



# Pentecost

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
Anoka, Minnesota

May 28, 2023 ♦ 9:30am



***We are an Open and Affirming Church.***  
***No matter who you are or***  
***where you are in your life's journey,***  
***you are welcome here.***



This bulletin is designed to assist you as you watch our livestreamed worship service, whether you follow along live or view it at a later time. The stream can be found on our YouTube channel at this location:

<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

## Welcome & Announcements

*If you are a guest with us today, welcome! If you are comfortable sharing your information with us, there are cards in the pew holders that you can use for that purpose (place them in the offering plate).*

*If you would like to join our mailing list, email [office@uccanoka.org](mailto:office@uccanoka.org) and ask to be added.*

Prelude

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

\* Opening Hymn

“Come, O Spirit, Dwell among Us” #267

**Come, O Spirit, dwell among us, come with Pentecostal power;  
give the church a stronger vision, help us face each crucial hour.  
Built upon a firm foundation, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone,  
still the church is called to mission that God's love shall be made known.**

**We would raise our alleluias for the grace of former years;  
for tomorrow's unknown pathway, hear, O God, our humble prayers.  
In the church's pilgrim journey you have led us all the way,  
still in presence move before us, fire by night and cloud by day.**

**Come, O Spirit, dwell among us; give us words of fire and flame.  
Help our struggling voices praise you, glorify your holy name.  
Good Creator, Savior, Spirit, Three in One: what mystery!  
We would sing our loud hosannas now and through eternity.**

\* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (drawn in part from Psalm 104)

One: Bless the Fount of Life, O my soul!

Many: **Mother of All, my God, you are very great!**

One: She who makes the clouds her chariot is the one who rides on the wings of the wind.

**Many: She is the one who makes the winds her messengers, fire and flame her ministers.**

One: She is the one who makes springs gush forth, that they may flow between the hills.

**Many: She is the one who waters the mountains from her high chambers, satisfying the earth with the fruits of her work.**

One: Send forth your Spirit, Holy One, and create again in us the blessings of your name.

**Many: Renew us and the face of the whole earth!**

One: Let us pray.

**Many: Divine Fire, set alight within us again, we pray, your Holy Spirit of surprise, imagination, and ingenuity. Send to us messengers who will be like tongues of flame, translating for us and enabling us to hear others in our own language. By that wonder, weave us together with wind and water, that we might grow closer together instead of farther apart. Then, inspire us to be those messengers for others, brokering and translating and creating pathways to community. Amen!**

### A Time for Children (10:30)

*ADVISORY: The livestream of the service continues during the Children's Time; if your child sits facing the Pastor their face shouldn't appear on camera.*

### Prayer of Preparation

### "Pour Out Your Spirit"

C. Grundy

From the sac - red wa - ters of my birth  
to the sac - red wa - ters of this hour,  
I have leaned up - on You who knit me in my  
moth - er's womb. O pour out Your Spir - it now.

*I'm learning to sit with not knowing; when I don't see where it's going  
cool my heels and start slowing, I'm learning to sit with not knowing.*

*I'm learning to sit with what's next; what if and my best guess.*

*Be kinder when it's a process; I'm learning to live with what's next.*

*Here's a clear space I have chosen where the denseness of this world opens  
Where there's something holding steady and true regardless of me or you.*

*I'm learning to live with the high stakes, befriending my mistakes.*

*Lay my hand where my heart aches; I'm learning to live with the high stakes.*

*I'm learning to live with what takes time, no ribbon across some finish line.*

*Stop feeling I'm always a day behind, I'm learning to live with what takes time.*

*(10:30) Children ages 3 and up may depart at this time for faith formation activities.  
Activity bags are available in the back of the sanctuary for those who might enjoy them.*

Scripture Reading – Acts 2:1-8, 12

Lector, **Congregation**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, **"Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"**

<sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, **"What does this mean?"**

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

Hymn

“Like the Murmur of the Dove’s Song” #270

**Like the murmur of the dove’s song, like the challenge of her flight,  
like the vigor of the wind’s rush, like the new flame’s eager might:  
Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

**To the members of Christ’s body, to the branches of the Vine,  
to the church in faith assembled, to our midst as gift and sign:  
Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

**With the healing of division, with the ceaseless voice of prayer,  
with the power to love and witness, with the peace beyond compare:  
Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

Acts of Prayer

*If you wish to share a prayer with the congregation (joy, concern, hope, worry, or anything at all),  
you may write it upon the supplied index card and give it to a Deacon during the Interlude.  
Write “SILENT” on the card if you want the Pastor to see it but not say it aloud.*

