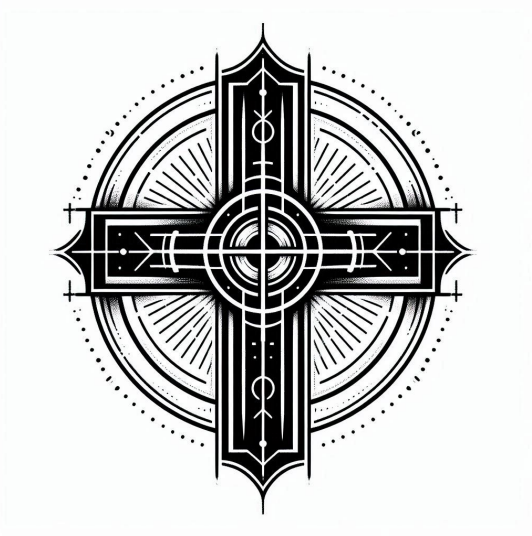
PENTECOST SEASON WORSHIP PLANNING GUIDE

YEAR C

Section One of Ordinary Time



The Festival of Pentecost through Proper 12

June–July, 2025

Pastor Mark Anderson

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEASON OF PENTECOST

The Season of Pentecost arrives not with the restraint of mere tradition but with the disruptive power of the Spirit who will not be managed. It is not a tame season. It does not come quietly, asking for permission. It crashes in like wind through locked rooms, like fire on waiting heads, like breath in dry lungs. It is not interested in reinforcing our religious routines. It is the invasion of the living God, who will not be confined to the past or reduced to pious abstraction. What happened at Pentecost is not a memory—it is a force. It is happening still. The Word is loose, not only preached but performed in the upheaval of lives forgiven, communities reconciled, and sinners sent. Grace here is not discussed; it is inflicted. And when it comes, it dismantles what we thought was secure—so that something wholly new, wholly of God, might rise in its place.

This is not the season of settling in; it is the time of going out. The Spirit does not decorate the church for comfort; it ignites the church for mission. The impulse of Pentecost is always outward, always centrifugal. The Spirit hurls the church into the world—not with strategies or slogans, but with a scandalous word of forgiveness, a holy foolishness that dares to believe that death is not the final word. Now, the community of believers, touched by flame and shaken by wind, becomes something it never expected: mobile, multilingual, merciful. The mission of God is no longer a task we choose; it is a movement we are caught in. In this season, the church is not the destination. It is the vehicle. It is how God continues to reach, to gather, to make new.

Songs must now stretch wider, touching unfamiliar rhythms and harmonies, because the breath of God has blown open the doors. The liturgy cannot stay confined to what is familiar, nor can the hymnody cling to safe cadences. New languages are demanded, new melodies, new metaphors—because the Spirit speaks in accents we have not yet imagined. The psalms are sung now with tongues of fire, and the prayers become prophecies. Music becomes mission. Poetry becomes proclamation. The church must become a choir with room for every voice, even the ones that make us uncomfortable. In Pentecost, art itself becomes apostolic. The Spirit insists that beauty belongs not only in stained glass and organ pipes, but in neighborhoods, in protest songs, in laughter rising from tables shared with strangers. The Spirit brings polyphony—not uniformity—and that is the miracle.

Now is when the liturgy becomes movement, when theology finds its pulse in poetry and prayer, and when the ordinary green days of the church year become anything but ordinary. The green is not static. It grows. It writhes. It pushes up through stone. It overtakes abandoned lots. The long season after Pentecost is not filler; it is formation. It is the living out of resurrection in a world that still stinks of death. And so the church learns to walk again, not by sight but by the strange rhythm of the Spirit. Here, we live in the tension between promise and fulfillment, learning to see Christ not only in the breaking of bread but in the breaking of systems, the breaking of silence, the breaking of hearts made whole again.

Let the church breathe deep. Let it remember that to live in the Spirit is to be caught up in something always new, always more than we can manage. And still, God is with us. Not as a safety net, but as the net that catches others when we risk love. This is not a season to be understood so much as surrendered to. The Spirit is not an idea we grasp—it is a wind that grasps us. So let us be grasped. Let us be re-formed, re-fired, re-sent. The Season of Pentecost is long, yes. But that is because the Spirit is patient—and relentless. God is not finished. And neither, thanks be to God, are we.

ON PREACHING THE PENTECOST SEASON TEXTS

To preach during the season of Pentecost is to preach in the aftermath of fire. The Spirit has come, not as a gentle suggestion, but as a consuming wind that disorients and reorients. This is no mere extension of Easter cheer. The Pentecost season demands a theology grounded not in spectacle, success, or strategies for church growth—but in the cross. If the preacher will be honest, then the texts of Pentecost must not be recruited in service of spiritual triumphalism, but proclaimed as the strange and saving work of the God who chooses the weak things to shame the strong, the foolish word to unmake the wise.

The temptation in this long green season is to turn the Spirit into a technique: to make Pentecost the launching pad for a better moral program, a more energized congregation, or a fresh coat of religious enthusiasm. But the Holy Spirit is not our mascot. It is not the energy of human potential. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ crucified. To preach Pentecost rightly is to recognize that the Spirit's primary work is not to inspire our efforts, but to *put to death* the old self that insists on saving itself—and to raise up a new creation that lives by faith alone.

The texts will speak of healing, mission, boldness, and community. But every one of these, if preached through the lens of the theology of glory, will become a ladder back to self-justification. Healing becomes proof of worth. Mission becomes achievement. Boldness becomes performance. Community becomes the club of the righteous. The preacher's task is to tear down these constructions with the Word that kills—and to speak the Gospel that raises. The only Spirit worth preaching is the Spirit who drives us to the cross, where the old Adam is drowned and the new person is raised by sheer promise.

The theology of the cross insists that God hides where we least expect: in the wounded body, in the rejected stone, in the preached Word. So when Acts speaks of tongues and fire, when Paul speaks of walking by the Spirit, when Jesus speaks of sending the Comforter—we must not make these signs of spiritual advancement. They are signs that the crucified Christ is still at work, undoing our pride and gathering sinners into something they did not and could not build: the church born not of consensus or charisma, but of grace.

So preach boldly, yes—but not about us. Preach the Spirit, yes—but not as a tool. Preach the Pentecost texts, not as a celebration of human potential, but as the ongoing invasion of a God who saves the ungodly through a Word that offends, wounds, forgives, and raises the dead. The Spirit has come—and with it, the terrifying and beautiful news that we are no longer our own. We have been claimed by a promise, and sent—not to succeed, but to speak.

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION 1:
THE CALL AND COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

This is where the season after Pentecost truly begins—in the lives of people who had no business being chosen.

Here are the sick, the sorrowing, the sinners, and the ones who scream in graveyards. Not one of them has a résumé. Not one of them would be allowed to speak at a religious conference. But they are the ones Jesus touches, raises, forgives, frees. Why? Because he's not looking for credentials. He's looking for the dead.

These are not stories about noble faith. They are not moral lessons. They are interruptions—grace breaking into closed systems. Every healing, every calling, every act of mercy in these weeks is a scandal to anyone still clinging to religious self-confidence.

And if we're honest, that's us. We want to manage discipleship. Organize it. Measure it. We want Jesus to approve our spiritual progress. Instead, he walks right past our plans and calls the ones who know they have nothing.

The centurion says, "I am not worthy." The widow has no words at all. The woman washes his feet with her shame. The man in the tombs can't even speak until the demons are gone. And those who say, "I'll follow you," don't realize where he's going: to a cross.

This section of the season is not about steps upward. It is about being taken down to the place where Christ alone speaks. The call of Jesus is not a career move. It is a death and resurrection. It strips away the self who thought it could walk the way of the Lord—and gives life where no one expected it.

So here we are. Not the impressive. Just the interrupted. Not the faithful. Just the found.

Let's walk with them.

ORDINARY TIME SECTION 1

Date	Proper Number	Liturgical Name	Page Number
June 8, 2025	Pentecost	Festival of Pentecost	p. 8
June 15, 2025	Trinity Sunday	1st Sunday after Pentecost	p. 16
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THE FESTIVAL OF PENTECOST

COMMENTARY ON THE LESSONS

Acts 2:1–21 — The Spirit Descends on the Powerless

It did not begin in a temple. It began in a house.

The Spirit came not to the holy, but to the hesitant. Not to the worthy, but to the waiting. They were all together in one place—not strategizing, not praying perfectly, but simply there. Then came the sound—wind, not whisper. Fire, not order. And suddenly, the tongues that had once been confused at Babel were set ablaze with gospel.

This is not the Spirit who makes us religious achievers. This is the Spirit who pours out Christ's finished work into the world. The miracle isn't the sound of different languages—it's the message that cuts through every heart: *this Jesus, whom you crucified, God has raised up.*

The Spirit doesn't empower us to climb up to God; he brings God down to us. No self-improvement plan here—just the shocking announcement of grace in your own mother tongue.

Genesis 11:1–9 — Babel and the Tower of Self-Justification

This is not a story about bricks and towers. It's about what happens when people build a name for themselves instead of receiving the one God gives.

The Tower of Babel is what religion looks like when it forgets the cross: an upward project, a self-salvation plan. It says, "Come, let us make something that lasts." But the Word of God undoes such efforts with a confusion not of judgment but of mercy. The scattering is not the end of the story. At Pentecost, God reverses Babel—not by making us speak the same language, but by speaking Christ to us in every language.

Babel is the old Adam's dream. Pentecost is God's promise: *you don't come to me—I come to you.*

Psalm 104:24–34, 35b — The Spirit Who Breathes the World

Here the Spirit is not fire or sound but breath. The breath that gives life to beasts, that causes the fields to sing, that sends forth renewal.

When we think of the Spirit, we often imagine energy, enthusiasm, empowerment. But the psalm shows us something gentler, more primal: the slow exhale of God who gives and takes away with wisdom. The Spirit's work is not always dramatic. Sometimes it's the quiet beauty of creation. Sometimes it's the breath that returns after we thought we were done for.

To sing with the psalmist is to admit we are creatures, not creators. That our life is not our own. That we are breathed into being and held by the One who opens his hand.

Romans 8:14–17 — The Spirit of Adoption, Not Anxiety

You are not orphans. You are not slaves. You are not on your own.

The Spirit you've received doesn't make you better. He makes you belong. And not through your striving, but through Christ's suffering. To be led by the Spirit is not to be spiritually impressive—it's to cry out with the weak voice of the baptized: *Abba, Father!*

The Spirit testifies—not to your potential but to your adoption. Not to your worthiness but to Christ's worth for you. The Spirit's job is not to give you spiritual bravado, but to bring you into the groaning of the crucified and risen Jesus, and to remind you, in your darkest places, that you are still God's child.

John 14:8–27 — Show Us the Father

Philip's request is all of ours: "Just show us God. Make it clear. Make it real." And Jesus says: *If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.*

But the "me" we see is not the one on the throne. It's the one on the cross.

This gospel reading is not a manual for how to receive the Spirit—it is a promise that the Spirit will come and bring Jesus to us, again and again. The Spirit does not draw attention to himself. He

points to Jesus—the crucified one. The peace Jesus gives is not peace as the world gives—transactional, temporary—but peace that holds even when everything else collapses.

The Spirit is not a feeling. Not an experience. He is the Advocate who preaches Christ when you can't even lift your head. He abides. He comforts. He gives Jesus.

And in the end, Jesus says something no teacher ever said: *I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.*

That's not a future threat. That's a present promise.

GREEK WORD STUDY ~ JOHN 14:8–27

1. **πατήρ (patēr) – "Father" (vv. 9–13, 16, 20, 23–24, 26)**

"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."
This is not generic divine language. Jesus does not speak of "God" in abstraction—he speaks of the Father, the One to whom he is intimately united. In John, the Father is not far off or hidden in the heavens. The Father is present, visible, known in the face and voice of Jesus. To see Jesus is to see the Father, not because they blur together, but because they dwell in one another. The Father is not accessed through achievement or ascent, but through the self-giving Son. This is theology not of glory but of proximity. The Father is not a theory—he is revealed in crucified love.

