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Focal Scripture: John 7

Good morning, beloved siblings in Christ here at Trinity Lutheran Church,

That must have been a strange thing there in Jerusalem. No wonder that people thought the apostles were filled with new wine. There they stood or walked or were seated somewhere and talked and talked and talked. Everyone another language, a mess altogether, and you couldn't even know if those speaking understood their own words. They seemed not in control of themselves, and the only way people could understand this, was, that they supposed them completely out of any control, as you are when filled with new wine. Honestly, I guess, old wine would do the job, too, and wine experts say, even better. It doesn't seem to be a story teaching about vinery. It is a story to learn about who has the say when something has to be said about our lives. It is not they, it is not the wine. Right, they were not in control of themselves. But wrong, they weren't out of control. They were under God's control, or better: They were under God's guidance. This were so complete, that they might not have known about it. That's what made things seem a mess.

The mess was well ordered, though. Like you might think something chaotic happens in this world, and it is well

ordered, though. There is this famous story about the butterfly in Australia causing with the stroke of its wing a thunderstorm in New England. The thunderstorm causes a mess, it doesn't come out of the blue, though, but we know the rules that have brought it up, all those ever growing waves, beginning with the butterfly's wing beat, resulting in a storm here with us. We know much more about rules causing freak weather, and this is not only about butterflies. It is about us, about you, about me, about generations of ancestors who used the earth as if it were bottomless. Now we seem to hit bottom and see what happens when Florida is under water and California on fire. This has its rules. It is very chaotic nevertheless, dangerous and frightening. In every mess, there is an order, it might work out for the good, or for the bad. We don't know when we are overwhelmed by the mess.

Neither did the bystanders at Pentecost, when they listened to the mixture of languages. The order ruling here was not the one Peter reminded them of. What a funny argument he found: "Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning." I love it. But I don't buy it. True, no one should be drunk at 9 o'clock in the morning. Neither at 9 o'clock in the evening obviously. One could be nevertheless, at either time. Peter's argument is no argument, actually. His rule is good, it does not change reality though if this is bad.

The listeners wouldn't believe him, either. But they could believe another argument or kind of observation. They could find a red thread in this mayhem. Through all of this mess everyone could hear their own mother tongue. As a second language speaker I know pretty well, how heartwarming it is, when someone says "Guten Morgen" to me. It's not many words, it's almost nothing, but so much, hearing your own language as a stranger in the midst of talking in a foreign language. Here, they heard the apostles preaching, telling the story of Jesus Christ, telling the story of a new world, in which God is pouring out his Spirit upon all flesh. And they heard it, unexpectedly, in their own language.

There is something about spirit. You cannot feel it, you cannot see it, nor smell it either. The Spirit might be there or not, the spirit isn't palpable, let alone provable. It's a hard thing to celebrate the Spirit today, indeed. When celebrating Christmas, we can point to the manger. When celebrating Easter, there is the tomb, even if it is empty. You can see it being empty. But you cannot see the spirit. This means: We cannot see what binds Christians together.

Pentecost is said to be the Birthday of the Church. But when we want to show and watch the birthday child, we see nothing. All too often Churches have tried to make the Spirit visible. Martin Luther revolted against ways in his time to make the Church visible. He revolted against those who thought a certain hierarchy represents the Spirit, passing it down from predecessor to successor through a time-tested

chain. Only in the Gospel do we find the Spirit, he thought, and in the Sacraments, we celebrate on the basis of the Gospel. That is what our Lutheran confessions say, too. Yet, honestly, isn't it a bit more you think what makes you a discernable Lutheran? Truth be told, my German Lutheran fellows who have been used to liturgical garments as I am wearing today, the good old Talar, still two decades ago debated if an alb with a tippet wouldn't look a bit too Catholic. All right, they learned it needn't be, and now German Lutheran pastors tend to choose if they wear this Talar or the alb. This is not the only weird thing in defining what is Lutheran. You might feel some hymns being very Lutheran, or our liturgy, you might even feel the person of Luther being something very important for your faith, as you are called Lutherans. Luther himself would have denied this naming. "How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name?" he wrote once when people began calling themselves Lutherans (which first their adversaries had begun to do). But how would we identify without this name of Luther? Would we call ourselves only Christians then?

Is that scary?

It is kind of, as all of a sudden we could not say what the difference is between us and others. We could not say, why a Christian coming to Milford should rightly choose this Church to go to and not to another.

This is what we want somehow, don't we? Attracting others for what we feel to be important? And this is kind of defined in a particular way. We find the tradition in which we grew up to be right. Especially we Lutherans do, who seem to be more bound to their tradition than others are. To do so, we have to name things, which are visible and audible. We have to say: Look, Lutherans are this or that.

