

May 24, 2026

Pentecost

St. John's Episcopal Church

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Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23

From Canticle of the Sun, Saint Francis of Assisi:

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through which you give your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water, she is very useful, and humble, and precious and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten the night. He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Wind, water, fire and earth – Pentecost uses these four elements that ancient people believed made up the universe to unfold a mystical story of God's re-creation, which St. Francis reveres in his poem.

The imagery at Pentecost - like wind, water, fire and earth -represents the active, transforming presence of God. The first of these symbols to appear at Pentecost as described in Acts 2 is the wind – a roaring wind, like the storm of creativity that brought forth all of life at the beginning. God brings forth His divine will upon the world, inviting us to experience God's power and presence.

Water is the main element of Baptism. Jesus is the living well – “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37-38)

As such we restate our baptismal vows on this day of Pentecost as a new beginning. We rededicate ourselves to proclaim by word and example the Good news of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being. With God’s help.

And fire is the element we most often associate with Pentecost – because we recall the image of tongues of fire appearing above the heads of those gathered that day. Fire purifies, and clears overgrown forest on the land. Just like fire came from deep within the earth millennia ago, pushing upward towards the skies, creating the land on which we stand today, our fire of faith within is God’s passion, inviting others to experience this power of love in our lives. **1**

And earth may not seem as exciting as the other elements, however, it represents the crowd from many nations. Parthians, Medes, Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts, Cretans and Arabs...

Genesis tells us that God made us all from dust and soil; and science says we are all made of stardust that came from the Big Bang – which was God’s way of creating the universe in which we find ourselves. Whatever Science discovers is the knowledge of how God made

everything. The more we learn about our constantly expanding universe, the more we realize just how amazing our God is.

During the times of the prophet Joel, the figure whom Peter used as inspiration for his Pentecost sermon, the people looked in anticipation for the spirit's arrival in their own moments of chaos and uncertainty. In the days of Joel drought, wildfire and swarms of locusts had led to severe famine across the land. People were losing hope. Despair and death were everywhere and in the midst of that tragedy the prophet received a promise that suffering would not last forever. The rains would fall, the fields would again be green, and the livestock would be healthy. But the restoration of Israel and Judah went well beyond streams and pastures; it included the heart too. Because in those days when everything was set right again God's spirit would be poured out on every one young and old alike.

Peter said his words about 50 days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; we have discussed the mixed emotions of the disciples during this liminal time for most of the Easter season. With the appearances, the Ascension, and now Pentecost, I am sure the disciples now fully understood Jesus words of assurance at the Last Supper. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, as promised, it truly was time to live into the great commission.

All four canonical gospels contain a version of the Great Commission, each providing a slightly different emphasis on the final instructions Jesus left his followers before ascending to heaven:

- **In Matthew 28:18-20** we find the most often quoted account. Instructed by the angel at the tomb to follow the resurrected Jesus to Galilee, the disciples went there. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy

Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you..."

- **Mark 16:15:** Commands the disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation and to baptize..."
- **Luke 24:47-48:** Focuses on proclaiming "repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem".
- **John 20:19-23:** Emphasizes the sending of the disciples, where Jesus states: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you."
- Additionally, a parallel version of this commissioning is recorded in **Acts 1:8**, at the Ascension - which outlines the geographic scope of their mission: " You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In today's new testament lesson Peter harks back to Joel's apocalyptic imagery, and its promises that the last days will be the end of that which God opposes – oppression, injustice, cruelty, poverty and inequity – and are to be the first days of a new creation *on earth*, a just and peaceful human community in the world – the long awaited reign of Jesus on earth.

If we could truly live as God calls us to, learning to love and care for the earth, each other and ourselves with radical love and wisdom, as God loves us, then we would be here until our star the sun dies out or the earth itself could no longer sustain us even if properly tended to. The Sun is currently about halfway through its lifespan of 10 billion years. Scientists say that under perfect environmental stewardship the sun could sustain life on earth for another 1-1.5 billion years.

So let us celebrate the birth of our church, as well as a new way to look at Pentecost, as a renewal of our promises to be creative and joyful

human beings intent on sustaining a just and peaceful community of all living things on earth.

How are we feeling about the world?

Without doing an actual poll, it seems people have serious concerns about the state of our country and our world. These include political violence, the lack of civility and productivity in the public realm, the rapid increase of overall costs of living, worries about the impact of a world shaped by artificial intelligence, to name a few.

In our scriptures today Joel and Peter say that it is the work of the spirit that will make the difference, and that we need to *allow* it to be poured down upon us. We have to be willing to work for a different, better future.

Is it possible that we could live into a future where there's no need for weapons, where poverty is something of the past, where everyone has what is necessary to follow their dreams? At Pentecost it's perhaps time for us to listen attentively to what is happening in the world, to discern where the spirit is leading us to use our unique gifts and talents, so that the Holy Spirit can do what it has been doing among us for 2000 years. *We have to believe we can be called forth into newness of life and at St. John's.*

As we all know, one of the best ways to live beyond anything negative that has happened to us, is to reach out to others in need and that is where we will find joy once again. There is much to do here in our own county and in our own church. May we be inspired by some of the lyrics of a song by Bob Dylan in the early 80's when he produced 3 Christian folk music albums, and whose 84th birthday is today. The song is called "What can I do for you". **2**

What can I do for you?

Chorus

You have given everything to me

What can I do for You?

You have given me eyes to see

What can I do for You?

Chorus

You have laid down Your life for me

What can I do for You?

You have explained every mystery

What can I do for You?

Chorus

You have given all there is to give

What can I do for You?

You have given me life to live

How can I live for You?

Let us all promise to include these prayers in the coming months, as we discern our call as a church to our city and county. What can we do for you, Lord? How can we live for you? Pour your spirit down upon us Lord, show us the way. Amen

Resources

1. Bass, Diana Butler; [A Beautiful Year](#) – 52 Meditations on Faith, Wisdom and Perseverance; St. Martha's Essentials; 2025; p. 213-216
2. Boulton, Matthew Myers; [www. Saltproject.org](http://www.saltproject.org); May 19, 2026;

Theologians' Almanac; <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2026/5/19/theologians-almanac-for-week-of-may-24-2026>