Offering

Text-to-Give: **844-334-1477**

*Thank you for your gifts to our ministries!  
If you are watching from home (live or later), please consider adding to the Offering  
by sending your gifts by mail, text, or online ([uccanoka.org/donate](http://uccanoka.org/donate)).  
You can support the church further through the RaiseRight program:  
[www.raiseright.com](http://www.raiseright.com). Our unique church ID is gWKLGX8TRZCN.*

Interlude

Koki Sato

Prayers of the People

*The Pastor will read aloud the prayers of the congregation, occasionally including the call/response:  
God in your love // **Hear our prayer.** Prayers marked “SILENT” will not be read aloud.*

Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

*The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire (debts, sins, trespasses, etc.).  
We affirm that God has many names, so use one of the suggested or another of your choosing.*

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy  
kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our  
daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not  
into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the  
power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

## Benediction

Congregational Blessing

“God Be With You” (#809)

Dorsey/Hutchins

**God be with you. God be with you. God be with you ‘til we meet again.  
O God be with you. God be with you. God be with you ‘til we meet again.**

Postlude

Koki Sato

*You may be seated as you listen to the Postlude. If you choose to depart at this time, please speak gently as you exit out of respect for those who choose to listen.*

## Acknowledgements

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## Sermon Text

I promise you that I have more reasons to put my new kitten on the cover of the Pentecost bulletin than the fact that he’s a **flame**-point ragdoll. Indeed, it’s not so much about little Rory Pond himself as it is about how we managed to get to adopt him—a process that was smoothed by some timely intervention by an agent of the Holy Spirit.

By “intervention,” I mean “translation” or perhaps “brokering.” That’s a key element of the Pentecost story, the same story that comes up on this day every year when we celebrate the traditional birth of the Church.

You know the story, or at least you’ve just heard it read once again. Jesus dies and rises again on the third day. At some point thereafter he meets up with various of his followers, and as Luke continues into Acts, we get a re-narration of his departure. He says to them, “This is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:4b-5). When the day of Pentecost arrives—a word that literally means “fiftieth” in Greek—a bunch of Jesus’s followers are sitting around somewhere. Maybe they’re still mourning Jesus’s departure and wondering what the heck they’re all supposed to do now. At some point, they hear a rushing wind, something that to the attentively knowledgeable reader should immediately bring up the rushing wind of God’s breath that brooded over the waters of creation. Something is about to be born.

By the by, let’s not think of that wind as “violent.” The Greek word in question also means things like, “strong,” and “vehement,” so I think we should think of it as a **fierce** wind. A fierce wind of God brooded over the waters and wrought order out of chaos. A fiercely loving wind blew through the room on the fiftieth day, bringing a new passion to those who had witnessed Jesus’s Passion. Yes?

Anyway, the sound of this wind fills the room they’re in, making me wonder if it wasn’t a little like the sound of having a terrible windstorm just outside. They should be afraid! And then, wonder of wonders, fire appears in the room among them all. Again, perhaps the attentive reader is remembering the story of Elijah in the mountain cave. The prophet witnesses a wind, an earthquake, and a fire, but the

text says that God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or fire. God was in the sound of a sheer silence, or a gentle murmur.

Not so this time. This time, God is most assuredly present in the wind and in the fire, and it's going to shake and quake the earth of their lives. The wind buffets everyone, and the little flames settle upon them, and then the big thing happens: they all start speaking in other earthly languages. People who are passing by don't seem to have heard the rushing wind, but they are hearing these voices, and they're perplexed because all of these Galileans, who I suppose ought to be speaking Aramaic, are speaking in all the languages of the Roman Empire.

I wonder what it was like to be a resident of the Roman Empire. Did those centurions speak only Latin, or were they recruited from all Imperial lands? Did the residents of Palestine mostly just hear without understanding? They probably had to get used to sitting with not knowing. To not understanding where things were going. They would pay their taxes to Caesar, and otherwise they kept their heads down and tried to avoid notice. They learned to sit with what's next, especially when they had no idea what that "next" entailed.

But of course this isn't like the Carrie Newcomer song which seems to me to be about building serenity and acceptance in the face of things we can't change, at least in part. On Pentecost, the gift of languages and understanding is all about making possible something that was before impossible. For when people can understand each other, they can build things together. Sing songs together. Usher in a beloved community together. Sure, there are things they can do together without language, but such things are inevitably limited without the ability to truly *communicate*. Or, to take that word more literally, to *create community*. When the Holy Spirit arrived in that moment, something that was previously inconceivable suddenly became conceivable. It's her gift to do that—to surprise people with possibility. To build over things that seem hopelessly broken. To bring people together against all tradition and expectation.

