

## SERMON THE REV. SUSAN JOHNSON, ELCIC NATIONAL BISHOP



*The ELCIC provides a summer sermon series written by the Bishops and their Assistants across the ELCIC. Sermons are for congregations to use when pastors are on holidays. This morning we will hear from*

*National Bishop Susan Johnson.*

June 5, 2022 – Pentecost - *John 14:8-17 (25-27)*

### **National Bishop Susan Johnson**

Grace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Happy Birthday, dear church. And greetings to you from your siblings in Christ from coast to coast to coast that make up this part of the family of God that we know as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Today, Pentecost, often feels like an occasion or an anniversary. It's like one day we repeat every year and the events are the same. In fact, it's really like a slice in the history of God's actions in the world. God's actions in the world have a past, a present and a future. This is one part of God's past: God's actions in humanity and in the world.

The actual day of Pentecost is an amazing story, or an experience. And like all amazing stories, we love to tell it again and again.

One of the reasons is because of all the names. Phrygia? Pamphylia? Mesopotamia? They sound so exotic and romantic. But really, they represent all of the known world to the writers of Acts at that time. The appearance of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire on top of the heads of the disciples, now that is amazing. That has never happened to me and I have never seen that happen to anyone else.

But that the disciples could start speaking and be understood by all of those people from a variety of different language families, that is amazing. And people were so amazed that many came to faith that day. In fact, later on in the Acts lesson, after the part that we read today, it says that 3,000 people were baptized that day. Three thousand!

But let's go back for a moment here. It's like in a television series when you come to a new episode where it says, 'previously on an earlier episode', let's recount what has happened just before this. Remember, this is only 50 days after Jesus' resurrection. And what have the disciples been doing in those days? Well, they have occasionally met with Jesus during his post-resurrection appearances. But most of the time they have been huddled in locked rooms, afraid, fearful, terrified that the Romans would come get them and crucify them like they had crucified Jesus.

I want to underline that, because I think it says something about how we are feeling and how we are doing when we think about this Pentecost – because of where we've been. Like it or not, we have spent a lot of time locked up during this pandemic. We have been isolated, we have been fearful, we have been afraid... especially at the beginning when we didn't understand the virus or how it was transmitted, how severe it was going to be, and as we saw the death counts rise.

But there are other things that kept up fearful. Things like the war in Ukraine right now. The images that we see and the stories that we see every day create anxiety within us. We are so fearful of what is happening in our world. Catastrophic weather events. Right now, I am in the middle of an unprecedented flooding level in Winnipeg. But it's not just here, it's all across our country. In the last year we have seen heat domes, wildfires, extreme flooding, extreme heat, extreme cold, extreme drought, and in places where it should be cold, it hasn't been cold enough – like in the arctic, where the permafrost is melting. It points out the urgency of the climate crisis. And that in and of itself provokes anxiety and fear in a lot of people, and I understand that.

The cost of living is going up and people are afraid that they will not be able to meet their mortgage payments or pay for gas in their car. And on top of that the recent announcement of the leaked majority report of Roe vs. Wade in the United States has many people up in arms or full of anxiety of what might happen in the future.

You may share all of these things, or you may only share some of these things. But we have been living in a time of fear and anxiety, just like the disciples were.

And this Pentecost day, we remember that the Holy Spirit is calling us out, like the Holy Spirit called the disciples out. Out of locked doors, out of fear,

into the world with a wonderful, grace-filled, loving and hopeful Gospel to proclaim in words and deeds.

The Holy Spirit has continued throughout history to come and call God's people. But this is our time and our circumstances. We have many challenges to face. We know that our church is declining in membership, and even in number of congregations. We have old habits of caring for buildings and only ourselves that we need to shake off.

The Gospel lesson for today reminds us that the one who believes in Jesus will also do the works that Jesus did; Jesus was not hung up on members and buildings. Jesus was about getting out to where people were in need, and proclaiming and living out the message of love. That's what we are being called to do.

It's a little intimidating, it's scary, we have a vision, but we have no road map. But we are also not left helpless. The Holy Spirit continues to work in the world, within us and between us. Jesus continues to walk with us as we try to live out each day as faithful disciples. And we have each other – people in our congregations, in our synods, in the national church, with our full communion partners and indeed with the faithful around the world. And we have the witness and the prayers of those who have gone before us and are now at rest.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus leaves this message for his disciples and for us:

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.”

Let's breathe in and breathe out God's peace.

Let's be there to support each other when the fear and anxiety starts creeping in. And let us continue to pray that God would lead us and that the Holy Spirit would inspire us.

We can do this, dear church.

Happy Birthday.