2. **πνεῦμα (pneuma) – "Spirit" (v. 17)**

"This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him."
The Spirit is not energy, mood, or atmosphere. The Spirit is personal—the Spirit teaches, speaks, remains. Here, the Spirit is named the Spirit of truth, meaning the Spirit cannot be separated from Jesus, who is the Truth. The world cannot receive this Spirit because the world looks for what it can control. But the Spirit comes not in strength but in hiddenness—in the Word, in remembrance, in community. The Spirit does not amplify us. The Spirit points us to Christ. It is the Spirit who takes what is Christ's and delivers it to us—not information, but promise.

3. **παράκλητος (paraklētos) – "Advocate / Helper" (vv. 16, 26)**

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."
This term means one who is "called alongside"—an advocate, counselor, or comforter. The Spirit is not a substitute teacher in Jesus' absence. The Spirit is Christ's presence, now multiplied and mobile. The Paraclete does not inspire generic spirituality but testifies to Jesus, reminds us of his words, brings them to life when we have forgotten. This advocacy is not legal maneuvering—it is the active reapplication of grace. In our failure, fear, and forgetfulness, the Paraclete is Christ beside us, saying again: "You are mine."

4. **μένω (menō) – "Abide, remain, dwell" (vv. 10, 17, 23**)

"We will come to them and make our home with them."
This is the language of communion, not transaction. To abide is not to perform but to remain—to rest in the relationship established by God. Jesus abides in the Father, and promises that the Spirit will abide in us. But not only that—we are told that the Father and the Son will come and make their home with those who love him. This is the radical reversal of religion: God doesn't wait for us to find him. God moves in. The Trinity takes up residence in the heart of the believer—not through moral perfection, but through the Word received in faith.

5. **εἰρήνη (eirēnē) – "Peace" (v. 27)**

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives."
This peace is not the calm of favorable circumstances. It is not absence of conflict or inner serenity. This peace is the crucified Christ's final gift to his own—spoken not from safety, but from love stretched out toward betrayal and death. This peace is given through the cross, not around it. It is peace with God, because God has reconciled himself to the world in Jesus. When Jesus says, "My peace I give to you," it is not a wish—it is a verdict. The war between us and God is over. The law no longer accuses. Grace has the final word.

6. **ἀγάπη (agapē) – "Love" (vv. 15, 21, 23–24)**

"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them."
This is not romantic love, nor is it mere affection. Agapē is covenantal, self-giving, and one-directional. Jesus does not say, "If you obey me, then you can prove your love." He says, "If you love me, you will keep my word"—not as a condition, but as a natural outflow of being loved first. Love begets love. And what is "his word"? It is the Word that brings life, that raises the dead, that forgives sinners. This love is not our achievement—it is our participation in the eternal love of the Father and the Son, now shared with us by the Spirit.

SERMON: "NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES"

Text: JOHN 14:8–27"

Let's be honest: Philip says what most of us are thinking. "Just show us the Father, and we'll be satisfied." It's the religious equivalent of saying, "Cut to the chase, Jesus. We're tired of the metaphors. We're tired of the waiting. Give us something we can hold." We're not so different. We want God to show up in unmistakable ways. We want to see something. We want clarity, presence, resolution. We want a God who doesn't hide in ambiguity or speak in riddles. Philip's request is deeply human—an ache for certainty, for divine proof, for something visible that can silence our doubts. We ask for the same—whether in tragedy or transition, anxiety or exhaustion: "God, just show yourself, and we'll believe." And Jesus responds—not with new information, but with Himself. "Have I been with you all this time, and you still do not know me?" In other words: *You don't need more. I have already given you everything.*

And Jesus' reply? "Have I been with you all this time, and you still don't know me?" That's the ache of it, isn't it? That the God we want—the dazzling, undeniable, untouchable God of power—keeps showing up in the one we don't expect. God shows up not in spectacle, but in flesh. Not in thunder, but in tears. Not above us, but among us. The God who feeds the hungry, touches the unclean, washes feet, and dies rejected. This is the God we are given. And now—because Jesus is going away—we're told that the Spirit will come in his place. But this Spirit is not another version of Jesus. The Spirit *is*the presence of Jesus, now poured out, now dispersed, now whispered instead of shouted. A Word, not a weapon. A breath, not a blast. The question becomes not "Where is God?" but "Where is Christ still speaking?" And the answer: *right here*, by the Spirit, in this Word, for you.

But the Spirit doesn't come to make things easier. The Spirit doesn't come to explain everything. The Spirit comes to *remind us*. To teach us what Jesus has already said. To hold us in the tension between "already" and "not yet." The Spirit is not a shortcut. The Spirit is a Companion. You won't find the Spirit handing out answers like flashcards. You'll find the Spirit bearing witness to Christ—again and again—when you forget. When you are lost. When you are too tired to believe. The Spirit teaches not like a professor with a syllabus, but like a song you remember when words fail. A lullaby in the dark. A verse you didn't realize you'd memorized. The Spirit calls to mind the promises you forgot you needed. And in that remembering, there is power—not the power to control, but the

power to endure. To hope. To stand. The Spirit does not shield us from suffering. The Spirit joins us to Christ, in his death and resurrection, so that even in sorrow, we are never alone.

Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives." And what a strange peace it is. It does not remove trouble; it shows up amidst it. It does not come with certainty, but with a promise. A peace that is not about escape but about presence. Not about perfection, but about being held by a love that has already gone all the way to death—and returned with life. The peace of Christ is not tranquility. It is not the absence of noise, or news, or heartache. It is the presence of the Crucified One, standing among the frightened and saying, "Peace be with you." This peace does not depend on your circumstances. It is not something you achieve by good behavior or perfect trust. It is given. Freely. Unconditionally. It rests not on your feelings, but on his faithfulness. A peace that passes understanding because it is grounded not in you—but in Christ. In his wounds. In his Word. In his unshakable promise to never leave you.

We want God to show up in power, in clarity, in success. But Jesus shows us a God who comes hidden—in flesh, in forgiveness, in a Spirit we cannot see but who is always working, always whispering, always reminding. What a scandal this is, that the God of all things would come not as emperor or warrior, but as servant and friend. That God would dwell in a crucified man, and now in broken bread, in water poured, in faltering words spoken in faith. The Spirit doesn't give us the God we want. The Spirit gives us the God we need: Christ crucified and risen, for sinners like us. And this means that the Spirit shows up in places we're tempted to ignore: in weakness, in waiting, in wounds. In congregations that feel small. In people we overlook. In moments that don't feel spiritual at all. The Spirit is not a feeling. The Spirit is a promise.

So if today you are waiting for proof—if you are tired, if you are uncertain—hear this: You are not alone. The Advocate is with you. The Word still speaks. The Spirit still breathes. And Christ is not a memory but a living presence. Not because you feel it, but because he said it. "I will not leave you orphaned." That is not sentiment—it is promise. The Spirit is the seal of that promise, echoing through the pages of Scripture, breaking open our hearts to faith, binding us to the body of Christ. You may not feel brave. You may not feel holy. But the peace of Christ is yours. The Spirit of Christ is yours. And even now—through the fragile Word, through the fragile preacher, through the fragile church—Christ is for you.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not let them be afraid.

Because the peace Christ gives is not the absence of struggle. It is the promise that even here—even now—you are being kept.

Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY

COMMENTARY OF THE LESSONS

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31 — Wisdom Rejoicing

This passage presents divine Wisdom as both ancient and personal, almost hypostatic—a voice crying out, present before creation, delighting in the world and in humanity. In the Christian tradition, especially from patristic interpretation onward, this figure of Wisdom has often been seen as a foreshadowing of Christ, the Logos, preexistent with God and active in creation (cf. John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:15–17).

On Trinity Sunday, Proverbs 8 invites us into the eternal joy and generative activity of God. Wisdom is not a cold, abstract principle but a vibrant presence, rejoicing, loving creation. The theological implication here is that God is not solitary or static, but eternally dynamic—already before creation there is joy, relationship, movement.

The Father is not a lonely monarch; from the beginning there is with-God-ness. Theologians like Athanasius and Augustine saw in this passage a veiled portrait of the Trinitarian life—a life of delight and gift, not domination.

Psalm 8 — Majesty and Mercy

Psalm 8 places humanity within the vast scale of creation and asks the bewildered question:

"What are human beings that you are mindful of them?"

The psalm holds together two truths: the grandeur of God ("your name is majestic in all the earth") and the unexpected dignity of humanity ("you have crowned them... with glory and honor"). It is a kind of cosmic wonder that centers not on human greatness in itself, but on God's strange mercy—His choosing to care for such seemingly small creatures.

In the context of the Trinity, Psalm 8 hints at what would later be made explicit in Christ: that God's majesty is shown not in distance but in nearness. The same God who set the moon and stars in place came in Christ to bear our frailty. The Son takes on the humanity described here; the Spirit now breathes into us the dignity once reserved for royalty. The psalm ultimately leads us not into self-esteem but into **awe**—that God, in triune fullness, would stoop to love dust like us.

Romans 5:1–5 — Justified into Hope

Paul proclaims that justification by faith leads not only to peace with God, but to hope amid suffering. This is one of the most succinct summaries of the Christian life in light of the Trinity.

Each member of the Trinity is active in these verses:

- We have peace with God (the Father) through
- Jesus Christ, who gives us access to grace, and
- The Holy Spirit, who pours God's love into our hearts.

This is not speculative Trinitarianism—it is experiential. The triune God meets us in our sufferings. And, crucially, Paul insists that suffering is not contrary to Christian hope; it is part of its formation. This is the theology of the cross in Pauline form. The Christian is not immune from tribulation but is promised a hope that does not put us to shame—a hope grounded in God's own love, delivered by the Spirit, not our optimism.

Here, the Trinity is not a doctrine to grasp but a relationship to enter: the Father loves, the Son reconciles, and the Spirit assures.

John 16:12–15 — The Spirit's Role in the Trinity

In this short but rich section of Jesus' Farewell Discourse, we hear about the **Spirit of truth**, who will guide the disciples "into all the truth." Jesus admits that his followers cannot bear everything now—an acknowledgment of their weakness, but also an invitation into the ongoing work of the Spirit.

The Trinitarian dynamic is on full display:

- The Spirit speaks not on his own, but declares what is given from the Son.
- The Son has received all from the Father.
- The Spirit takes what belongs to the Son and declares it to the disciples.

This is the Trinity in motion: not three beings operating separately, but one divine life shared, given, and communicated to us. This passage shows that the work of the Spirit is not to innovate, but to deliver—to bring the crucified and risen Christ to us again and again.

GREEK WORD STUDY ~ JOHN 16:12–15

1. ἀλήθεια (alētheia) – "Truth" (v. 13)

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

In John's Gospel, truth is not a concept but a person—Jesus himself (John 14:6). The Greek *alētheia* literally means "unhidden" or "unconcealed," suggesting that truth is what is laid bare, made known. In this passage, truth is not something we discover or master; it is what the Spirit leads us into. This is not propositional certainty, but relational fidelity to the crucified and risen Christ. Truth, here, is cruciform. It is not our insight but God's revelation, given by the Spirit and grounded in Jesus.

2. ὁδηγήσει (hodēgēsei) – "He will guide" (v. 13)

"He will guide you into all the truth."

The verb *hodēgeō* means "to lead on the way" or "to show the path." It evokes the image of a companion walking alongside, not a commander shouting directions. The Spirit does not drag or demand but guides patiently. This is the language of pilgrimage, not achievement. In the theology of the cross, this means the Spirit leads us not to escape the cross, but to walk deeper into it—into Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection—as the shape of the truth.

3. λαλήσει (lalēsei) – "He will speak" (v. 13)

"For he will not speak on his own…"

The verb *laleō* is a common word for speaking or saying, but in John's Gospel, it carries theological weight. The Spirit is not a new prophet with new ideas. The Spirit speaks what is heard—what is from the Son, who himself speaks what is from the Father. This is a chain of divine self-giving speech, not invention. The Spirit is the voice of Christ's ongoing presence, delivering not new doctrine but the same crucified Word, again and again.

4. ἀναγγελεῖ (anangelēi) – "He will declare" (vv. 13–15)

"He will declare to you the things that are to come… He will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Anangellō means "to announce," "to report," or "to proclaim." It implies official delivery, like a messenger announcing a royal decree. The Spirit does not just whisper comfort—he declares Christ's gifts as finished and for you. This is not vague spirituality but gospel proclamation: the forgiveness, peace, and presence of Christ, announced into the midst of fear and confusion. The Spirit declares not law, not burden, but grace—pure and undeserved.