So, about that cat.

I've had kitten fever for a while now, and I found this Facebook group called "Rehoming Kittens in Minnesota." If nothing else, it's delightful to look at the pictures, and that I had been doing. But one day, someone posted a picture of a little flame-point ragdoll, saying only that he was available for rehoming. I took note of it but didn't really think too deeply about it, except to note that my wife had been talking herself about new cats for a while, and she had specifically talked about ragdolls.

A few days later, when I looked back and saw that the post had very few comments, possibility turned into intention. I looked up the seller, a woman from west of the Twin Cities metro. From the looks of her Facebook page, it seemed likely that she was religiously conservative, but that was neither here nor there. Just a detail. Of more significance was that she and I had a mutual friend, someone with whom I have worked professionally who is an exvangelical. I sent the woman a private message, expressing interest in the kitten. After she told me the price, my wife and I set a record for the fastest agreement ever, and I told the seller we were interested. Then I pointed out our mutual friend and casually suggested he could serve as a reference for me. She agreed to the sale.

The next day, all went well. We drove out to the seller's place and returned home with our little Rory. And then, later that evening, my friend who also knew the seller called me. It turns out the seller was a lot more religiously conservative than I realized. In fact, she had checked out my profile, and as many of you know, I put up a fair amount of "public ministry" stuff, particularly things about justice for my LGBTQ+ neighbors. Well, she wasn't so sure what she thought about that, so she messaged our mutual

friend and expressed concerns about all of the “transgender stuff” on my wall. My friend—with whom she had grown up—told her, “Yes, he supports the LGBTQ+ community. But the thing is he loves everyone. He’s a really good guy.”

All that happened before we went to get Rory, and afterwards, she messaged our friend to share with him that she had enjoyed meeting me and my family and found us to be delightful. Would any of that have happened without my friend who “brokered” that encounter, “translating” my core values to her in a way that she could understand it? So that she *would* understand it since it came from a trusted voice? I don’t know; but I believe know that the Holy Spirit was involved. That’s what my friend was doing; he was an agent of the Spirit who enabled two folks with pretty different worldviews to cross the divide and make a little community. He built a bridge for us to meet in the middle.

I’ve sometimes been asked how we will ever learn to talk to each other again in the midst of this highly polarized national environment. Folks on the left who support drag queens and trans rights (two things that are not remotely the same, for the record) get called “groomers” by folks on the right. Folks on the right who cling even more tightly to their guns and their Christianity in the face of rapidly evolving culture get branded as bigots by folks on the left. I’m generalizing a bit, but I think we’ve all seen instances where that’s true. In this either-or, binary, two-party environment, voting for a particular candidate or party is too often interpreted as being 100% in lockstep with that person or party. It’s easy to hunker down and get further entrenched when you’ve reduced your opponent to a caricature. How do we build a bridge over that increasingly-wide chasm?

We do it the Pentecost way: with the Holy Spirit’s help. In practical terms, we find trusted, good-hearted people who have a foot in both worlds and let them do the work of translating. Of helping the rest of us remember what Paul said: the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you.” Perhaps each of us in our own small ways can even BE that person. I think it likely that we all have folks with whom we’ve remained connected who are right-wing or left-wing or whatever. Folks with whom, despite those labels, we’ve managed to stay in relationship. In those moments, maybe YOU are the universal translator. Maybe YOU are the one who will help them see someone else’s experience in a way beyond sound bites. Maybe YOU are destined to be the inrushing of the Spirit for someone else. Maybe YOU are the point of flame in someone else’s Pentecost awakening.

And maybe then, when we all sit back afterwards, amazed and perplexed, we won’t be asking, “What does this mean?” so much as we’ll breathe out a big gust of air and bless the new creation that was just birthed into being.

Amen.



♦ **First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka, MN** ♦

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*First Congregational Church, UCC of Anoka is an Open and Affirming Christian Community for all. We affirm that the image of God is most fully reflected in diversity. We invite all people to share their energy and talents in full participation with our community. We welcome all individuals and families of any sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, relationship status, race, national origin, socioeconomic status, age, mental and physical health or ability, or belief. Together, we celebrate these and all other facets of one's essential being.*