

*All Things in Common*  
*Rev. Thomas Cary Kinder*  
*United Church of Strafford, Vermont*  
*May 26, 2024, Celebrating the Day of Pentecost*  
*Excerpts from Psalm 104; Excerpts from Acts 2:1-17, 40-47; and 4:32-35*

**Welcome** to the United Church of Strafford, Vermont, an Open and Affirming Congregation, on this Seventh Sunday of Easter. Welcome to you who are in the sanctuary and welcome to you online.

We acknowledge that we are on the ancestral and unceded land of the traditional caretakers, the Western Abenaki people. We share the belief that the land and all life are gifts of the Spirit, and our role is to honor and protect the creation, building a loving community that includes all.

Pentecost celebrates all the diverse manifestations of the Spirit among us—every expression of Christ-like love and oneness that we see uniting our diversity.

The first Pentecost was a day of dramatic power. The Bible says, “Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.”

The drama in the Pentecost story is full of wind and fire, but the talk is of visions and dreams, prophecies and signs. The Spirit changes our way of seeing reality, and the way we see one another, and what we feel called to do, and how we want to be together.

When the drama quieted down, what lasted was a new way of living dedicated to caring for one another and all creation, and being one in the Spirit—living what Archbishop Desmond Tutu called God’s dream. So one of the best ways to celebrate Pentecost is to linger after the service and share life, reaching out with love especially to those we know least well, because the Spirit bridges all differences so that we may all be one.

**Call to Worship** The Hebrew and Greek words for Spirit in the Bible have the same three meanings. Ruach and Pneuma both mean breath, wind and spirit. Ancient wisdom recognized that our life and the life of the Earth arise from Spirit and depend on its breath and wind to survive and thrive.

All that the Spirit requires of us is that we practice acknowledging, receiving and following it. So let us worship together in the faith that the Spirit is here in this place and wants to breathe into us and blow through us into the world.

### *All Things in Common*

Heather Cox Richardson wrote in her daily email on Monday about a speech Donald Trump gave in Minnesota last week. She wrote, “Trump echoed fascists when he told supporters, ‘No matter how hateful and corrupt the communists and criminals we are fighting against may be, you must never forget this is not a nation that belongs to them. This is a nation that totally belongs to you. It belongs to you. This is your home, this is your heritage.’”

That is the same fascist rhetoric that led to the murder of six million Jews. A current saying goes: “If you ever wondered what you would have done if you had been alive during the holocaust, you are doing it now.”

What is striking about white supremacist Christian nationalism is how totally opposed it is to the Pentecost story. I doubt he knows this, but when Donald Trump talks about communists he is talking about the earliest Christian church, he is talking about Peter, James and John, Martha and the Marys, the people who had seen how Jesus lived and heard his teachings from his own mouth. Out of that direct experience of his self-emptying love of all, his eradication of selfish ego and greed, they created a pure, nonviolent communist society, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

This social revolution was so central to the church’s identity that the Book of Acts describes it in both the second and fourth chapters. The odd and shocking thing is not that they lived that way, but that we don’t! How can the way of the Spirit of Christ be so crystal clear and yet we don’t even talk about those passages or confess how far we are from them? Jesus taught about our relationship to money and material things more than anything else in his ministry, and yet we have allowed money and material things to rule our society in exactly the way that Jesus warned us would be disastrous for our souls and for the world.

I cannot see the path from where we are now as a civilization to where the Spirit of the universe that spoke through Jesus would have us be, but in these last days, in this time that looks like the end of the church and nation and earth as we have known them, it is crucial that we open

our hearts and minds to the Spirit, it is crucial that we see visions and dream dreams, and interpret them with the help of the wisdom handed down to us of how the Spirit has worked throughout the ages.

For instance, we can see from the wisdom of the Pentecost story that if it really is the Spirit at work, it will not make us exclusive, it will give us a new ability to speak the languages of those around us.

The Spirit will not lead us to hate and oppress people based on differences, it will lead us to be open to and affirming of all. It will not isolate us within our sacred room but throw open our windows to be a spiritual community that serves the whole people.

The Spirit will lead us to the ideal of generous-hearted lovingkindness, acts of healing and providing for all those who have needs—like community nurses and nurseries and Deacons Funds—and it will lead us to make a bold critique of a society that fails to fulfill those ideals.

The Pentecost story shows that the Spirit will demand social equity, that those with much will be brought lower by sharing what they have, and those with little be lifted higher by receiving what others share. If there is a needy person, our work is not done until that need is met. If it is the Spirit working through us, this will make our generous hearts glad and full of gratitude and praise, and goodwill will spread around us.

The Pentecost story in the Book of Acts tells us all this, and the Psalm adds that the Spirit will renew the face of the ground. Things may change and die and return to their dust, but the Spirit will be sent forth again and life rise from that fertile dust. The Spirit will lead us to create a counter-culture, a model society on earth, to the extent that our limited and imperfect abilities allow.

The highest ideals of the United States of America have been remarkably close to the earliest church—not the communist economic system of sharing all possessions, but at our best, we have tried to meet the needs of those who did not have enough. At our best, we have promoted equality, freedom and civil and human rights. At our best, we have opened our hearts to take in refugees. At our best we have at least held out the ideals of offering health care to all and restraining those who would destroy the earth we all share. In our best moments, we have stopped those who acted out of hate, who refused to respect and welcome diversity.

But right now that entire imperfectly fulfilled American ideal is in danger, and we need to ask ourselves how the Spirit is urging us to respond as individuals and as a congregation.

Robert Kagan's new book, *Rebellion: How Antiliberalism Is Tearing America Apart—Again* explains what is happening. He writes,

“The institutions that America's founders created to safeguard liberal democratic government cannot survive when half the country does not believe in the core principles that undergird the American system of government. The presidential election of 2024, therefore, will not be the usual contest between Republicans and Democrats. It is a referendum on whether the liberal democracy born out of the Revolution should continue. Today, tens of millions of Americans have risen in rebellion against that system.”

How can we respond to this threat?

Our honest answer may be, “I don't know,” but the Spirit does know, and the Spirit lives in every one of us in this room, as it does in all its creation, so we need to move beyond “I don't know” and quiet our fear, our confusion, our ego-concerns, our desire to be right or to be respected, and instead be willing to have courage, to speak boldly, to be vulnerable and risk ridicule, to risk our self-interest, to give our life to the struggle in the next five months, trusting that the Spirit will work through our flaws if we are pursuing its truth with faith, hope and love.

The Spirit of the universe is not a creation of humanity. Humanity is a creation of that Spirit and totally dependent on it for survival. To work against the Spirit is deadly and cannot succeed for long. To work for the Spirit is to have the greatest power in the universe on our side.

I don't know how this church or any of us will solve the problems of our time, but I do know that if we practice spiritual disciplines and open our hearts and minds as wide as we can to the Spirit, and dedicate our time and resources and life to its cause, we will have the best chance of creating a new spiritual community and a strong liberal democracy and a golden civilization that can heal the earth and live sustainably for generations to come.

So let us quiet all the other voices in our minds, resting in the trust that the Spirit wants to speak and work through us in this time and place. Let us pray in silence...

**Haiku by Mel Goertz**  
Looking out at night  
incredible moonlight  
in the orchard and sky.