5. ἐμὴν (emēn) – "Mine" (v. 14)

"He will take what is mine and declare it to you."

The possessive pronoun emē emphasizes personal ownership. What is "mine," Jesus says, is not a generic category—it is his cross, his obedience, his life, his Spirit, his peace. The miracle of this passage is not that we are told what belongs to Christ, but that it is given to us. What is "his" becomes ours, not by effort but by the Spirit's delivery. The entire life of Christ—his merits, his righteousness—is transferred, bestowed, spoken into our lives.

6. πατήρ (patēr) – "Father" (v. 15)

"All that the Father has is mine."

The Gospel of John never speaks of "God" in distant abstraction; it speaks of the Father, the source of the Son's mission and the one who has given all things into his hands. The term patēr signifies not just origin but relationship and giving. The Father is not a distant deity above the cross, but the One who is in the cross, handing over everything out of love. In this passage, the Father gives to the Son, the Son gives to us, and the Spirit ensures it arrives. This is the Trinity in motion—self-giving from eternity, into time, for you.

SERMON ~JOHN 16:12–15

TITLE: "INTO ALL THE TRUTH"

Jesus says, *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."* And we know the feeling, don't we? There are some truths we just can't carry—not yet, maybe not ever. The weight of grief, the ache of unanswered prayers, the shame we try to hide, the confusion that comes when God doesn't show up the way we expected. We want clarity. We want closure. We want a religion that puts the pieces together neatly. But Jesus doesn't offer that. Not here. Instead, he offers something stranger—and better: he offers to keep speaking, to keep coming, to keep guiding us, even when we're not ready. This is the first gift of the theology of the cross: God meets us not in our readiness, but in our need. Jesus doesn't say, "You must bear the truth." He says, "You can't—but I will give you the Spirit, who can." Truth, then, is not a weight we lift. It's a promise that lifts us.

This is Trinity Sunday. And let's admit it—there's no clean way to explain the Trinity. Analogies fail. Diagrams mislead. Every time we try to make God make sense, we end up with something less than God. Because the Trinity is not a puzzle to solve. It is a *confession to receive*. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit—three persons, one God—not as a riddle, but as a relationship of eternal self-giving. What the theology of the cross reminds us is this: we do not find God by ascending to comprehension. God finds us by descending into our flesh, into our death, into the ruins of our attempts to reach him. The Trinity, then, is not a math problem. It is the shape of God's mercy. The cross reveals what has always been true: that God is never alone, and God does not want to be without His own.

Jesus says, *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."* Now, this truth is not just facts about God. It is not moral principles or cosmic blueprints. The Spirit guides us not into certainty but into Christ—*the Crucified One who is the Truth.* And the Spirit doesn't rush us there. He guides. He walks with. He speaks again and again when we forget. The truth the Spirit declares is not "how to be better" but "Christ for you." Truth, in the theology of the cross, is not something we *discover*. It's something *done to us*. The Spirit exposes our illusions of control, strips away our idols of success, and then speaks Jesus—*his wounds, his mercy, his Word*—right into our fear. To be guided into truth is to be guided into Christ's death and resurrection, over and over again.

Jesus goes on: *"He will take what is mine and declare it to you."* And what is his? His cross. His obedience. His forgiveness. His peace. His Spirit. All of it is now yours. But notice—he doesn't say, "The Spirit will help you earn what is mine." No, the Spirit *delivers* what is Christ's. The Spirit is not your coach. The Spirit is your mail carrier. He brings you the whole inheritance of Christ: unearned, undeserved, all grace. This is how God works—not by demanding your ascent, but by delivering salvation down into your locked room. The Spirit brings the Crucified and Risen Jesus to you, again and again, in the Word, in the sacraments, in the frail voice of a preacher, in the crack of a promise you almost forgot.

And then Jesus says something quietly thunderous: *"All that the Father has is mine."* This is not just poetic language. This is Trinity in motion. The Father gives everything to the Son. The Son gives everything to us. And the Spirit makes sure it gets there. That's it. The entire life of God has always been a movement of self-giving love, never hoarding, never withholding. The cross isn't a detour. It is the clearest picture we have of who God really is. The Father does not send the Son to do the dirty work and then retreat to heaven. The Father is in the cross. The Spirit is in the cross. The fullness of God is revealed in this one direction: downward, into our death, to bring us up by sheer promise.

So what do we say on Trinity Sunday? We say that we don't understand it. But we've been *caught up in it*. You are not given a diagram. You are given a crucified Christ. You are not asked to solve the mystery. You are asked to trust the mercy. The God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not looking for your grasp, but for your open hands. You are being drawn—not into control, but into communion. Not into certainty, but into grace. Not into an idea of God, but into the flesh-and-blood love of the One who lived for you, died for you, rose for you, and still speaks to you.

You may not be able to bear everything today. But the Spirit is with you.
Christ is yours. The Father has not let you go.

So breathe deep. The truth is not an answer. The truth is a person.
And he comes today—with wounds still showing—
to speak again: *"Peace be with you."*

Amen.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST ~ PROPER 7

COMMENTARY ON LESSONS

1 Kings 19:1–4 (5–7), 8–15a — The Law Drives, the Gospel Raises

Elijah is not heroic here. He is undone. The zeal that once consumed him has burned him out. Fleeing Jezebel's wrath, he collapses under a broom tree and asks God to end his life. This is what the law does—it drives, it demands, it accuses. Even a prophet, fresh from victory, is not immune.

But then, unbidden and unearned, an angel appears—not to command, but to feed. "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you." Not a new task, not a renewed mission. Just bread and rest.

And later, at Horeb, the Lord is not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. These are signs of power, judgment, and glory—what the law might expect God to sound like. But God speaks in the stillness. Not to burden, but to be present.

Here is the shift: Elijah is not given a better strategy, but a new word. The law drove him to despair. The whisper raises him again—not by making him stronger, but by making him free.

Psalm 42–43 — The Law Exposes the Longing, the Gospel Is the Hope

The psalmist does not pretend to be well. He does not try to fix himself. He thirsts. He cries. His soul is cast down. This is not weakness—it is honesty. The law exposes the aching absence, the space where God once seemed near.

The refrain—"Hope in God, for I shall again praise him"—is not a triumphal shout but a defiant whisper. It is a protest against despair. Faith is not a feeling here; it is the stubborn trust that God is not finished, even when everything inside says otherwise.

There is no technique offered here. No five-step recovery. Just longing. Just prayer. Just waiting. And that is enough. Because faith doesn't rise from within—it is spoken into us, again and again, by the Word who comes from outside.

Galatians 3:23–29 — The Law Binds, the Gospel Frees

Before faith came, we were imprisoned. Not because the law is evil, but because it is not grace. The law is good at what it does: it locks us up. It confines. It reveals. But it cannot justify.

What the law cannot do—make us righteous—Christ does. In baptism, we are clothed with Christ. And this is not symbolic. This is a death and resurrection. We are no longer defined by what divides—ethnicity, status, gender—but by who has claimed us.

The gospel does not come to improve the old categories. It comes to destroy them. You are not invited to climb up into Christ. You are drowned and raised. That is freedom: not potential, but promise. Not law rebranded, but law fulfilled—and silenced.

Luke 8:26–39 — The Law Chains, the Gospel Unchains

The man among the tombs is a perfect image of what the law, left to itself, cannot fix. He is naked, bound, violent, exiled. Society has no solution. Chains can't hold him. Words don't reach him.

Jesus doesn't analyze the man. He doesn't counsel the man. He speaks to the thing that owns him. "What is your name?" And then: command. Authority. Release.

The gospel doesn't ask us to behave. It doesn't wait until we're in our right mind. It finds us in the tombs, breaks the chains, and clothes us with a new mind.

And then the man, healed, wants to follow Jesus. But Jesus sends him back. Not as a project, but as a preacher. The town cannot tolerate that kind of freedom. Grace is terrifying. They'd rather keep their demons.

But the man speaks anyway: "how much God has done for you." That's the whole gospel right there. Not what you did. Not how you got better. What God has done. For you.

GREEK WORD STUDY ~ Luke 8:26–39

1. δαιμόνιον (daimonion) – *"Demon"* (vv. 27, 29, 30, 33, 35, 38)

"For many demons had entered him." (v. 30)

The word *daimonion* refers to a spiritual being in rebellion against God—a force of distortion and division. In the theology of the cross, this term exposes not only supernatural evil but also how humanity is bound, fragmented, and self-destructive without Christ. The possessed man becomes a mirror for us: exiled among tombs, naked, driven by voices not his own. Jesus does not come to reason with the demons but to unseat them—not by violence but by presence. His word alone disarms them. The demon's name, *Legion*, signifies many, but Christ is One—and his mercy is more.

2. σωθῆναι (sōthēnai) – *"To be saved"* (v. 36)

"Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons was healed."

The verb here, *sōthēnai*, is often translated "healed," but its fuller meaning is *to be saved*, *delivered*, *made whole*. In this story, salvation is not abstract—it is embodied. It comes to a man who had no advocate, no home, no name. To be saved, in this sense, is to be reclaimed. Christ restores what was deformed, not by reforming the will but by silencing the accuser and speaking peace to the tormented. This salvation is not the result of the man's faith or choice—it is sheer gift, undeserved and unasked.

3. ἱκετεύω (hiketeuō) – *"To beg"* (vv. 28, 31, 37, 38)

"He begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss." (v. 31)

This verb appears repeatedly in the text—used by the demons, the townspeople, and the healed man. *Hiketeuō* connotes desperate pleading. Everyone is begging Jesus for something: the demons beg for mercy, the people beg Jesus to leave, and the healed man begs to stay with him. In each case, the posture of supplication reveals the unsettling nature of grace. Christ disrupts every status quo—evil begs to remain, the townspeople beg for distance, and the freed man begs for nearness. Yet Jesus grants none of the requests except the one that sends the man *back*—not with power, but with a story of mercy.

4. ἄβυσσος (abyssos) – *"Abyss"* (v. 31)

"And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss."
The *abyssos*—the abyss—is a word full of dread. It evokes the primeval chaos, the deep from which God brought forth creation (cf. Gen 1:2). In apocalyptic thought, it becomes the place of demonic imprisonment. For the theology of the cross, the abyss is not just the external threat of hell—it is the internal void of God-forsakenness. It is what Christ himself enters on the cross. The demons fear this place because it is their end. Ironically, the abyss they dread is the very one into which Christ descends—for us. He is cast out, forsaken, and silenced so we might be restored.

5. ἱματισμένος (himatismenos) – *"Clothed"* (v. 35)

"...sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind."
Himatismenos is a passive participle: "having been clothed." The man does not clothe himself—he is clothed. This detail matters. In the theology of the cross, this is a picture of baptismal grace. The nakedness of shame, exposed among tombs, is covered—not by merit, but by mercy. He is not only made sane, but he is re-humanized, re-dignified. He is clothed just as Adam was clothed after the fall—not with leaves but with garments given by God (Gen 3:21). To be clothed by Christ is to be named again as beloved.

6. ἀπέστειλεν (apesteilen) – *"He sent him away"* (v. 38–39)

"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."
The verb *apesteilen* means "he sent him"—from *apostellō*, the root of *apostle*. The healed man becomes a sent one—not to foreign lands, but home. Not with theological precision, but with the only qualification that matters: "what God has done for you." The theology of the cross makes apostles out of the least likely. The man who once howled among tombs becomes the first Gentile missionary, proclaiming not doctrine, but deliverance. His sending is not glamorous; it's personal. His scars are not erased; they become his sermon.

SERMON: "THE MAN IN THE TOMBS"

Text: LUKE 8:26–39

Grace to you, and peace—from the One who steps out of the boat and into your graveyard.

He came across the sea, to the other side. The wrong side. The unclean side. The place where no self-respecting rabbi would bother to go. But then again, that's how grace works—it doesn't wait for the proper moment or the proper people. It just goes.

And as soon as Jesus steps onto that shoreline, he is met by a man who hasn't been among the living for a long time. You know the kind. Or maybe you are the kind.

