

The Zion Flame May 2024

Zion Lutheran Church

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Pastor Becky Langholz

Dear People of God,

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). On Sunday, May 19th, the church marks the festival day of Pentecost. Sometimes known as the “birthday of the church,” Pentecost was originally a Jewish festival that took place 50 days after Passover (“pentecost” means fifty). According to the story that starts in Luke’s Gospel and continues in the book of Acts, after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the disciples stay together in Jerusalem “continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:53). Jesus had told them to wait for the Spirit to arrive and empower them to share the Gospel far and wide. The Spirit does indeed arrive with drama and power in a mighty wind and tongues of fire! Miraculously, the disciples are able to speak and share the story and love of Jesus Christ in a way that a diverse group Jewish pilgrims (they were in Jerusalem to observe the Jewish Pentecost) could understand. The life-giving power of Jesus begins its journey beyond the region where he and his first disciples walked.

Here we are as the church 2000 years later, and our world still needs to hear about this loving and life-giving power in diverse ways. The challenge of spreading the Gospel is unique in every time and place. I notice that our slice of the world remains hungry for Jesus’ word of forgiveness and grace. Life is face-paced, and comparison is at an all-time high. We have easy access to information about everything, and this can leave us feeling like there is always more and that we are never enough. Jesus can be an antidote to this exhausting sense of insatiable “to-dos.” He has already taken care of all the most important work. Because of him, we are reconciled to God forever! Our past mistakes are forgotten, and perfectionism is revealed for the idol it is. We are free to let go of comparison and rest in grace and gratitude.

Our unlimited access to information also means we witness human suffering in a way that we never could before. The horrors of war, poverty and natural disasters are overwhelming. But, as people of faith, we have someone to go to with our laments, and theological frameworks can help us understand the challenges of earthly life. We can take our concerns to God in prayer and trust that God will act on behalf of all the creation God so loves. We also trust that Jesus has gone through the worst of human suffering before us; he stands with us and brings his peace that passes understanding to all those in need. In addition, Christian churches have always worked to organize collective efforts to alleviate human suffering, and we can all be a part of this on-going work.

Finally, our corner of the country is especially hungry for Christ-centered community and relationships. Humans are not meant to go through life alone. The Pentecost event inspires the growing number of disciples to live in community together:

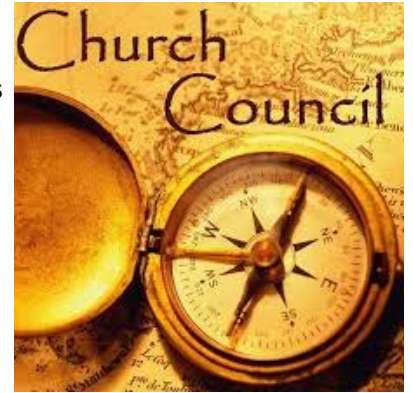
All who believed were together in one place and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts; praising God and having the goodwill of all the people (Acts 2:44-47a).

Communities based in the compassion, grace and inclusivity of Jesus, like Zion, are a lifeline for so many, as we could all testify to. We all know folks who are isolated and lonely, who feel as though they carry the weight of their lives all on their own. How might we reach out and invite these folks in? How do we need to change to be more welcoming and meet their needs?

With the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we celebrate that God has equipped the church for mission! People still need to hear the life-changing Good News of Jesus Christ in ways that resonate. May the Spirit grant us wisdom and courage to be able to spread the Gospel in our time and place.

Your partner in mission,
Pr. Langholz

Zion's Church Council will meet on Thursday, May 9th. Reports and agenda items for the meeting are due on May 1st. Direct questions or congregational needs to President Harry Shearer.



Did you know you can give to our church online?

You can even set up automatic withdrawals or give to specific special funds. Check out our church website:

www.zionlutheranwhatcom.org and the "Give" tab for more information.

Pr. Becky will be out of the office on Thursday, May 16th. She and husband Pr. Joel are making a quick trip to California for a friend's wedding. She'll be back for church on May 19th. If there is a pastoral care emergency while she is away, please contact Pr. Jana Schofield.

Pr. Becky will be out of the office on Monday, May 27th in observance of Memorial Day. She can be reached on her cell phone: (360) 393-6630.

Financial info (through March 2024)

General Fund: \$21,621.91
 Special Funds: \$15,432.73
 Thrivent Reserve Fund: \$56,250.92
 Receipts YTD 2024: \$28,125.05
 Expenses YTD 2024: \$27,790.83
 Net 2024: \$344.22



We will hold our Semi-Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday, June 9th, immediately after worship. Though we have no major church business, this will be an opportunity to be updated on our mission and ministry together this year. Stay tuned for more details.



