



Grace Lutheran Church
June 5, 2022: Day of Pentecost
Pastor Nancy M. Raabe

"Together in One Place" ([John 14:8-17](#); [Acts 2:1-21](#))

Q. How many Lutherans does it take to change a lightbulb?

A. "Change?" What's "change"??

Lutherans are not alone in this. Human beings generally do not like change. Change should be the spice of life, making things new and interesting. Nope. We hate change. We just want things to stay the same.

I'm sure that Micah, who graduates next week, is much bolder than I was at her stage of life. I remember cowering in the high school courtyard as graduation day approached, confiding to my English teacher that I did not want to leave. I liked things as they were. Early mornings in the band room practicing my French horn. Band concerts, competitions, trips My little circle of quirky friends – the "out crowd." Why couldn't things stay the same? "Nonsense, Nanny," my English teacher said, using her special nickname for me. "You have your whole life ahead of you."

Fast forward to my senior year in college. Same thing. College was my life, my quirky friends (still the out-crowd) were my family, the music building was my home, the endless rhythm of chamber and orchestra rehearsals carried me from one day to the next. I so did not want to graduate that I convinced my parents to pay for an extra half-year of college ostensibly so I could take the fifth semester of music theory with the renowned composer who was on sabbatical my senior year.

But the truth is that I did not want to leave. I didn't want anything to change. I felt the same when little Margaret marched onto the bus for her first day of kindergarten. The same when Martin left for college. All very difficult for me. Changes I didn't really want, yet I knew they were good and necessary for the flourishing of our children's lives.

What about change forced on us that is not good and necessary for the flourishing of life? The unexpected death of a child on whom all your hopes were pinned? The sudden incapacitation of spouse that turns your life upside down? A diagnosis of breast cancer, two brutal rounds of chemo two years apart, the discovery of another lump, a mastectomy, and then a lymph node taken at the time of the surgery that tests positive, revealing an entirely different kind of cancer spreading through your body? Four siblings whose lives are torn apart by the sudden deaths a few days apart of both lively, healthy parents?

The first three of these happened to friends of mine, the last perhaps you read about in connection with the Texas shooting. These changes are not good and necessary. What allows anyone in these situations, or those you have experienced, to fathom how there can be a way forward? What gives them, and you, the strength to turn to turn toward the future?

This is precisely where the Holy Spirit enters, into the exact moment when our hearts are most deeply troubled.

Take the disciples in today's Gospel. For three years Jesus had worked to make them fishers of people—teaching them, instructing them how to pray, showing them how to minister to others, performing healings and miracles. Now he is telling them he is leaving, that everything is about to change. They don't want change. They like things the way they are.

They are already unnerved from Jesus' revelation that that one of them will betray him. Then he tells them that he will be with them only a short time longer, and that they cannot go where he is going. They are worried, frightened, anxious. Greatly agitated, Peter pleads, "Lord, where are you going? Why can I not follow you now?" Jesus tries to tell them that they know the way to the place where he is going. But all they know is fright and confusion. Thomas bursts out: "Lord, we do not know where you are going!"

This is where the Holy Spirit enters in. The disciples think they are being abandoned, but Jesus tells them better things are coming, just like my high school English teacher told me. And not just better things in a general way, Jesus says, but God will send you another Advocate -- one who will be with you forever, "to teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." This is how our faith grows. We hear and read God's Word, and the Advocate, the Spirit, unnoticed, keeps reminding us of all that we have heard especially when our hearts are most troubled.

And where was the Advocate of whom Jesus was speaking? Already abiding in them. This is what the tongues of flame in Acts 2 are about – the Spirit already in them which was bursting forth.

But this is what I really want you to hear from John 14: That through the Holy Spirit who is already in us, you will not only do the works that Jesus did, but GREATER works than these! Greater than water into wine, the blind given sight, the dead restored to life? Yes, because yours are works of love on which the reconciliation of all things in God's love depends. How will John 3:16 ever come to pass without you? How can God so love the world that those who believe in God's Son have eternal life, without all of you as the Advocates through whom God's love is poured out? For we did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, Paul begs us to see in Romans 8, but a spirit of adoption through which our relationship with God is the most intimate one imaginable. Abba! Daddy!

At the beginning of Acts 2 the disciples were a ragtag band without a plan. Suddenly with the burst of flames they became the talk of the town. Peter threw off his stumbling ways and delivered a zinger of a speech by which 3,000 were added to their number in a single day.

What is our plan here at Grace? I have been here almost a year, and I'm not sure. But I have a better idea. In lieu of a five-year master plan, what if we were to throw our anxious hearts open to the Spirit, the Advocate who is already in us? What if we have a little Pentecost every time we are gathered together in one place? What if we were to visualize tongues of flame resting on each other's heads? I already see them on yours! Maybe then we would be inspired to speak like Peter did and to take action like the rest of the disciples did. As we come together in one place, breaking bread with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all people, the Lord WILL add to our number those who are saved.

Come, Holy Spirit! Fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and renew the face of the earth. Amen. x