This man was not just possessed—he was lost. Lost even to his own name. "Legion," he says. And that's not his name. That's his wound talking. That's his trauma talking. That's the violence done to him speaking in multitudes. His body is not his. His story is not his. He lives among the dead because the living no longer know what to do with him.

He breaks chains. He screams. He harms himself. People are afraid of him. And truth be told, they've grown used to being afraid of him. It's easier to have him out there, naked in the tombs, than to see him up close and remember that he was once a boy with a mother, a laugh, a name.

You and I—we don't like tombs. But we do like control. We prefer our demons predictable, and our boundaries respected.

And that's why this story disturbs us.

Because Jesus crosses the boundary. He steps into Gentile territory, into a graveyard, into a man's torment. And he does not flinch.

He speaks not to the man's disorder, but to the man.

He sees him. He calls him out. And the powers inside him tremble.

This is what the Word of God does. It doesn't negotiate with evil. It drives it out. It doesn't suggest change—it commands it. The Word doesn't give advice. It gives life.

And it comes at a cost. The demons flee. The pigs drown. And suddenly, the man who lived in chaos is sitting calmly, clothed, in his right mind.

And that is when the real fear begins.

Not when the man was possessed. But when he's healed.

They had learned to manage his brokenness. They had fenced him in. But this grace—this liberation—was unmanageable. Costly. Dangerous.

What scares them is not that he was healed. It's that they weren't in control of it.

So they beg Jesus to leave.

And he does.

He leaves… but not before sending this man—this one-time outcast, now preacher—back to his own people. Not with a new theology degree. Not with a better moral record. Just with one truth:

"Go home, and declare what God has done for you."

Not what you did.

Not how much you changed.

Not how hard you worked to get better.

But what God did.

That is the gospel: not an invitation to fix yourself, but a declaration that you have been seen, forgiven, named, healed, and sent.

You, who once lived among tombs.

You, who were chained by your shame, or your addiction, or your secrets.

You, who no longer even answered to your name.

The Word steps onto your shore.

He walks right into the place where you've been hiding. And he calls you his.

He does not leave you with techniques. He leaves you with a story. A cross-shaped story. A word for the town you thought had given up on you.

He leaves you with a life you didn't earn. A healing you didn't deserve. A name you thought you lost: beloved.

And the world will not always welcome that. They will be afraid of the one who got free. Because you can't predict grace. It won't stay in its place.

But still, the Word goes on.

Through the man in the tombs.

Through you.

Through us.

Thanks be to God.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST ~ PROPER 8
COMMENTARY ON THE LESSONS

2 Kings 2:1–2, 6–14 – The Mantle Falls in Grace

Here is no gentle farewell. The whirlwind takes Elijah, not death. Fire and wind—not silence—carry him away. This is not a story about climbing a ladder to God. It's about being left behind with nothing but a falling cloak.

Elisha, standing there, does not seize glory. He rends his clothes. His first act is grief. There is no triumph here—only the ache of absence and the mystery of succession. Yet God does not leave him empty-handed. The cloak falls—not as inheritance, but as mercy. Ministry is not earned. It falls. It's thrown. And it lands not on the best candidate, but on the one who stays close enough to weep.

There's something deeply cross-shaped about this scene. The power of God comes through parting, through loss, through what looks like being left behind. The Jordan is struck—not to show off—but to cross over. The river parts, not for a parade, but for a continuation. That's how the Spirit works: not as spectacle, but as handing over, handing down, often with shaking hands.

Psalm 77:1–2, 11–20 – God in the Troubled Waters

This is no polished liturgy—it's a cry in the night. "My soul refuses to be comforted." That's honesty. That's the real voice of the heart when faith is not a certainty but a struggle. The psalmist does not deny the pain; he names it. And yet, in remembering, he is turned.

What does he remember? Not his own faith. Not his victories. He remembers the acts of God. The rescue. The trembling earth. The path through the sea. That's where this psalm turns into Gospel: "Your way was through the sea, yet your footprints were unseen."

God is not always visible. He's not in the thunder we expect or the plan we construct. His footprints are not always easy to trace. But the sea opens. The path appears. The miracle is not that suffering

vanishes, but that God leads *through* it. That's the theology of the cross: God does not avoid our suffering—he walks into it. In Jesus, he takes the sea into himself.

Galatians 5:1, 13–25 – Freedom That's Not For You

"Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

This is not a pep talk for the morally improving. It's a declaration of emancipation for the sinner. Freedom here is not a theory—it's Jesus. It is not given so we can serve ourselves. It is given *against* ourselves. And it always feels like death before it feels like life.

The works of the flesh—Paul lists them all like a mirror we don't want to look into. And let's be honest, we see ourselves there. The answer is not better effort. The answer is crucifixion. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh." Not disciplined it. Not reformed it. Crucified it. Dead and buried.

But then—fruit. Not produced by us. Not manufactured. Grown. *Fruit of the Spirit.* It comes not by command, but by abiding. And notice, it's not a singular achievement—it's plural, shared, relational. Love, joy, peace... these are not things we achieve, they are signs we've been seized.

Luke 9:51–62 – The Road Where Jesus Has No Pillow

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." That means Golgotha. He knows where he's headed. His face is set toward the cross.

People say they want to follow him, but it's clear: they don't know what they're saying. They think he's headed to power. But Jesus has no place to lay his head—not because he's unlucky, but because the world will not make room for a love like this.

We want to delay: "Let me bury my father… Let me say farewell…" But the kingdom won't wait for our plans. This is not a walk for the well-prepared. It's a summons for the unready. Following Jesus means walking into death before glory, into loss before gain.

And so this gospel is no altar call for the enthusiastic. It is a stripping down. It's a Jesus who walks ahead to Jerusalem—alone—and calls you to follow, not for your improvement, but for your undoing. And in that undoing, life. Not the life you had in mind, but the life God gives: risen, new, unmade and made again.

GREEK WORD STUDY ~ Luke 9:51–62

1. ἀνέστησεν τὸ πρόσωπον (anestēsen to prosōpon) – *"He set his face"* (v. 51)

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

This phrase combines the verb *ἀνίστημι* (to set, raise up) and *πρόσωπον* (face). It is a Hebraism meaning to resolve with purpose or determination. But this is no ordinary resolve—it is the face of the Suffering Servant (cf. Isaiah 50:7), set like flint toward death.

In the theology of the cross, this moment is the great turning point. Jesus does not drift toward fate—he walks into rejection, into the hands of the world that will crucify him. The face of God is now turned toward Jerusalem, not in wrath but in mercy that will cost everything.

2. παρελάβη (parelaben) – *"He was taken up"* (v. 51)

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up…"

The verb *παραλαμβάνω* (here in a passive form) can mean to be received, taken along, or carried. In Luke, it refers not merely to the ascension but the whole sequence: passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is a divine passive—*God* is the one who will take him up.

What looks like defeat—arrest, humiliation, crucifixion—is in fact the path of being "taken up." Glory, in the theology of the cross, is hidden in suffering. The exaltation of Christ begins when he sets his face toward the cross.

3. πῦρ (pyr) – *"Fire"* (v. 54)

"Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

Pyr means fire—biblically associated with judgment (cf. Elijah in 2 Kings 1). James and John still think that following Jesus means getting to throw lightning bolts. But Jesus rebukes them.

The fire of God will fall—but not on sinners in Samaria. It will fall on Jesus. At Golgotha, the fire of judgment consumes the Lamb. The theology of the cross teaches that wrath is not avoided—it is borne. Grace does not deny judgment; it absorbs it.

4. ἀκολουθέω (akoloutheō) – *"To follow"* (vv. 57, 59, 61)

"I will follow you wherever you go."

The verb *akoloutheō* means to go behind, to accompany, to become a disciple. In Luke 9, this verb is used three times—each time with conditions, hesitations, or misunderstandings.

But the call to follow Jesus is not a call to self-improvement. It is a death sentence. In the theology of the cross, discipleship is not climbing spiritual ladders—it is walking behind the one who goes to die. We don't blaze the trail. We follow the condemned man who walks it for us.

5. ἄφες (aphes) – *"Let me go" / "Permit me"* (v. 59)

"Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

ἄφες is an imperative of *ἀφίημι*, which means "to release, to let go, to permit." But in the New Testament, this verb is most often used for **forgiveness**—to release from debt or guilt.

So while the man means it as a request for delay, the word echoes something deeper: our desire to be in control, to handle things first before following Jesus. But Christ doesn't wait for our resolutions. He forgives sinners, not planners. Grace doesn't say "get ready"—it says "go now." And in going, we find we are already carried.

6. βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (basileia tou theou) – *"Kingdom of God"* (v. 60, 62)

"Go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Basileia means kingship, reign, dominion—not a place, but a happening. And this kingdom does not arrive with fanfare but with a cross.

In Luke 9, the kingdom is proclaimed not by rulers but by those who leave everything behind—not because they are strong, but because the King has already set his face toward the cross. The kingdom of God is not our construction. It is the place where sinners are brought in, not by worth but by mercy. The plow cuts through the soil of the old world. And in its furrow, the seeds of a new creation are sown.

SERMON: "HE SET HIS FACE"
Text: LUKE 9:51–62

He set his face. That's how it begins. Jesus, the one who has spent his ministry healing the sick, touching the unclean, forgiving the fallen—turns now toward the end. Toward Jerusalem. Toward the cross. And everything shifts.

He sets his face—not toward comfort, not toward applause, not toward stability or success—but toward the rejection that saves. He does not wait to be welcomed. He does not ask for a vote. He does not put out feelers. He sets his face like flint toward the place where the world will try to silence him. And he walks.

What kind of king does this?

The disciples don't understand. James and John want to call down fire. That's the old religion: scorch the ones who don't get it, purify the field, make the world holy by removing its blemishes. But Jesus rebukes them. He will not let fire fall—not on Samaritans, not on sinners, not on you.

Because he will take the fire himself. The judgment doesn't fall where we think. It falls on him.

And here is the first scandal of grace: we want religion that exalts us. Jesus gives us a cross that undoes us.

Then come the free will volunteers. "I will follow you," one says. Brave words. But Jesus is honest. "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Let that sit for a moment. He doesn't pitch success. He doesn't offer purpose-driven living. He offers homelessness, exposure, and abandonment. He offers a kingdom that looks like failure.

He is not recruiting heroes. He is calling the dead. Because only the dead will follow someone with no pillow, no sword, and no backup plan.

Another says, "First let me go and bury my father." Sounds fair. But Jesus says, "Let the dead bury their own dead." Why so harsh? Because this is not a matter of priorities. This is a matter of resurrection. Jesus is not simply more important than family. He is the end of the old order. The end

of death. The end of the law that says you have to get it right before you can be loved. He is the end of the funeral march. He is life crashing into death.

And yet another voice calls out: "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at home." But Jesus says, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." This is not about harsh conditions. This is about the impossibility of divided allegiance. You can't go with Jesus and stay where you are. You can't carry your old life in your back pocket. You can't follow the one who goes to the cross while holding on to your résumé.

So who *can* follow?

Here's the punchline: no one. Not the eager disciple, not the loyal son, not the nostalgic follower. Not you. Not me. And that's the grace.

Jesus is not recruiting the fit. He is raising the dead. This road, this journey to Jerusalem—it is not our path to walk *for* him. It is his path walked *for* us. He sets his face not so we can succeed at following, but so we can be forgiven when we fall away.

And when we do—because we do—he doesn't send fire. He sends mercy. He walks on. He carries the cross, even as we drop ours. And still he calls us, carries us in baptism's promise. Not because we are able. But because he is.

So today, if you feel unqualified, if your hands shake on the plow, if your heart looks back, if your spirit is weary or stubborn or ashamed—hear this:

He set his face for *you*. And where he goes, you will be gathered. Not because you followed well, but because he did.

Amen.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST ~ PROPER 9

COMMENTARY ON THE READINGS

2 Kings 5:1–14 – A Grace That Offends Our Pride

This story is not about a man being healed—it's about a proud man being undone. Naaman, a great commander, must stoop to the muddy waters of the Jordan, and more painfully, to the unimpressive voice of a prophet who doesn't even come out to greet him. Grace here is not magical but humiliating. The cure is not in the water, but in the Word attached to it. God chooses what is weak and lowly to shame what is proud.