New Church Windows: Fundraising has begun to help us complete window replacement on the church building. The southside windows were replaced last year, and now we are working on the northside. We are hoping to raise \$7,000. Checks can be placed in the offering plate with "church windows" in the memo line. Thank you for your generous support!

Pr. Becky is in the church office Mondays and Thursdays from 9-12pm. She also works from home and can be reached on her cell phone: (360) 393-6630 or via email at pastor@zionlutheranwhatcom.org.

Outreach and Missions

Zion Lutheran Church Mission Statement

Since 1903 The beloved, forgiven people of God. **Called** to spread the Good News so as to build up the body of Christ. **Gifted** to share the healing love of Jesus Christ with our hurting world. **Empowered** by the Spirit to be a caring country congregation for ministry to one another and the larger community.

Zion's Relational Covenant

In our life together, we will...

Give thanks to God for the gift of our church and each other. Honor and respect our diverse opinions, perspectives and work-styles. Take responsibility for our own feelings and deal with issues directly. Ask clarifying questions and avoid making assumptions. Speak up honestly in the proper time and place. Make decisions in a transparent manner. Support decisions made by the group. Pray for unity in our congregation.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

We'll gather to clean the church on Saturday, May 4th at 9:00 a.m. Cleaning and maintaining our church are volunteer efforts, and many hands make light work. Come out for an hour of vacuuming, dusting and generally sprucing up our beloved church building.

Zion's on-going collections:

Non-perishable food items

Household items and toiletries

We partner with local non-profits to get these items to community members in need. Thank you for your generous contributions! Zion will also collect your aluminum cans for recycling. Proceeds have funded many church improvements over the years. Drop off cans in the bin by the basement ramp door. Speak to Brenda Bannerman for more details.



Did you know? It can take up to 100+ years for aluminum cans to disintegrate.
Please recycle them!



Worship

Pentecost Sunday is May 19th. We celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit and how it energizes us for ministry. Wear red to worship that day (the church color of the Holy Spirit) and bring a red geranium to donate to the church gardens. We will also have a potluck "Heritage Lunch" after worship. Bring a dish or dessert to share that represents your cultural or ethnic heritage or anything that feels like "home."

Connect with Zion online: Resources for worship and reflection are available on our church [YouTube channel](#).



We celebrated a wonderful Easter Sunday together this year!



Opportunities for Education

Monday Bible Study meets May 6th, 13th and 20th this month. We meet from 12-1:30pm. We are studying the words and teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. On Monday, May 20th, we will have a special session with Pr. Mike Anderson, author of Blessed Contradictions.

The Men's Breakfast and Bible Study will gather on **Saturday May 11th, starting at 8:30am**. Come together for good food, fellowship and Bible Study.





From the Spirit

May 2024

I have a confession to make, I am a terrible pool player. I am so bad that the last time I played, the person I was playing with stopped the game and said, “You are the worst pool player I have ever played with.” (I had told him I was horrible but he didn’t believe me.) I’m using this story as a very thin tangent to talk about gifts and the Spirit ... bear with me.

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, we read, *“Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

As many of you know, Paul was writing to a congregation in Corinth after receiving some correspondence from them and hearing their concerns. Throughout this letter Paul emphatically makes it clear that no one is spiritually better than others – no one has better faith, no one has better gifts, no one should eat better than another at the Eucharist table. Paul is adamant in this. (He is talking about this because of some struggles in the Corinth church. You are welcome to read the entire letter of 1 Corinthians to get more context.)

Paul emphasizes that because we all receive faith through the Holy Spirit, no one is spiritually superior. Paul further emphasizes that because we all receive a variety of gifts given by the Holy Spirit, no one has a worthier gift than another. And, to emphasize this point, Paul writes that the Spirit does not give only one kind of gift to all. Because the church and the world need diverse gifts, the Spirit gives different gifts to different people. In other words, Paul is simply saying this: same Spirit – lots of gifts. You hear this? In a society where we emphasize certain gifts and skills and abilities above others (and often feel like we have fallen short), we hear in 1 Corinthians that the Holy Spirit gives a variety of gifts to a variety of people. Specifically, YOU have been given a variety of gifts, and this is good.

Further, these Holy Spirit gifts – they are not meant to benefit the individual person but are to benefit the entire community and world. Paul emphasizes that these gifts are not to be used in selfish ways or in self-seeking ways. Paul clearly states that if a gift cannot be shared, and shared for the good of others, it is not from the Spirit. Ultimately, the purpose of these different gifts of the Spirit is to share in God’s love and grace and mercy with all through Jesus Christ our Savior.

