

## Sermon Notes from CMJ

Pentecost – Year B

**RCL Readings** – Acts 2:1-21; Psalms 104:25-35; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

**ACNA Readings** – Genesis 11:1-9; Psalms 104:24-35; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13; John 14:8-17

**Introduction.** Pentecost, known as *Shavuot* in Hebrew, initially appears in the Torah as an agrarian holiday centred around the wheat harvest in Israel. Pentecost, Πεντηκοστή, means “fiftieth” in Greek and is the word used by the Septuagint to refer to *Shavuot*, which means “Weeks,” acknowledging the Jewish tradition of *Shavuot* falling 50 days after Passover. The Greek word for Pentecost actually only occurs in the Apocrypha, in Tobit and 2 Maccabees. In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the festival is called Feast of Harvest (Exod 23:16), and in Septuagint, it is called Feast of Sowing.

**Common Theme.** Theological themes of the Jewish agrarian calendar developed predominantly during the Second Temple period. By the time of the New Testament, Pentecost became the festival to celebrate not only a grain harvest but also divine revelation and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. In the giving of the Law, Jewish tradition holds, God revealed himself to the world. In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we see that God continues to reveal himself and speak afresh to his people.

**Acts 2:1-21.** On the day of Pentecost, Acts records the disciples meeting together in Jerusalem, most likely in the area of the Temple Mount. Many commentaries will say the disciples were in the Upper Room, the location of the Last Supper. However the Greek text does not say that, nor does it say they are in the Temple. The Greek οἶκος (*oikos*) simply means “house”. In Hebrew the term, “the House,” would imply the Temple, known as the House of God. The Temple Mountain is called *Har HaBeit* in Hebrew and means the “mountain of the House.” In Acts 2, the Jewish people have gathered from “every nation under heaven” to worship the Lord. The atmosphere is electric. There is the expectation of revelation, messianic anticipation, and the prophetic promise of God’s Spirit on all flesh. Jesus had instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem, and they are not disappointed. Let us rejoice this Sunday that God has been true to his word through the prophets and his Son and faithfully sent us his Holy Spirit to dwell with his people.

**Psalms 104:25-35.** Psalm 103 and 104 begin and end with the imperative to “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” The phrase is a call to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. Other psalms call on us to worship the Lord on musical instruments or through song or in holiness. This psalm pairs well with Pentecost. The Father pours out his spirit on his creation, and our spirits respond in blessing the Lord for his goodness, faithfulness and generosity. The psalmist involves creation and its dependence on God, who sustains the world, giving food “in its season” (v. 28). Should God withdraw his presence and care, the result would be misfortune and death (v. 30). However, the outpouring of the Spirit renews the earth with life and blessing (v. 31). God has indeed poured his spirit on his creation. This is part of our sacred history that we confirm at Pentecost. May our own spirits respond to this truth in the appropriate fashion and bless the Lord.

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**Romans 8:22-27.** When Adam ate the fruit in the garden, the world was cursed. It was not the fault of creation that Adam fell, however, the world bore the result of the fall along with humanity. Like humanity, creation also longs for redemption and not destruction. Paul says creation groans, not in death pangs but in labour pains. Life is coming! Just as the world suffered the effects of the fall of Adam, so too creation will benefit alongside the redemption of mankind. We would be fooling ourselves by saying that waiting for the final redemption is easy. Wars, failing economies, broken families all attest to the pain of a fallen world. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is hope. This hope exists outside of ourselves. Scripture has revealed a God that is faithful to his covenants, delivers on his promises of redemption and salvation through Israel and the Messiah, and upholds his word again in sending the Spirit. While we may struggle with waiting, and in our weakness even fall into sin, it is the Spirit that, since Pentecost, reminds us of the hope we have and even assists in our prayers. What a great gift Pentecost has been to the world.

**John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15.** Jesus spoke previously (in John 14) of the “Helper” that will come from the Father. The Holy Spirit is described in Greek as the *παράκλητος*, *paraklétos*, which has been translated into English as “helper,” “comforter,” “advocate” and “intercessor.” In verse 26, “proceeds from the Father” has been a source of historic debate and disagreement between Latin (Western) and Orthodox (Eastern) churches. It is a sad reflection that even the gift of the Helper has resulted in controversy. It was probably not easy for the disciples to understand at the time that “it was to their advantage” that Jesus was going away. The presence of the universal Spirit in and among his people is superior to the physical presence of Jesus on earth. That’s an interesting thought. We now have 2,000 years of guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of Heaven has expanded around the globe, and more than two billion people now call Jesus Lord. Again, what a gift Pentecost has been to the household of faith.

### ACNA Addendum

**Genesis 11:1-9.** The story of the Tower of Babel describes a gathering of humanity in direct rebellion of God’s command to Noah’s descendants to spread out all over the earth (Gen 9:1). According to Genesis 10, the city of Babel was founded by Nimrod, whose name in Hebrew literally means “we rebelled.” The previous rebellion against God had resulted in the flood. So now the solution, they decide, is to build a tall tower for self-aggrandisement. The tower also serves as a focal point to keep the people together to forestall the “scattering over the earth” and is tall enough to escape the potential divine wrath of floodwaters. Greek historians Strabo and Herodotus record a large tower structure still in existence at Babel during their lifetimes. The rebellion did invoke divine wrath, in the form of mixed languages. Multiple languages brought confusion and dispersion among the people, but different languages are not an impediment to the Lord! The multiple tongues at Pentecost show how the Spirit can overcome our confusion and that unity of spirit can exist amidst the diversity of culture and tongue.

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**1 Corinthians 12:4-13.** In context, Paul is speaking positively about the gifts of the Spirit that can and will bring blessing to the difficulties experienced by the Corinthian believers. The Holy Spirit has been poured out since Pentecost, and he has been working in different ways amongst his people. It is not that one gift is superior to another, rather the Spirit operates in a variety of ways for the “common good.” The gifts of the Spirit are dispersed, which implies that no one gets everything. Instead, it is only through unity in the body of believers that we actually have access to all the gifts. This should motivate us for more fellowship together so that, in humility, you will have access to the gifts the Spirit has imbued in me, and I will have access to the gifts given to you.

**John 14:8-17.** One of the mysteries of the faith we share is that to know Jesus is to know the Father. It is not always easy to understand how, but Jesus does show us the same love, compassion, justice, mercy and goodness that is in the Father. Jesus assures us that as his disciples we will do greater works than he did. How is this possible? Let me put it like this. Jesus taught a handful of disciples. His disciples have turned around and taught the whole world. The Church has established schools and Bible colleges across the face of the planet. Jesus healed many people. His disciples have brought healing to the nations and established hospitals, clinics and doctors to much of the world. And we didn’t do it alone nor only in our own strength. We had and still have the Helper. These great works, done in the name of Jesus and empowered by the Spirit, have given glory to the Father and the Son. Jesus says the Spirit will abide with us forever. The Spirit came at Pentecost, not to stay temporarily until the rapture or the return of Messiah or until the new heavens and new earth, but far longer than that. Forever! The gift of the Holy Spirit is a permanent addition to our lives. Just as eternal life begins now, our relationship with the Holy Spirit begins now and continues into the world to come.

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.