Psalm 30 – The God Who Turns the Mourning

This psalm sounds like a song sung in the hospital hallway after a hard night. The psalmist doesn't deny the weeping or the pit, but clings to the One who brings up life from Sheol. God's anger is real, but it is not the end. The tears do not win. They serve a larger joy, birthed not by effort but by the gracious turn of God's face.

Galatians 6:(1–6), 7–16 – Crucified Boasting

You can't plant ego and expect resurrection. What is sown to the flesh will rot, but the Spirit brings life where there was none. Paul says, "boast only in the cross"—because it is there that everything worth boasting in is crucified. Here, community is not performance; it is mutual bearing. And freedom is not self-expression, but new creation.

Luke 10:1–11, 16–20 – Sent with Nothing but the Word

The seventy-two are sent out with no bags, no sandals, no backup plan—just peace on their lips and the kingdom in their steps. They go like lambs into the jaws of wolves, but they come back dancing. Why? Not because the demons obeyed them, but because their names are known in heaven. The kingdom doesn't arrive through conquest but through cruciform vulnerability. That is the real authority.

GREEK WORD STUDY ~ LUKE 10:1–11, 16–20

1. ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*) – "I send" (v. 3)

This is more than just being sent; it's being commissioned. *Apostellō* carries the authority of the sender. The seventy-two aren't freelancers—they bear the King's message. And the King sends them *like lambs among wolves*—a cruciform mission.

2. εἰρήνη (*eirēnē*) – "Peace" (v. 5)

Peace here is not inner calm or good vibes—it's a pronouncement. It is spoken *into* houses, into strangers' lives, as a gift. It's the peace of reconciliation with God, not earned, but announced. This is not human hospitality—it is divine intervention.

3. ἤγγικεν (*ēngiken*) – "has come near" (v. 9, 11)

The Kingdom of God "has come near." Not arrived in full, but pressed up close. It's not an invitation but an intrusion. It doesn't wait for welcome—it breaks in with healing, judgment, and mercy.

4. ὄφις (*ophis*) – "serpent" (v. 19)

Jesus gives them authority over serpents. This echoes Genesis 3 and the ancient enemy. But here, it's not about trampling real snakes—it's about authority over evil. And this power is not to be wielded for pride but received in trembling joy.

5. ἐγράφη (*egraphē*) – "written" (v. 20, implied)

"Your names are written in heaven." The verb suggests permanence, a divine record. They are not rejoicing over performance, but over identity. The real miracle is not what they do, but what God has done—claimed them.

6. ἐξουσία (*exousia*) – "authority" (v. 19)

Authority given by Christ is never power to dominate, but power to proclaim, serve, and suffer. It's the authority of the cross—not flashy, but freeing. It comes not from strength but from the crucified On

SERMON: "SENT WITH NOTHING BUT A WORD"

Text: LUKE 10:1–11, 16–20

Grace to you, and peace—peace that is not your own, but spoken to you, given to you, carried with you, and returned to you in the crucified Christ. This is not the peace of an easy life or the absence of hardship. This is the peace that comes through wounds, through loss, through a Word that finds you precisely where you are weakest and most unable. This is the peace of the cross—where all that you thought you needed to earn God's love was taken away and replaced with a crucified Savior who is enough.

"He sent them out—two by two—into every town and place where he himself was about to go." But how did he send them? Not with armor. Not with a handbook. Not with money or bags or plans. Just this: "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals." Just this: "Say, 'Peace to this house.'" It doesn't seem like much. In fact, it seems reckless. Who sends unarmed messengers into hostile territory? Who sends lambs into a wolf's mouth and calls it mission? The answer: the One who chooses what is foolish to shame the wise, who lets himself be rejected, stripped, mocked, and crucified. Jesus doesn't call the equipped; he empties the called, so that all they carry is him.

And yet, this is how the kingdom of God arrives—in vulnerability. In risk. In dependence. In trust. You'd think the kingdom would come with trumpets, processions, or powerful people in grand robes. But instead, it arrives on dusty feet, through borrowed words, carried by people who don't know how this will end. This is the upside-down nature of the cross. The King reigns from a tree. The kingdom comes in weakness. And messengers are sent without credentials, so that the message isn't obscured by the messenger. The gospel is not God plus our effort—it is Christ alone, crucified and risen, bearing all authority in his pierced hands.

"Peace to this house," he says. Not: "Here's how to fix it." Not: "Let me change your life." Just: "Peace." And this peace is not a mood. Not a feeling. Not a wish. It's a Word. And it either rests on them—or it returns to you. You don't control it. You just speak it. That's the offense and the freedom of grace. It's not a tool. It's a gift. And because it's a gift, it can't be manipulated. You can't make it land, and you can't make it stick. You can only give it away. That's what the cross has done to our speech—it's crucified our control. And raised up in its place a Word that works all by itself, when and where it pleases God.

We think we're supposed to carry everything—answers, proofs, good behavior, religious expertise. We try to carry our own worthiness like a bag slung over the shoulder. But the disciples are told: no sandals. No bag. No backup plan. Just the Word. That means you don't *have* to be impressive. You don't have to "win" anyone. You are not the Savior. You are the one sent with the Savior's peace on your lips. And even more—you're the one to whom that peace has been spoken. The cross teaches us to stop trying to carry what only Christ can bear: the weight of salvation, the burden of results, the anxiety of being enough. He is enough. That's why you can walk barefoot and empty-handed into a world that may not welcome you.

And yes, some will reject you. Some will not want this peace. That too, Jesus names. "If they don't welcome you," he says, "shake the dust off your feet." Not as an act of vengeance. Not with a smirk. But as a sign: even here, the kingdom came near. Even here. That's the scandal of the gospel. It shows up even in places where it will be rejected. It doesn't ask for permission. It doesn't need your success. The cross means God is not waiting for a yes before he draws near. He comes close—closer than our resistance, deeper than our rejection. The kingdom comes near even when it's not wanted. And sometimes, the most faithful thing you can do is let the dust fall and keep going.

The dust reminds us: we are not responsible for results. The Word does what it does. Sometimes it cuts. Sometimes it heals. Always, it works. You are not called to make it work. You are called to bear it. That's what it means to be a preacher—not just from a pulpit, but from your life: to bear a Word that is not your own. The cross takes away our obsession with effectiveness and gives us a new freedom: to trust the One who was most "ineffective" in the world's eyes, hanging powerless, and yet was doing the greatest work of all—redeeming the world.

The disciples come back amazed. They're glowing with power: "Even the demons submit to us!" And Jesus—he doesn't scold them. But he redirects their joy: "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Because that's the real miracle. Not that you were effective. But that you are known. Not that you did great things. But that you were claimed before you ever set out. That's the difference between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. The first rejoices in what you can do for God. The second rejoices in what God has already done for you. Your joy is not your work—it's your name, inscribed not in your performance, but in his wounds.

Your name is written. Not because of your performance, but because of a promise. A cross-shaped promise. A name spoken in baptism. A name sealed in the heart of Christ. The cross is God's pen, and the ink is blood, and what it writes cannot be erased. That's why you go. Not to prove yourself, but because you've already been sent. Not to earn heaven, but because heaven already knows your name. Not to be successful, but to be faithful—to the One who is faithful to you.

So yes—go. Go as lambs. Go without armor. Go without proof. Go without sandals, if need be. But go with this: peace on your lips. A kingdom in your footsteps. A name written in heaven. Not your own. His.

And that is more than enough.

Amen.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST ~ PROPER 10

COMMENTARY ON THE LESSONS

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Amos 7:7–17 – The Line in the Dust

Amos sees a plumb line—not a sword, not a fire, but a standard by which everything is exposed. The judgment of God doesn't always come by disaster; sometimes it comes by clarity. What will no longer be passed over is the gap between God's justice and Israel's pretended religion. The priest Amaziah wants to silence the prophet and preserve the national altar, but Amos is not a professional preacher—he's a shepherd with a Word that cannot be unsaid. The theology of the cross always disrupts comfortable religion. The Word of God unmasks our idols, not by attacking them directly, but by standing next to them and revealing their crookedness.

Psalm 82 – God Among the Gods

Here, God steps into the divine courtroom—not to defend, but to accuse. "How long will you judge unjustly?" Even those in power, those who bear the name of divinity, are held accountable to the poor and the weak. The true God does not hide behind might or sovereignty. He judges in favor of the lowly. The cross is already hinted here: God shows himself not above the weak, but for them. The gods die. The LORD stands. The psalm ends in a plea—"Arise, O God"—and that cry will echo all the way to Easter morning.

Colossians 1:1–14 – A Kingdom of Grace, Not Performance

Paul opens this letter not with commands but with thanksgiving for faith and love—the fruit of the gospel, not of effort. The hope laid up in heaven is not something to be reached but something already given. This passage dismantles any notion that the Christian life begins with striving. The strength Paul prays for is not the kind that lifts weights—it's the strength to endure, to wait, to walk in the dark while still trusting the inheritance is real. The kingdom is one we are *transferred* into, not one we climb toward. The cross does not make us capable; it makes us recipients.

Luke 10:25–37 – The One in the Ditch

This parable is not a moral program; it's a revelation. The lawyer's question is all too familiar: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question presumes that life with God is a reward for the right kind of behavior. Jesus affirms the law, not as encouragement, but as exposure: "Do this and you will live." But we don't do this. That's the point. The man, trying to preserve his self-righteousness, asks, "Who is my neighbor?"—hoping the answer will justify him. Instead, Jesus tells a story that undoes him.

The one in the ditch is us. And the Samaritan—unexpected, rejected, offensive—is the one who saves. This is not a story about doing better. It's a story about being found. The cross is not a principle to emulate; it is a rescue to receive. And in that receiving, something happens: mercy takes root. But it is never the root. It is the fruit of being carried, healed, and paid for.

GREEK WORD STUDY – LUKE 10:25–37

1. ποιήσας (***poiēsas***) – "Having done" **(v. 28)**

Jesus replies, "Do this, and you will live." The word is active: "having done." Not believed. Not hoped. *Done.* This verb frames the law's demand—not as a goal, but as a requirement. It exposes what we cannot fulfill. The theology of the cross begins with the death of doing as a means of righteousness.

2. ἀγαπήσεις (***agapēseis***) – "You shall love" **(v. 27)**

Not sentiment, but self-emptying. Agapē is not emotion but cruciform action: love that gives without expecting return. The imperative here is crushing. Who can love God fully and neighbor equally? No one but Christ. The law reveals its own impossibility.

3. πλησίον (***plēsion***) – "Neighbor" **(vv. 27, 29, 36)**

The lawyer wants to define this term. Jesus refuses. "Neighbor" is not a category to manage—it's someone you'd rather avoid. In the cross, Christ became neighbor to sinners—close enough to touch our wounds. Neighbor is not who you choose to love; it's who needs mercy.

4. σπλαγχνισθεὶς (***splagchnistheis***) – "Moved with compassion" **(v. 33)**

This visceral word describes gut-level mercy. It's used in the Gospels of Jesus himself. The Samaritan doesn't calculate—he *feels* and acts. This is divine compassion, not managerial charity. It is what the cross reveals: God does not love at a distance. He is moved, and he moves toward us.

5. ἐπὶ τὰ τραύματα (***epi ta traumata***) – "upon the wounds" **(v. 34)**

This phrase brings the gospel home. Oil and wine are poured directly *upon the wounds.* Not metaphorically. Not ceremonially. Healing is not abstract. It is bodily. Christ's own body, broken and poured out, binds our real wounds. The cross is not a theory—it is balm.

6. ἐλεος (***eleos***) – "Mercy" **(v. 37)**

"Which of these proved to be a neighbor?" The answer is not "the one who did the right thing," but "the one who showed mercy." Mercy is not fairness. It is not duty. It is the interruption of judgment by grace. The final command—"Go and do likewise"—can only be heard by those who've already been found in the ditch, already been touched by mercy, already been raised.

SERMON: "THE ONE IN THE DITCH"
Text: LUKE 10:25–37

Grace to you and peace from the One who did not pass you by, but found you where you had collapsed—without credentials, without excuses, without hope—and carried you into mercy, not because you were worthy, but because he is.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is often told as a story about doing more, loving better, becoming the kind of person who will stop on the road. We are told to "go and do likewise," and we nod solemnly, hoping maybe we can. But if that's all this is—a morality tale—then the story will eventually crush you. Because the truth is, we don't do likewise. Not consistently. Not when it costs. Not when no one sees.

