the doing of the Holy Spirit.

And you know, there **is** evidence that the Holy Spirit has been at work in your lives. No flames dancing on your head – no weird languages from you. No, a little less dramatic than that. After all, the Holy Spirit doesn't always use special effects.

The evidence of the Holy Spirit in your lives is that you are here. Today, kids – your Confirmation – is a Holy Spirit moment – a sticking moment.

Today the Holy Spirit glues you to this church, at least for the time being. And hopefully you will become unstuck someday, because you've found another church wherever life may take you.

And if you can remember only one thing from this day –

remember that God's love for you is real;  
and that what He wants from you more than anything else –  
is simply for you to remain stuck to Him – for life!

Amen.