How many of us remember our 1st birthday party or our baptism if we were baptized as an infant or a small child? Chances are not many of us would remember because we were simply too young. Perhaps the only memory of these two significant events in life was through photos or video that we may see later on when we grow up, or through stories that are being passed on by our parents.

Most Christian denominations, including the Presbyterian the Moravian, and the Roman Catholic, offer baptism to children, as a sign of God’s covenant to us even when we might be too young to respond faith….for we are all precious in God’s sight. Our baptism (whether it was adult or child) serves as a symbolic faith declaration of who we are and whose we are as children of God. **We declare that God has claimed us since the beginning of life and that we are responding to God’s calling by living out our faith giving all glory, honor, and praise back to God.**

As I was planning out for this worship service today, I realize the symbolic irony behind this special day in which we celebrate not only Pentecost, which is the birthday of the church, but we also celebrate the beginning of a new life in Christ through baptism. The images of **Water, Spirit,** and **Fire** keep flashing across my mind, as these three elements resonate and interweave one another throughout the texts that we have just read earlier.

In the Pentecost text that we read in Acts, we read about how God commissioned the Holy Spirit to be amongst us, as Christ has promised, in the form of the dove and with the tongues of fires. In our Baptism text in Mark, we read about how we are being baptized not only physically by water but also by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was fully present in both of these events. The Holy Spirit gives us new life and an exciting new beginning. Through the life of a child, we come to realize God’s ever present covenant that is being fulfilled within each of us, as we pledge our commitment to support and to nurture their faith into maturity.

**On this special day we are reminded of God’s covenant relationship that has been established with us through God’s faithfulness, and how we may honor God through our covenant relationship with one another.** This is all about God and NEVER about us. The Holy Spirit does, however, play a pivotal role of **transforming us**…**reshaping us**, and **fine-tuning** us into the person that God has created us to be.

When it comes to Baptism, what’s the first thing that comes to your mind? Probably water, right? Although water is a key part of the Baptism, it is NOT the most important part. That belongs to the Holy Spirit. As we read in the Mark passage earlier, when John the baptizer was about to baptize Jesus, as He stepped into the Jordan River, John made a public declaration to the crowd that, “*the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*[[1]](#footnote-1)

In the same way, when it comes to Pentecost, we usually associate that with fire and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a rushing wind and a dove.

As we witnessed in the first Pentecostal moment, the people who were once scattered were gathered in from east and west, and from north to south. When the heaven opened up and the rush of a violent wind filled the house, those who were gathered suddenly found themselves speaking in their own native languages, even though they all lived around the Galilee region….that’s like some of us who are gathered in this room today, suddenly speaking in Chinese, Spanish, German, Italian, French or whatever other languages that your native tongue might be. But somehow amazingly, despite their linguistic challenge, they were able to understand each other, perhaps it was because they were all speaking universally praising God, in the common language of love and giving all the glory that God deserves. They were “*speaking about God’s deeds of power.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Scripture tells us that the Spirit gave them the ability to not only speak in their own native tongues, but the ability to understand what the other others are saying as well….I think that’s phenomenal and critical that we communicate and understand each other!

How often do we fail to understand each other because we only hear our own voice, our own perspectives and not giving the others a chance to speak nor do we value their opinions. **Our passage today tells us that in spite of their differences, the early believers were all on the same page, in mutual agreement with one another and in one accord.**

Pentecost was a transformative moment in the course of human history. Some see it as the reversal of the Tower of Babel event back in Genesis when all the people were scattered and began speaking in different language.. No longer do we see ourselves as individual parts of the body, but we see ourselves as the body with many complimentary parts that are dependant of one another. The Holy Spirit unites us all as God’s people, as we live through our One Faith, One Lord, and One Baptism.

Furthermore, the Spirit of Pentecost enables us to do things that are beyond our human imagination. Things that once seemed impossible are now possible. The Spirit invites us to dream dreams and to cast out visions. As God declares, *“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and the young shall see visions, and the old shall dream dreams.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

In the past couple of weeks, we’ve been reading about how many of the early disciples were empowered to heal those who were with physical disabilities and sickness. They would go around casting out demons and evil spirits, and lead others into faith by sharing their stories and testimonies to others. They never thought they would be able to do any of these, but they did...only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As many of you have seen on the news in the past couple of weeks, there have been series of wildfires that are burning uncontrollably in the northern part of the Alberta province up in Canada. The entire city of Fort McMurray (with a population of about 80,000) has been evaluated with thousands of homes already been destroyed. To this date, close to 600,000 acres have been burnt and officials are predicting that the fire may just burn itself out for the coming weeks, if not months ahead.

Meanwhile, down in the deep southern part of the US, we have a different problem with having too much rain and too strong of wind triggering hail storm and severe flooding with tornados touching downs that destroyed thousands of homes. As you can see, **this combination of water, wind, and fire not only disrupts our everyday lives and routines, but it transforms us into a whole new way of us of caring and looking out for one another, as well as our respects towards nature and the environment all around us.**

In the same way, when we are baptized by the Holy Spirit, our renewed faith in Christ can also be spread rapidly like wildfire. As the Spirit of Pentecost descended upon the people, we are commissioned to be the “spark plugs” and the “ambassadors” of God’s love to others. **Our lives are being transformed by the water, spirit, and fire to carry out God’s mission here on earth.** The Spirit of our Baptism offers us this new life and this new beginning, as we are being washed through the water and are made spiritually cleaned.

As you see, **the same Spirit of Pentecost and Baptism opens up a new realm of possibility in which we see ourselves in relations with one another, as we strive to live together as One community. The Old is gone, and the New has come!** The diversity that the Spirit of Pentecost brings is extended beyond our linguistic and cultural differences. It offers us opportunities to build bridges and foster new relationships with those around us.

In the same way, the Spirit of Baptism invites us to share the good news that we find in Christ to those who are near and far, to the ends of the earth. It creates a transformative ripple effect from those who are in the inner-circles to those who are marginalized in society, those who are looking in from the outside….that’s part of the Great Commission. It doesn’t matter of who we are, but whose we are, under the sovereign grace of God, as we bear witness to God’s mission and carry out this ministry of hospitality and welcome towards all those around us.

Friends, the Holy Spirit invites us to see things in a whoel new way. We are living in this new Pentecostal community right now. No longer do we live in a “melting pot” but a “salad bowl” where everyone’s unique gifts and contributions are brought to the table and celebrated. It is our greatest hope and dream that we live out this genuine, authentic and open community of faith by declaring our one Faith, one Lord, and one Baptism. God will pour out God’s Spirit upon us. The young shall see visions and the old shall dream dreams[[4]](#footnote-4), for whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Mark 1:7-8* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Acts 2:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Acts 2:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Acts 2:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Acts 2:21* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)