If the spirit is invisible, this seems not to be primarily what can be said about the Spirit. It cannot be, as the Spirit is not only in Lutherans. He is in all believers, who are called at this first feast of Pentecost, in all who believe that Christ is the right foundation on which our life is built. To outsiders Christianity might look like a mess with all those different denominations, and I can tell: This is far more the case here in the United States than it is in Europe. Once I heard someone comparing the cultures, saying: If Europeans are not pleased with what their pastor said or did, they go to them and try to convince them, even if they have to debate over decades. If Americans are not pleased with their pastor, they build another Church on the other side of the street. That might be exaggerated, but it is not totally wrong. There we are, with the huge number of churches Christians hold here and worldwide. And this multitude is often surprising: When we, Lutherans who we are, join the worship in a Church like the Coptic one, or Greek Orthodox, this might seem quite different to our customs. They worship our God, though, and

they do so through Jesus Christ. They are rooted in Pentecost as we are.

And we can be pretty sure that their languages were among those spoken at Pentecost, as Egypt, where the Coptic Church has its major place, is not far from Israel, and most of the citizens of the Roman empire spoke Greek in that day. Actually, those Churches are older than the Lutheran Church is. On the other hand, they are not. I am deeply convinced that the Lutheran Church has been founded at Pentecost as any other Churches are. This is simply amazing: Diversity of churches, diversity of faith, diversity of humans stood at the beginning of the Church, has been established at Pentecost. Church has so many languages, so many faces, so many traditions, so many liturgies, it is as manifold as humans are. That is the story of Pentecost. It is one church, though.

What we heard from the Gospel brings this into a more adequate image than those tongues of fire, I guess. Fire from heaven is a miracle, and an impressive one. But miracles might sometimes puzzle our minds more than help them to understand. Water is something we use in our daily life, and we need it. We are heading to the time of the year, when we will thirst for water, as the temperatures climb up to ninety or even near one hundred. People in the Near East know even more how dearly needed water is, and what it means to be thirsty, really thirsty, I mean. The well in the desert or in the small villages of those countries was so important and in some areas still is. Having this well means more than just

refreshment. It means bringing us back to life. This is Jesus' promise when he asks us to come to drink from his water. He creates us anew, he makes us lively and vivid, like after a long hike, when you come to a place where they will serve water for you. Okay, mostly, they will not only serve water, but some soda, whatever. You will take it. You will drink it. You will refill it. And drink again.

That quenches your thirst and ends your ailments, making you happy and joyful.

But Jesus does not only speak about something being quenched here and ending. This water is a new start: "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." Those who come to the spring, become a spring themselves. The water is not only to refresh them, but to empower them to refresh others. Rivers can be so different. The Indian River looks other than the Hudson River. They are connected nevertheless, and all of them bear the same kind of water. It is just Hydrogen dioxide, as we have learned somewhere. This is everywhere in any river, how ever different they are. The one river gives it to the other, the next to a new one, until it runs into the sea. That's how it goes. And that's how the spirit is present in our lives, given from the one to the other. So, the spirit takes up so many faces.

Your face is the spirit's face, when you show your neighbor that God loves them.

Your face is the spirit's face, when you help the downcast to get up again.

Your face is the spirit's face when the one who feels despised hears and sees and learns, that they are respected.

The spirit has so many faces, as believers are many. He is so diverse as Christians are. Indeed, the invisible Spirit does not become visible by any hierarchy or Church structure. He does not become visible by the clothes we are wearing, and indeed these liturgical garments do not make a difference between humans as if some could spend more of the spirit, and others less. All who we are baptized, all who we are believers are called to become a spring of living water for others. Whoever we are. Wherever we are. It is not a tradition that defines us to bear the Spirit, but the way how the Spirit becomes living in our lives, makes us his living messenger, transmitting the Spirit to others.

All of this began at a very strange day in Jerusalem, with some people looking rather more drunk than sober, uncontrolled rather than under control. Yet, they gave what they received. They received God's spirit as it has been promised to Israel in the Hebrew Bible, and they gave it to the others. This was a mess. And it was well ordered. The governing rule was: give the spirit to everyone right as they need it. To the Greek as well as to the Jews, to men as well as to women and to everyone however they define themselves. They get the Spirit as the inspiration in their life before God, and all of us are called to give it to the next just as they are. Then Pentecost happens. Then Pentecost is not the story about something back then in Jerusalem. Pentecost

is here and now, not because we celebrate it in Church. It becomes true Pentecost when we live a life in the Spirit and for the spirit, every one of us, and all together.

Amen