As Americans, we have often been told (and maybe believe) that as individuals we are responsible for ourselves. We are not to rely on others – we are to be strong and self-sufficient. We are taught that to have freedom is to be autonomous. But let’s be clear. This is far from what we read in 1 Corinthians. Paul says each person receives gifts for the common good. Paul says that each person receives the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. It is in community where the gifts from the Holy Spirit shine. It is in community where the Holy Spirit is made manifest.

You see, it is God’s intention that we are to be with one another – for one another – as the community of faith, as the body of Christ, as the Church on earth. The Holy Spirit has given a variety of gifts to a variety of congregations and individuals. And together we are called to bring these gifts together to help bear one another’s burdens, to love and pray together, to bring justice and new life, to be made manifest in the Holy Spirit for the common good. Honestly, it doesn’t matter that I am a terrible pool player. But it does matter how I both share the gifts that God has given me and how I reach out to others in mutual support when I am in need.

I would love to hear stories from you about your gifts being made manifest in the Holy Spirit – individually and in your congregation. How are each person’s gifts being shared in your own particular congregation? How is your congregation sharing with another congregation? What gifts were missing from your particular place of worship that you have found outside of your space? What gifts have you been able to share with others?

May we live into what we often say in worship, “The gifts of God, for the people of God.” Amen.

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
bishop@lutheransnw.org

**From the Veep****May 2024**

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” John 11: 25-26

On March 19, 2024 there was a terrible traffic accident in the Fairwood area south of Renton. It claimed the lives of four people, including three children. Two additional children were hospitalized, as was the driver who caused the accident. In the blink of an eye three families lost precious loved ones. This terrible tragedy impacted the small school community that I lead – as all those who died were part of our HOME Program family.

Any sudden, violent death is hard to comprehend, but when children are added to the mix it is even more difficult. As poet Emily Dickinson says, the loss is “So huge, so hopeless to conceive.” As an educator, one of my gifts is the ability to see my students not just for who they are now, but also to simultaneously envision who they might become. My job is to help them live into that future. As a community, then, we mourn not only the loss of the children they were, but also the adults they might have been and the lives they might have lived.

In the first few days after the accident, our art teacher provided an amazing project for her classes. The students took terracotta flowerpots and broke them apart. The teacher shared how we have experienced loss and can feel broken. Students were encouraged to paint the outside how they feel they appear to the world and the inside how they feel on the inside. Once the paint was dry, they reassembled their pots and planted seeds to grow a plant. Those pots will be tangible reminders that although the rebuilt pots are not the same as they were before they were broken, they can still be beautiful and fulfill their purpose of providing a place for new life to grow.

As we have processed this tremendous loss, we have been in awe of the families who were at the center of this. Their faith, their love, their forgiveness have been inspirational. Their faith traditions are not exactly mine, but they do believe that death is not the end and that Jesus is Lord. For me, I take comfort that the God I worship knows what it is to suffer and knows what it is to lose a beloved son. God doesn't prevent these tragedies, nor does God make the pain go away, but God walks with us in that pain. One of the parents said at one of the funerals that God doesn't give us more than we can handle, but for me the truth is there is quite a lot that I cannot handle on my own, but everything is possible for God. When my effort falls short, I know God can lift me up.

All of this loss occurred just before Holy Week this year and I must say that the walk from the cross to the empty tomb and the promise of the resurrection was particularly poignant. We are Easter people and I rejoice that it is so.

Here's what the Synod Council and/or I have been up to in April:

Executive Committee: We met on April 10. Among other business, we finalized the budget to present to the Synod Assembly, approved a new policy for synod coaches, and authorized the Gloria Dei Endowment team to provide a sabbatical grant.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Assessment: Our DEIB Assessment team held our first training on March 23 and the leadership team met to debrief and plan next steps on April 18.

Preparing for Synod Assembly on May 18 – at Grace Lutheran Church in Des Moines

Kay Edgerton

Vice President of the NW Washington Synod

veep@lutheransnw.org

Upcoming in May

The Evangelism Committee will meet on May 13th at 2pm at Zion. Speak to Rosemary Meyers for more details.

“Just for Fun” Friendship Lunch Group: All are welcome to meet for lunch at a local restaurant on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 12pm (May 28th this month). Look for a sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary. Contact Sue Flaherty if you have questions. This will be the last lunch until we start again in September.



Save the Date: Zion’s Annual Strawberry Social event will take place on Sunday, June 23rd at 4pm.



Easter Sunday
daffodils at Zion



To Pastor Becky and the Zion congregation:
Thank you all for sharing worship, a lovely coffee hour visit, and the gift of the beautiful rhododendron on Sunday, April 21st. We will enjoy planting it in the yard at our home on Orcas Island. We are looking forward to visiting you in the future for worship at Zion.

Robin and Bob Ogmundson