The lawyer who questioned Jesus wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. It sounds like a good question, even a holy one. But beneath it lies a dangerous assumption: that eternal life is something we can qualify for, that there is a kind of person who *deserves* to inherit. It is the same old religious hunger for control—tell me what to do so I can secure my place. Jesus, seeing this, does what only Jesus can do: he does not dismiss the Law—he sharpens it. "Do this," he says, "and you will live." Full stop.

But that's not good news. It's judgment.

"Do this and you will live" is not the gospel. It is the Word of God in its first, most devastating voice. It exposes us. Not just what we've failed to do, but what we've never even *wanted* to do. We don't love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. And we certainly don't love our neighbors as ourselves—not the difficult ones, not the invisible ones, not the ones who bleed. The Law shows us not a ladder to heaven, but a mirror to the grave.

So, "seeking to justify himself," the man asks, "Who is my neighbor?" That's not a humble question. It's a legal one. He's looking for limits—definitions, exceptions, escape hatches. Like us, he wants to know how little mercy he can get away with giving and still be righteous. And Jesus tells a story—not to give him a rule to follow, but to blow up the very world in which rules make us righteous.

A man goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He is stripped, beaten, and left for dead. The priest sees him, and walks on. The Levite sees him, and walks on. These are not wicked people. They are religious people. Responsible. Busy. Clean. But the Law does not save the man in the ditch. It steps around him. Only a Samaritan stops—the outsider, the despised one, the one who has no obligation under the Law. He sees. He comes near. He touches what is unclean. He pours oil and wine. He bears the man's weight. He pays the cost. And he leaves nothing unfinished.

Now—if you hear this story and say, "I should be more like the Samaritan," you've missed the most important thing: you are not the Samaritan. You are the one in the ditch.

This is not a story about how to be good. It is a story about what it means to be found. The parable does not begin with your compassion—it begins with your condition. You are half-dead, stripped of dignity, left behind by your own righteousness, incapable of rescue. You are not the helper. You are the one who needs help. And the One who comes—across every dividing line, across your guilt and shame, across death itself—is Christ. He is the neighbor you never expected. The outsider who became flesh. The despised one who stopped for you.

This is the theology of the cross: that God meets us not in our strength but in our failure; not as we ascend toward virtue, but as we are brought low. Jesus does not hand us a how-to guide. He climbs into our suffering. He binds our wounds. He puts us on his shoulders. He pays the price we cannot repay. And he does not ask us to deserve it. That's the scandal of grace: it is given to those who cannot move, cannot speak, cannot rise.

So when Jesus says, "Go and do likewise," he is not handing you a project. He is turning you inside out. Only the one who has been rescued can begin to love this way. And even then, our loving will never be the point. Our doing will always fall short. The point is not your ability to live out the parable. The point is that this parable has already happened to you.

You have been loved like this. Found like this. Carried like this. And now, even your halting attempts at love are held in the larger mercy of God, who finishes what we cannot.

So don't make this story into law again. Let it be gospel. Let it undo you. Let it find you. And when it does—when the Word picks you up from the ditch and says, "You are mine"—then love may rise

in you. Not as achievement, but as overflow. Not to earn anything, but because everything has already been given – in Jesus Christ your Lord.

Amen.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST ~ PROPER 11
COMMENTARY ON THE LESSONS

Amos 8:1–12 – The Basket of Summer Fruit

This is not a pleasant harvest. The prophet sees ripe fruit, but the wordplay in Hebrew (qayitz / qetz) makes it grim: the fruit is not a sign of provision, but of the end. Israel has ripened—unto judgment. God has had enough: of worship without justice, of songs without truth, of religious words that cover economic exploitation and moral rot. And when God says there will be a famine—not of bread, but of the Word—it's not a warning, it's a sentence. The Word is withdrawn. This is the theology of the cross at its most terrifying: God goes silent. Not out of absence, but out of judgment.

Psalm 52 – The Lie That Devours

This psalm addresses the one who boasts in evil—the manipulator, the liar, the powerful who misuses power. But the psalm turns: "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God." There is no triumph here, only trust. Not in vengeance, but in steadfast love. In a world where wickedness seems rooted deep, the psalmist clings to a deeper root. This is not the voice of strength but of defiant dependence. The tree grows not because it is mighty, but because it is planted in mercy.

Colossians 1:15–28 – The Cosmic Christ, Revealed in Suffering

This hymn to Christ gives us a dizzying vision: He is the image of the invisible God, the one through whom all things were made, the one in whom all things hold together. And yet—this Christ is revealed in the cross. The fullness of God dwells in the one who reconciles *by the blood of his cross*. There is no higher theology than this: not an abstract Christ, but one who suffers, dies, and is raised. And this same mystery is now made known among the Gentiles: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This is not a mystical elevation. It is a gift that comes through proclamation, in weakness, and for sinners.

Luke 10:38–42 – The One Thing Needful

Martha is busy. She is doing what good people do—preparing, serving, attending. But Jesus gently interrupts her labor with a diagnosis: she is anxious and troubled about many things. Mary, meanwhile, sits and listens. She has chosen the "better portion." This is not about temperament. It is not praise for passivity. It is a declaration: the kingdom comes not by doing, but by receiving. Martha's activity is not sinful, but it has become her righteousness. And in Jesus' kingdom, righteousness is given—not achieved. The one thing needful is not work, but the Word. Not effort, but Christ himself.

GREEK WORD STUDY – LUKE 10:38 42

1. παρεδέξατο (***paredexato***) – "Welcomed" **(v. 38)**

Martha "welcomed" Jesus into her house. The word implies hospitality—but more deeply, a reception of one with honor. It is a good beginning. But Luke will show that receiving Christ isn't merely about domestic preparation—it is about receiving his Word, and that Word reorders everything.

2. διηκόνει (***diēkonei***) – "Was serving" **(v. 40)**

This verb is the root of *diakonia*, from which we get "deacon." Martha's activity is ministry—but ministry divorced from the Word becomes anxiety. Even good service, when made ultimate, can become a burden. The theology of the cross exposes this: our works cannot bear the weight of righteousness.

3. περιεσπᾶτο (***periespato***) – "Distracted" **(v. 40)**

This word literally means "to be pulled away." Martha is not simply working—she is being drawn off course, inwardly scattered. The implication is not merely busyness, but disintegration. She is losing the center. The cross re-centers us not on tasks, but on the Word that holds.

4. μεριμνᾷς (***merimnas***) – "Anxious" **(v. 41)**

From the same root used in "do not be anxious" (Luke 12:22). Martha's labor is not just exhausting—it is anxious. When we make our doing the measure of our worth, anxiety is the fruit. The gospel is not "do better," but "you are loved even when you fail."

5. θορυβάζῃ (***thorybazei***) – "Troubled" **(v. 41)**

This verb can mean stirred up, agitated. Martha's soul is not at rest. The cross is where Christ absorbs our unrest and speaks peace. He does not scold Martha—he names what the law cannot calm. Only the Word can still the storm inside.

6. ἀγαθὴν (***agathēn***) – "Good" (v. 42)

Mary has chosen the "good portion." This echoes the Old Testament language of inheritance. The true inheritance is not land, law, or legacy—it is the Word made flesh, sitting in your home, speaking your name. The good portion is not earned. It is listened to. It is Christ.

SERMON: "THE BETTER PORTION IS NOT A THING, BUT A PERSON"
Text: LUKE 10:38–42

Grace and peace to you from the One who does not wait for your effort, your perfection, or your preparation—but who enters your house, sits down, and gives himself to you without condition.

Martha welcomed Jesus. That's how the story begins. It begins well. She received him, honored him, and went to work. It's what any good person would do. In fact, it's what many of us try to do every day: prepare a life worthy of God. Make something beautiful, hold it together, stay busy in faith, keep things respectable, make the Church welcoming, the home peaceful, the heart pure. We know what Martha is doing. We've done it all our lives. She is living under the logic of the law.

And the law is always compelling. It says, "If you do it right, you'll be okay. If you prepare well, work hard, stay faithful—God will be pleased." And to be clear, there's nothing wrong with Martha's service. There's nothing wrong with good works. In fact, the law is good—holy even. But when the law becomes your lifeline, your identity, your way of securing your place at Jesus' feet, it will slowly crush you. That's where the theology of the cross cuts through. Because at the center of the Christian life is not your doing, but Christ's giving.

Martha is not only serving. She's unraveling. Luke tells us she was *distracted*—literally pulled away. Her good intentions have become burdens. Her hospitality has become anxiety. Her serving has turned into striving. And the cross exposes this in all of us. Because we all come to Christ wanting to prove something: that we're faithful, generous, busy for the kingdom. We come bearing our spiritual resumes, hoping he will notice. But the cross says, *None of this will save you.*The one thing needful is not what you bring. It is what he brings. And he brings *himself*.

So Jesus gently speaks. He doesn't shame Martha. He doesn't dismiss her gifts. But he does unmask her burden: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things." It is not her action he critiques. It is her anxiety—the way her work has become her justification. This is what the law always does. It gives us something good, and then we make it ultimate. And the cross breaks that illusion. It says: even your best efforts cannot bear the weight of your righteousness.

And now, look at Mary.

Mary sits. Mary listens. Mary receives. And this is not laziness. This is faith. Faith is not what we do for God—it is what God does to us, in us, through his Word. Mary has chosen the better portion—not because she's figured it out, but because she's let go. She has stopped striving and started receiving. And this is the hardest thing of all. Because we don't want to be the ones in need. We want to be the strong ones, the capable ones, the ones who serve. But faith begins when we admit we are not the host—Christ is.

The better portion is not a principle, not a lifestyle, not a set of spiritual disciplines. The better portion is a person: Christ himself, given in weakness, offered in vulnerability, crucified in love. The better portion is the One who doesn't ask you to climb the ladder, but who descends the ladder and sits with you. The better portion is not earned by devotion. It is received in helplessness. That's the heart of the theology of the cross.

Think about what Jesus does here. He is not feeding a crowd, healing the sick, or teaching a multitude. He is simply *present.* Sitting in a house. Sharing his Word. This is what grace looks like—not spectacle, not activity, not results. Just presence. Just promise. Just Christ giving himself to those who are ready to fall at his feet—because they have nowhere else to go.

And that means something scandalous: that Mary is not better than Martha because she did more. She is not better because she got the message. She is not even better because she chose rightly. She is called blessed because she received. The better portion was never about what she did. It was about what Christ was doing *for her*.

And what he is doing for you.

Today, Christ has come to your house. Not to check on your performance. Not to audit your spiritual output. But to speak peace into your anxious heart. To call your name—not once, but twice. To say: there is one thing needful, and it is not your service. It is not your understanding. It is not your strength. It is *me*.

And this portion cannot be taken from you. It will not rot. It will not expire. It is not subject to your worthiness. The better portion has been secured at Calvary. Nailed down with finality. Raised with power. Spoken over you in baptism. Poured into you in bread and wine. You don't have to hold onto it. It holds onto you.

So sit. Listen. Rest. And know this: you are not enough—and that is not bad news. That is the truth that sets you free. Because Christ is enough. And he has come to you. Not to be served, but to serve. Not to be impressed, but to save.

The better portion is yours. And it is Christ.

Amen.

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST ~ PROPER 12
COMMENTARY ON THE LESSONS

Hosea 1:2–10 – The Shocking Grammar of Grace

God commands Hosea to take a wife of whoredom—Gomer—and to name their children as signs of judgment: Jezreel (the site of bloodshed), Lo-Ruhamah ("Not Pitied"), and Lo-Ammi ("Not My People"). This is not a moral allegory—it is a theological scandal. God's people have broken covenant, chased other lovers, and forgotten his mercy. And yet the promise remains. "In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said, 'Children of the living God.'" This is not because they repented, but because God refuses to give them up. The cross is already foreshadowed: love that bears shame, names judgment, and yet births mercy.

Psalm 85 – Mercy Rises from the Earth

This psalm remembers God's past forgiveness as the basis for new hope. Wrath has been real, but mercy is deeper still. "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other." This is not abstract reconciliation—it is incarnate. In the cross, righteousness and peace meet not in compromise, but in Christ. The Word that speaks peace to the people is not conditional. It is given to those who fear him—that is, those who know they cannot save themselves.

