

24 May 2026 Pentecost St James Church Eucharist
Acts 2: 1-21 & John 20: 19-23

Pentecost Sermon – From Fear to Courage

Journeys

One of the joys and privileges of this job is conducting baptisms — and we have plenty of them. Whenever I meet the family, we always nominate one of the godparents to do the Bible reading.

And it's fascinating to watch what happens next. People who are perfectly confident in every other area of life suddenly walk from their seat to the lectern with real trepidation. You can see the deep breath before they begin.

The same thing happens at funerals. This week, one of the granddaughters stood to read a beautiful tribute. She was visibly nervous — but she found the courage to step up and speak.

The physical distance from chair to lectern is tiny. But emotionally, the journey from fear to courage is enormous. And that journey is exactly what Pentecost is about.

Pentecost

As today is Pentecost — a moment as significant as a baptism, though not with water but with wind and fire, languages and proclamation, peace and power.

And the greatest contrast in our readings is the disciples' journey. At the end of John's Gospel, they are behind locked doors, anxious and uncertain after the resurrection.

By the time we reach Acts 2, they are in the public square, boldly proclaiming Jesus in a hostile environment.

What happened? Pentecost happened. The Holy Spirit moved them from fear to courage.

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And notice the timing. Pentecost fell on the Jewish festival that celebrated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai — the beginning of a new covenant and a new community. Jerusalem would have been full of pilgrims from across the known world.

God picked His moment. The Spirit's arrival on this day, at this festival, was no coincidence. It was timed for maximum impact.

Perhaps the disciples weren't so much *holed up* in the upper room as *held back* — waiting for the right moment. And once the Spirit filled them, they couldn't hold themselves back any longer.

Covenant and Community

If Pentecost marks the beginning of a new covenant, what is this covenant about?

It is about *implementing the victory Jesus won on the cross*. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus disarmed the powers of evil and inaugurated a new Kingdom — a Kingdom to be lived out by His followers.

But they couldn't do it alone. They needed the Holy Spirit.

And that work continues. The apostles established the Church, preached, healed, taught, and formed new disciples — all to extend the Kingdom of God in a world full of competing gods and loyalties.

And this new community was never meant to be limited to Israel. That's why the Spirit enabled different languages at the very moment when different nationalities were gathered. Maximum coverage, you might say.

What marked these new communities wasn't just their worship of Jesus, but their behaviour. They refused to conform to the culture

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of the day — and in the Roman Empire, that was dangerous. Crucifixion was a real threat.

To be courageous in the face of real fear, they needed something beyond themselves. Something powerful enough to send them from the sanctuary of the upper room into the vulnerability of the public square.

And that something — that Someone — was the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and Us

Pentecost itself was a one-off event, but the Spirit's work certainly wasn't. If it weren't for the Holy Spirit, none of us would be here today, worshipping, praying, and seeking God.

I'll be honest with you: over the last year, my own prayer life has changed. I find myself praying directly to the Holy Spirit far more often. Clergy are supposed to pray each morning for the gift of the Spirit — and I do — but now, several times a day, I find myself praying directly to the Spirit. And I've noticed a difference.

Because the Spirit doesn't just bring us in. The Spirit sends us out — from the safety of this building into the places where we are called to proclaim Christ.

Not necessarily with ten-minute sermons or miraculous healings or long explanations of Scripture. But in the everyday ways we witness to Jesus:

- in kindness
- in forgiveness
- in patience
- in truth-telling
- in compassion
- in choosing peace over anger

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- in speaking hope where others speak despair
- in naming God when the moment is right

These are the Spirit's works too.

Disciples

So what marks out Spirit-filled followers of Jesus — those tasked with implementing His victory and building His Kingdom?

There's a wonderful line attributed to G. K. Chesterton:

“Jesus promised his disciples three things — that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble.”

So dear friends, as you go into your week — whatever it brings — I encourage you not only to pray directly to the Holy Spirit, but to live as people shaped by that Spirit:

Be completely fearless. Be absurdly happy. And do get into constant trouble — the holy kind.

May you know the power and presence of the Holy Spirit this Pentecost. **Amen.**

Rev'd Richard Haynes Pentecost 24 May 2026