

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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

That's pretty intense. The Pentecost story is, well, is out there.

That inexplicable ripping wind...blazes bursting out of thin air. It's wild. Especially the last part of the story we read, right? With the visions and the dreams. All those signs and portents.

And some of those are a little scary, aren't they? Blood and fire and smoky mist. The sun turned to darkness, the moon to blood. The prophets say things could get pretty rough out there the end of it all. And we'll see the signs. And they won't be pretty. Makes me wonder... I mean, the sun's still bright, and the moon's still pale... But, don't you wonder sometimes about the dark signs we do see?

All around us. How things seem to get worse and worse. War on top of war. Renewed nuclear proliferation. Starvation. AIDS epidemics, flu epidemics, natural disasters. Drugs, violent crime, hate-crime, genocides. Are these the dark signs symbolized by a sun that doesn't shine? Are we near the prophesied end? Would you like me to tell you? I'm sorry, I can't. I have no idea. I do know, though, that there are signs out there. Signs of evil. Signs of cruelty and injustice. All as ugly, all as horrific as the moon dripping blood.

But that is what makes this Pentecost day so astounding, so truly miraculous. Because the story we heard today has a pretty clear message. A message as loud as a great rushing wind. This story says, something else is going on too. There are other signs too.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

The disciples were all together, waiting for a sign.

Remember last week? Jesus told them, Go to Jerusalem and wait there... I will send you a helper. I will send you an advocate. A protector.

So they did, they waited there in the city that killed Jesus. They waited for some sign from him. *And boy did they get it.*

The wind rushes in, the flames flare above them. And they begin talking in tongues. Speaking all different languages—languages they didn't even know 5 minutes before. (I gotta tell you, after a few decades of slaving over foreign-language textbooks, I'm a little jealous).

But what a sight, what sound the disciples made, coming out into the street. People begin crowding around them, to check it out—*what's going on?* And the folks there are from all different countries. Because there was big religious festival going on. People from all over the world had traveled to Jerusalem, the holy city, for it. And when they get up close to those spirit-filled apostles, what do they hear? Miraculously, each person heard their own language being spoken. Each heard the disciples preaching the word of God—in the language they could understand. It was an astounding moment:

All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

But I think there's a clear sign here. A clear message.

God is saying...

No matter who you are...

No matter where you are...in the world, or in your life...

No matter what's happening around you...

God will find a way to talk to you. God will find a way to reach you.. To let you know, God is with you.

There are dark signs out there.

Anastasia, Michael, Shelby, Kaitlen... After today, you will be considered adults in this congregation. But you're old enough by now... You've seen enough by now to know, there are unpleasant things happening in the world. There is greed. There is cruelty. There is anger. And violence. And all sorts of godly things. You've seen some of it. And I think those of us here with a bit more life experience will tell you... The older we get, the more darkness there seems to be.

But Pentecost means we can celebrate, right in the middle of it all. Pentecost means that the more you grow in faith; the more you keep your eyes and ears open to the Holy Spirit...

The more you will see Christ.

The more you look for signs of him, the more you'll see Christ's light shining in the darkness.

And you'll know he is with you. To comfort and guide you. To strengthen, and uplift you. Always.

No matter what happens...

*The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,
but everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

So please, don't let your life of faith fade just because you've completed your confirmation classes.

There is so much yet to learn. For all of us here. So much to be surprised by. To be thrilled and swept up by. I think we can tell by Pentecost—by the fire and the wind of it—that a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life, will not be boring. Not still or stagnant. It's all about motion and energy and power. Because, yes, the

Spirit comes to us. To comfort, counsel, and defend us. But that *isn't all*. The Holy Spirit comes to us to set us in motion.

Those apostles who first received the Spirit, they were empowered for a purpose. And so are we.

That purpose is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

They were given the gift of speaking in tongues. Each of us has been given gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We're given gifts, so we can use them to shine Christ's light in dark places. To get up, and get out there.

To give and to serve, and to witness Christ's love with our lives. Whoever we are. Wherever we are.

Whatever's going on around us.

For our confirmands, this is the time. The time for each of you to start seriously discerning what your unique gift are, and how to use them for Christ. And for all of us too, if we haven't started yet.

It's time. What are your unique gifts? How can they serve the God who loves you, who has given everything for you? In what miraculous way will you proclaim the living God?

Think you can't bring miracles to the world?

Well, alone, you can't. But look what's possible in the Holy Spirit.

The apostles—barely literate fishermen and goatherds...

In the Holy Spirit, they spoke all those many languages that day.

Peter—bumbling cowardly disciple—the one always being corrected by Jesus...

In the Holy Spirit, he became the most powerful preacher in all of history.

Converted 4,000 people in a single sermon (again, I'm a little jealous).

You—whoever you are—what sign are you to others? How will you witness God's love?

In a few moments—Shelby, Anastasia, Michael, and Kaitlen—in a few moments, you will be affirming your baptism. Now, I don't know how long ago you were baptized. But on that day, someone stood with you, and handed your sponsor a lit candle, and said to you:

Let your light so shine before others,

that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven.

Today, I say it to you again, and to all of us here:

Let your light so shine before others,

that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven.

Amen.