Colossians 2:6–15 – Buried and Raised in Him

Paul roots all Christian life in the mystery of baptism: "You were buried with him… raised with him… made alive together with him." The circumcision of Christ is not a mark in the flesh but the cutting off of our old sinful selves. The handwriting against us is nailed not to our record—but to his cross. Here, the theology of the cross breaks the power of spiritual performance. God doesn't negotiate with our improvement—he kills and raises. Baptism is death, not therapy. And it's resurrection, not reward.

Luke 11:1–13 – Teach Us to Pray

Jesus teaches not a technique for prayer, but a relationship rooted in grace. When the disciples ask, "Lord, teach us to pray," Jesus responds with a simple, bold prayer that names God as "Father"—not a distant judge, but a giver who delights in mercy. Each petition ("Give us," "Forgive us," "Deliver us") reveals our need and God's generosity. The parable of the midnight visitor is not about badgering a reluctant God but shows that if flawed people respond to persistence, how much more will God, who is already generous, give to those who ask? And the greatest gift is not bread or answers, but the Holy Spirit—God's own presence, given not to the strong or worthy, but to those empty enough to receive. In the theology of the cross, prayer is not our power—it's our surrender to the One who has already opened the door in Christ.

GREEK WORD STUDY: LUKE 11:1–13

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1. ἐπιούσιον (*epiousion*) – "Daily" (v. 3)

This rare word appears only here and in Matthew. It may mean "necessary for existence" or "for the coming day." Either way, it's not a prayer for luxury—it's for what sustains. Daily bread is not just provision—it is Christ himself, the Bread of Life, given not in advance, but daily.

2. ἁμαρτίας (*hamartias*) – "Sins" (v. 4)

We ask not just for provision but for pardon. Sin here is not mere error—it's separation, falling short of trust. We do not barter forgiveness. We receive it freely. The cross is not God's reluctant plan B—it is the heart of the prayer. Forgive, as we forgive: not as a condition, but as a reflection of mercy received.

3. πειρασμόν (*peirasmon*) – "Temptation" or "Testing" (v. 4)

We ask not to be led into temptation—not because God tempts, but because we are weak. The theology of the cross knows that we cannot stand alone. We pray to be spared the time of trial not because we fear pain, but because we know our limits.

4. ἀναιδείαν (*anaideian*) – "Shameless persistence" (v. 8)

This untranslatable word combines boldness, need, and impudence. It is not polite prayer—it is desperate. The friend knocks because he knows the door must open. This is not about technique. It is a cry of faith that will not let go—like Jacob clinging to the angel, like Christ praying in Gethsemane.

5. αἰτεῖτε (*aiteite*) – "Ask" (v. 9)

The present tense implies continual action. Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Not because God is reluctant—but because prayer shapes us to receive. In the theology of the cross, prayer is not about control—it's about surrender.

6. πνεῦμα ἅγιον (*pneuma hagion*) – "Holy Spirit" (v. 13)

The final promise: the Father gives not just stuff—but *himself*. The gift is the Spirit—the presence of God who dwells in those who ask. Prayer is not about getting blessings. It is about being filled with the Blessing.

SERMON: "THE GOD WHO GIVES HIMSELF"
Text: LUKE 11:1–13

Grace to you and peace—from the God who does not wait for your strength, your eloquence, or your deserving, but who answers with nothing less than Himself.

"Lord, teach us to pray." It's a beautiful, humble request. But it's also revealing. These disciples have followed Jesus, witnessed miracles, and heard his teaching—and still, they do not know how to pray. They don't come with theological arguments. They don't ask for power. They ask for help with words. And maybe that's where prayer always begins: not in confidence, but in poverty. Not in knowing what to say, but in being emptied of what we thought we knew.

And what does Jesus do? He doesn't give them a formula or a motivational speech. He gives them a prayer—short, stripped-down, focused. "When you pray," he says, "say: Father." That's the first and most radical word. Not "O Supreme Being," not "O Distant Architect," but *Father*. Jesus hands over to sinners the very word he uses with God himself. And in doing so, he gives us more than permission. He gives us identity. You do not have to earn your place in the conversation. You are already known.

But notice this: every petition in the prayer is a confession of weakness. We are being taught to pray against ourselves. "Hallowed be your name"—because we profane it. "Your kingdom come"—because we cannot build it. "Give us… forgive us… deliver us"—because we are hungry, guilty, and afraid. This prayer is not for the spiritually elite. It's for those who have nothing to offer but need. It is the cry of the child, the beggar, the exhausted one at the end of their rope. In this way, the Lord's Prayer is not an achievement. It is surrender. It's not the speech of the righteous—it's the cry of the crucified.

Then Jesus tells a story. A man goes to his neighbor at midnight, knocking for bread. The door stays closed. But he keeps knocking. Not because he has a good excuse. Not because he's holy. He knocks because he has nowhere else to go. And eventually, the door opens—not because of friendship, but because of shameless persistence.

Is Jesus saying that God is like a grumpy neighbor, reluctant to help? No. He's saying the opposite. If even flawed people eventually open the door, how much more will God, who is good, answer his

children? But the key is this: prayer is not answered because it is impressive. It is answered because God is merciful. You do not have to persuade Him. You do not have to convince Him. You only have to need Him.

That's what the theology of the cross teaches us: that God is not found in our effort, our eloquence, or our piety. He is found in the depths—in our weakness, in our fear, in our sin. Prayer, in this light, is not our way of climbing to God. It is God's way of meeting us where we fall. It is not a spiritual achievement. It is the groaning of the Spirit within us (Romans 8), too deep for words, spoken even when our mouths fail.

So Jesus says: Ask. Seek. Knock. Not as a strategy, but as a surrender. These verbs are not ladders to heaven. They are cries from the pit. And the promise is not that we will always get what we ask. The promise is better: that God will always give what we *need*. And what we need most is not bread. Not answers. Not fixed circumstances. What we need is *Him*.

"If you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children," Jesus says, "how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" That is the climax. That is the surprise. The ultimate answer to prayer is not what you wanted—but who you were made for. God does not just give from a distance. He gives Himself. In the Holy Spirit. In the Word. In the cross.

And that's what we're really asking for, whether we know it or not. When we pray, we are not asking for things—we are asking for the Giver. And the Giver has already come. In Christ, the door has already been opened. The prayer has already been answered. Not in thunder, but in flesh. Not in power, but in crucified mercy.

So ask—not because you are strong, but because you are weak. Seek—not because you know what to look for, but because you are lost. Knock—not because you can demand anything, but because you have been promised everything in the name of Jesus.

And when you do, you will find not a God who makes you wait until you are worthy, but a Father who gives you everything—beginning with His own Beloved Son.

Amen.

WORSHIP PLANNING AND BIBLE STUDIES

"TONGUES OF FIRE AND RHYTHMS OF GRACE: LITURGY IN THE SEASON OF PENTECOST"

By Pastor Mark Anderson

There is a certain irony in the way we often speak of Pentecost. We call it the Church's birthday—and then proceed to treat it like a past event. We imagine wind and flame and languages in Acts 2, but we assume that the Spirit, like some holy fireworks display, exploded once and has now retired to the margins of our polite Sunday mornings.

But Pentecost is not a memory. It is a reality. And it's not a single moment—it's a *season*. The Spirit did not descend just to thrill. He came to form a people. Not just to disrupt—but to **order** us around the Word, to draw us into communion with the crucified and risen Christ, and to send us into the world with tongues shaped by praise and truth. Pentecost is ongoing. And the Church's worship is its daily breathing.

That's why I want to talk about liturgy—and why it still matters, especially in the Pentecost season.

Liturgy Is Not Just Tradition—It's Attention

In many circles today, "liturgy" gets a bad reputation. It's seen as rigid, outdated, or something that gets in the way of real spiritual experience. But that's a misunderstanding—not just of liturgy, but of human nature.

You and I live in a world of noise. Of screens and scrolls, of scattered thoughts and endless distractions. We are, as T.S. Eliot put it, "distracted from distraction by distraction." Our attention is frayed. Our imagination is formed not by silence or story, but by the unceasing hum of the latest update. The question is not whether we worship—it's what we pay attention to.

That's where liturgy comes in.

Liturgy, at its heart, is not about preserving the past. It's about making room for the present—the present *presence* of God. It's about shaping time and space so that we can actually hear what God is saying. When worship follows a rhythm—when it walks us through confession, proclamation, thanksgiving, and sending—it's not performing a religious script. It's training us to pay attention to the Word that is being spoken again and again into our lives.

Pentecost Is a Liturgical Event

Look again at Pentecost. The Spirit didn't blow through to liberate the disciples from form. He gave them a new form—speech, proclamation, intelligibility. The miracle wasn't chaos. It was clarity. "Each heard in their own language." Pentecost is not the rejection of structure—it is the infusion of structure with fire and breath.

Liturgy does not stifle the Spirit. It makes room for the Spirit to be heard.

In a culture that equates spontaneity with authenticity, it's easy to dismiss structured worship as lifeless. But in truth, structure is often what makes real freedom possible. Ask a musician whether rhythm kills expression. Ask a dancer whether choreography silences joy. The answer is always no. Form can hold beauty. And liturgy, rightly practiced, is a form that holds the fire.

Contemporary Sensibility: Not a Style, But a Posture

To be "contemporary" in worship is not simply to use guitars or projectors or informal prayers. It is to listen to the needs of the present moment. And what this moment needs most is not novelty, but depth. Our culture is not starving for entertainment. It is starving for *meaning*. People are not desperate for new songs. They are desperate for a Word that speaks into their grief, their anxiety, their longing.

Liturgy, when approached with fresh eyes and honest hearts, meets that hunger. But it must be inhabited, not repeated. It must be spoken from *within*, not just from memory. A collect is not a formality. It is a lifeline. The Creed is not a test. It is an anchor. The Eucharist is not just ritual. It is the living Christ, offered again.

To have a contemporary sensibility means to pray the ancient words with present fire. It means to proclaim the Gospel not just in the cadence of the Church year, but in the urgency of our generation.

Pentecost Worship: Fire in Rhythm

In the season of Pentecost, we do not abandon structure. We let it breathe. We do not chase after spectacle. We lean into the faithful rhythms that make room for God to speak. We do not reinvent worship to impress a restless world. We let worship *re-form* us, week after week, into the image of Christ.

The question is not, "Should we be liturgical or contemporary?" The question is: Are we listening? Are we giving people not just songs to sing, but space to hear? Are we offering more than relevance—are we offering reality?

Because the Spirit still descends. The fire still falls. The Word still speaks.

And the liturgy, when shaped by humility and filled with faith, becomes the room in which God does what only God can do.

FOR WORSHIP LEADERS: HOW TO PLAN PENTECOST WORSHIP IN LIGHT OF WORD AND WIND

If liturgy is meant to help us pay attention, then planning worship is not primarily about arranging content—it is about curating clarity. It is the sacred work of making space for the Word to be heard, for Christ to be received, for the Spirit to breathe into real lives. Here are a few guiding principles for planning worship during the Pentecost season—and beyond.

1. Let the Liturgy Carry the Weight

You don't have to make the service meaningful. The meaning is already there. The structure of the liturgy—Confession and Absolution, Word and Sacrament, Creed and Prayers—is already preaching

the Gospel. Your role is to inhabit that structure with living faith, not to replace it. Let the prayers speak for the weary. Let the readings speak before your commentary does. Trust the form.

Don't improvise because you think the old words are dull. Pray them like they matter because they do.

2. Weave the Contemporary into the Given, Not the Other Way Around

A contemporary sensibility is not about abandoning the past. It's about hearing the present moment in light of what has been received. If you use modern music or media, let them serve the readings. If you write new prayers, let them echo the collects. If you speak freely, let it deepen the liturgical language rather than compete with it.

Think of yourself not as a host trying to "wow" the room, but as a guide pointing to what's already on the table.

3. Shape Silence as Intentionally as Sound

Pentecost was loud—but it was not noise. The Spirit gave speech that could be understood. As worship leaders, our job is not to fill every second but to frame time so that people can breathe, listen, receive. Use silence between readings. Don't rush from Kyrie to Gloria. Let the prayers land.

The Spirit often works not in what we say, but in silence, in what we let sink in.

