

Sermon – Welcome to the Neighborhood  
Scripture Reading – Acts 2:1-8, 12-18  
Founders’ Day and Pentecost, May 19, 2024  
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Fifty days following Easter morning at a gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost, bystanders were amazed to hear a multitude of languages being spoken by Galileans, who were notorious for being monolingual. The miracle of God’s spirit coming on Pentecost is the miracle of people understanding the message of God coming into the neighborhood in their own dialect and then moving beyond our individual languages to embrace one and all. Listen now to what the Spirit is saying in Acts 2.

*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. (pause)*

*Members of the congregation speak vs. 17-18 in the languages.*

- *Javier Valesquez (Spanish)*
- *Sophia Choi (Korean)*
- *Ben Arnold (Bahasa Indonesia)*
- *Millie McNutt (Hindi)*

*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?” <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” <sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:*

*<sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

*<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy. Amen.*

The title of the sermon: Welcome to the Neighborhood

Today's text is from The Message Bible, John 1:14a: *The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.*

Let us pray: Holy and loving God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

When the Rev. Dr. Eugene Peterson, American Presbyterian minister, scholar, theologian, author, and poet wrote The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language, his objective was to connect God's story anew to ordinary people. Peterson worked on *The Message* throughout the 1990s, translating the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic texts and paraphrasing them into contemporary American English slang and idiomatic language. The Message, published in 2002, received the Gold Medallion Book Award, and sold over 20 million copies.

The rock star, social advocate, and philanthropist, Bono bought one of those copies which changed his life. Bono's hit song 40, based on Psalm 40, was inspired by The Message. Bono and Eugene had the privilege of spent time together at the Peterson's Montana home before Eugene died in 2018.

As I was preparing for today's sermon, Peterson's translation of John 1:14 came to my mind. *The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.*

On this Pentecost and Founders' Sunday, we celebrate the one-of-a-kind glory of God. We honor our past and we imagine our future with joy. We give thanks for the outpouring of God's Spirit, *generous inside and out, true from start to finish*, upon each generation, and we celebrate the God who became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.

This week as I accompanied members on site visits in preparation for our Fifth Annual Steadfast Neighbor Service Week, I felt a deep gratitude for all the ways Westminster has moved into the neighborhood. We know, respect, and have a deep and abiding affection for our neighbors. Working side by side during service week and providing matching grants, we invest in our neighbor's homes. Daily stocking the Little Pantry at Graham Elementary School, we partner with our neighbors in assisting those in need. Investing in our building and grounds through the Steadfast Neighbor Site and Landscape Plan, we provide an anchor and light for the neighborhood.

Last year we celebrated the completion of the Steadfast Neighbor Habitat House welcoming Paris and James Capler and their children into the neighborhood. Today we join in a "Welcome to the neighborhood!" party on behalf of Javier and Eva Velasquez Alonzo and their children and enjoy some Nicaraguan dishes and traditions. In my mind's eye is a picture of our new neighbor Javier Velasquez working side by side with our new neighbor and staff member James Capler laying mulch on our grounds this past April and successfully communicating, in spite of the language barrier, through an app on their cell phones.

The spirit that blew into the Jewish Pentecost festival that first century transcended the limitations of language, and their words were understood by each in their native tongues. The

miracle of God's spirit coming on Pentecost is the miracle of people widening their world, moving beyond their own dialect or point of view, understanding one another, and listening to one another with respect and intention.

God's spirit, *generous inside and out* and *true from start to finish*, went on to form the first Christian community which welcomed and honored the gifts of men and women, both young and old from different cultures and races, sharing leadership and possessions for the good of all. Long standing biases and prejudices were abandoned, bringing people together in the Spirit of Christ.

Sadly, yet inevitably, over time these divisions would return within Christ's church providing the need for God's Spirit *true from start to finish*, to advocate for change as we are a community of believers reformed and always reforming.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we give thanks to those who were a part of Westminster's beginning. What a joy it is to honor our abolitionist founders as we continue to advocate for justice and equity in our neighborhood.

Thanks be to the Triune God, from whom we come, to whom we return and in whom we live, move, and have our being, Thanks be to the God *Generous inside and out, true from start to finish*. who hears our prayers. Amen.