4. Plan with People, Not Just the Calendar

The liturgical calendar gives us shape—but people are the context. Let the themes of the season (mission, Spirit, proclamation, renewal) meet the real lives of your congregation. Let your prayers speak into burnout, longing, anxiety, friendship wounds, joy and sorrow. Let the "tongues" of Pentecost include the emotional languages of your people.

Don't be afraid to name what is real. God already has.

5. Pray for Humility and Surprise

Worship planning is not about control. It is about faithful preparation and holy surrender. You prepare the prayers. You rehearse the music. You print the bulletin. And then the Spirit comes anyway, when and where it will. Sometimes through your careful planning, sometimes in the silence after it. Either way, rejoice.

You are not the fire. But you can set the wood.

Final Encouragement

To every worship leader:
You are not creating a show.
You are making room.
You are not the power.
You are the one who, with trembling hands, opens the window and says:
"Come, Holy Spirit. Come."

So keep the structure.
Let it breathe.
Plan with the Word at the center.
Preach with the prayers.
Leave space for awe.

And trust:
The wind still blows.
The Word still speaks.
The fire still falls.

BIBLE STUDIES

PENTECOST PLAY & PRAISE: "WIND, FIRE & WORDS!"

A Fun Bible Activity for Kids (Ages 4–10)

Big Idea:

Pentecost is the day God gave the Holy Spirit—not because the disciples were brave or perfect, but because God keeps His promises. The Spirit came with wind, fire, and words so that everyone could hear how much God loved them. The Spirit still comes to us today—when we hear the Word, when we are baptized, when we sing, and when we pray.

Memory Verse:

"God has poured out his Spirit on all people!"
—Acts 2:17

Supplies:

- Red, orange, and yellow tissue paper or streamers
- Paper cups or paper plates
- Washable markers or crayons
- Stickers
- Bible (children's version or reader)
- "Wind" (a fan or blowing through a straw)
- Music source for dancing or singing

Activity Plan:

1. TONGUES OF FIRE HATS (10 min)

What You Need: Paper headbands or paper plates, red/orange/yellow tissue "flames," glue/tape, crayons.

What to Do:
Kids color and decorate a paper "hat" or headband. Add tissue flames to the top to represent the tongues of fire that rested on the disciples' heads.

🗣️ *Say:* "When the Spirit came, it didn't ask if the disciples were ready or good enough. The Spirit just came! God gave fire—not to burn them, but to help them speak good news. Today, you get your own fire hat—not because you're perfect, but because God loves to give."

2. WIND AND WHISPER GAME (5–7 min)

What You Need: Nothing (optional: fan or straws)

What to Do:
Form a circle. Whisper a message around the group (like telephone). Try again with "wind"—a small fan blowing or straws moving a cotton ball across the circle.

Say: "The Spirit came with a sound like a big wind! Can you hear wind? See it? Not really. But it *does* something. God's Spirit is like that. You might not see it, but it moves you. It brings Jesus close."

3. WORD PARADE (10 min)

What You Need: Bibles, printed words (like "Jesus loves you," "Peace," "God is with you"), and musical instruments or shakers.

What to Do:
Each child picks a "Word" from the pile and practices saying it out loud. Then march around the room saying or singing their word with music. Let it be joyful!

Say: "At Pentecost, God gave the disciples words to say. Words that helped people hear about Jesus. You get to carry those words too! God gave you a voice for good news."

4. CLOSING PRAYER – "THANK YOU FOR WIND AND WORD" (2–3 min)

Everyone sits in a circle.

Repeat-after-me style:

Dear God,

Thank you for your Spirit.
Thank you for wind and fire.
Thank you for Jesus.
Thank you for words we can speak—
words of peace, love, and hope.
Fill us up and send us out.
Amen.

Pentecost Song (to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle")

Wind and fire, a mighty sound,
People gathered all around.
Spirit came to hearts so wide,
Jesus' love they could not hide!
Now we tell the story too—
"God's great love is here for you!"

Final Thought (for Leaders/Parents)

Pentecost isn't about pretending to be "on fire" for God. It's about God showing up for us—kids and adults alike—whether or not we feel ready. That's the message to give our children: *God comes close, God speaks, and God sends us with love.*

The Holy Spirit is not a reward for the good kids.
The Spirit is the gift that finds *every* child of God—
and says: You are mine. You have something to say. Let's go.

Note: This activity isn't just for the Day of Pentecost. It's a great way to celebrate *any* Sunday during the Pentecost season (which runs all the way through summer and into fall). Use it to remind kids that the Spirit didn't come once and leave—the Spirit is still moving, still speaking, still with us.

Let it be a season of wind, fire, and the faithful Word—spoken in every little voice.

ADULT BIBLE STUDY: THE DAY OF PENTECOST — "WHEN THE WIND FOUND US"

Text: Acts 2:1–21

"And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind..."
— Acts 2:2

Opening Reflection

Pentecost is not the Church's triumph. It is not the reward for faithful discipleship. It is not the moment when the disciples finally got it right. It is the moment when God gave Himself, again, without conditions. It is the moment when the risen Christ poured out his Spirit not into temples, not into religious elites, but into ordinary, fearful, unqualified people with open mouths and empty hands.

If Easter is the resurrection of the Crucified, Pentecost is the speech of the Risen—the day when the Spirit takes what is Christ's and puts it on the tongues of sinners.

Background

Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot), was already a Jewish festival—a time of harvest and remembrance of the giving of the Law at Sinai. But here in Acts 2, **the Law is not given again**. Something else comes: not rules, but a Word. Not tablets, but tongues. Not commandments, but a promise that burns and breathes and cannot be managed.

This is not Sinai 2.0. It is the reversal of Babel. The confusion of tongues is undone—not by human achievement, but by divine speech. And all of it begins *not* with the disciples seeking, praying, or preparing—but with God coming like wind, fire, and voice.

Study Outline

1. "When the Day Had Come..."

Read Acts 2:1–4

What happens to the disciples is not the result of their faithfulness. The Spirit *interrupts* their gathering. He fills the room, not because they are ready, but because Christ has promised.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the significance of the Spirit arriving "suddenly"?
- In what ways does God's work often interrupt rather than confirm our expectations?
- How does this shape our understanding of worship and mission?

Reflection:

The wind didn't ask permission. It found them. The fire did not descend to reward. It lit on heads

bowed low with confusion. This is the grace that gives before we ask. The fire that burns without destroying. The Spirit who prays before we even know we're praying.

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2. "Each Heard in Their Own Language"

Read Acts 2:5–13

The miracle of Pentecost is not spiritual ecstasy—it is *comprehension*. God does not lift the Church out of the world but speaks into it. And not with one clean language, but with all the messy, scattered, political tongues of the world. This is not universalism. It is particularity multiplied by grace.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important that each person heard in their own native language?
- What does this say about the nature of the Gospel and how God addresses people?

Reflection:

God did not erase difference—He entered it. Pentecost doesn't flatten humanity into sameness. It gathers the scattered by naming them in their mother tongues. This is not a Church of conformity. This is a Church of gift and speech, born not in power, but in mercy.

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3. "What Does This Mean?"

Read Acts 2:14–21

Peter doesn't explain the experience. He preaches a promise. He connects what just happened not to psychology or spectacle, but to Scripture. He doesn't invite speculation. He proclaims: "This is that." Joel's words are now, here, for you. This is preaching: not about us, but *for us*.

Discussion Questions:

- Why does Peter root this moment in the prophet Joel?
- How does Peter's message challenge the assumption that God only speaks through religious "professionals"?

Reflection:

The "last days" are not doom. They are now. The end is not threat. It is *the beginning of mercy let loose*. Sons and daughters. Old men. Young women. Slaves. Nobodies. Prophets. The whole earth, trembling with promise. This is what it looks like when God no longer waits.

Theological Focus: The Spirit and the Cross

Pentecost is often misunderstood as the Church's reward for obedience. But the Spirit comes to those who had fled, failed, and locked themselves in an upper room. This is not a theology of glory—not a ladder up. It is the Spirit sent down, given without worthiness, without purity, without resume. The Spirit comes because Christ was crucified and raised—not because the disciples were ready.

The cross is not the prelude to Pentecost—it is its power. The same Jesus who was handed over is the one who now hands over the Spirit. He breathes not on the successful, but on the broken.

The Church is born not from strength, but from speech given to sinners—speech that names Christ, the crucified, as Lord.

Closing Prayer

Spirit of the Living God, Fall not on our success, but on our silence.

Fall not on our striving, but on our failing.

Fall not where we are strong, but where we are weak.

Speak, flame, wind, Word—in our language, in our breath, in our need.

Let your mercy be heard and spoken through us.

In the name of Jesus,
Amen.

PENTECOST FOR US: WHEN GOD SHOWS UP ANYWAY

A Bible Study for Young Adults on Acts 2:1–21

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place..."
—Acts 2:1

INTRO: WAITING IN A ROOM

Imagine this: You've seen your closest friend brutally killed, then alive again, then lifted into the sky. He tells you to wait—for something called "the Spirit." So you wait. In a room. With a bunch of people who are also scared, confused, burned out, and unsure what comes next.

That's where Pentecost begins. Not with clarity. Not with confidence. Not with power.
But with a room full of exhausted people waiting for a promise they barely understand.

Sound familiar?

1: "THE WIND BLEW FIRST"

Read Acts 2:1–4

"Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind..."

The Spirit does not wait for you to be ready. The Spirit doesn't need you to be bold or sorted or spiritual. The wind shows up. Fire falls. Not because the people were holy—but because Jesus had *promised*.

Pentecost isn't about emotional hype or proving your faith. It's not about you climbing toward God. It's about God breaking into your locked room. It's not a reward. It's a surprise.

Real Talk Prompt:

What's a space in your life where you're "waiting in the room"? Where you feel stuck, unsure, or spiritually flat

2: "EVERYONE HEARD IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE"

Read Acts 2:5–13

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages..."

At Babel, human pride fractured the world. At Pentecost, the Spirit starts patching it back together—not by erasing differences, but by speaking *into them*. God doesn't make everyone sound the same—He makes Himself understood right where people are. In their language. Their culture. Their soul.

This is a Spirit who doesn't ask you to become someone else first.

Discussion:

How do you think God might be speaking into your world—in your voice, your language, your culture?

Where have you been taught that you need to "clean up" or "code switch" to be spiritual? What if Pentecost says otherwise?

3: "THIS IS THAT"

Read Acts 2:14–21

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people..."

Peter doesn't explain how the fire works. He doesn't give a TED Talk on Holy Ghost mechanics. He points to the ancient words of the prophet Joel and says, "This is that." What was promised is now here—for everyone. For women and men. Young and old. Insiders and outsiders. And not because they earned it—but because God **pours**.

The Spirit is not achieved. He is poured out.

Discussion:

When have you felt the pressure to "perform" spiritually or emotionally?
What does it mean to hear that God pours—not rewards?

Who gets overlooked in your world? How would this story sound if told through them?

4: THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS (AND THE SPIRIT)

If we're being honest, a lot of church talk makes it sound like the Spirit only comes to the pure, the ready, the brave, the "sold out." But Pentecost tells the truth: the Spirit comes to *sinners, doubters, deniers, and flame-outs*. Just like Jesus did.

The Spirit is not a hype-man. He is the breath of the crucified and risen Christ, filling up scared lungs, shaking loose dead words, and raising the Church from the floorboards. This isn't power as domination. It's power as mercy. It's God showing up in our *least impressive places.*

You don't have to manufacture this. You don't have to fake anything.

Pentecost is for you. Not when you're polished. But when you're waiting, wondering, empty—and open.

Closing Prayer

God of wind and fire, we thank You for showing up
not when we are ready, but when we are lost, afraid, and waiting.

You do not wait for our perfection. You do not demand our strength.
You come to us as You came to those disciples— suddenly, freely, fully—
with mercy in Your breath and promise in Your voice.

Thank You for speaking our language, for filling what is empty,
for making Your home in broken, ordinary people like us.

Thank You for the Spirit—not a reward for the holy,
but a gift for the helpless. Not fire to consume us,
but fire to kindle courage and make Christ known.

Praise to You, O God, for breathing Your life into this world again.
Praise to You for not leaving us alone. Praise to You for Jesus,
crucified and risen, whose Word is our peace.

Come, Holy Spirit. Keep falling. Keep filling. Keep freeing.

Amen.