

## **Kingdom on the Move**

Menno Mennonite Church

May 24, 2026

**Purpose:** To unpack the work of the Kingdom that is carried by the Spirit.

**Message:** The gift of the Spirit brings what we need to build the Kingdom of God to the forefront

**Scripture:** Exodus 19: 16-19, Acts 1:3-5; 8, Acts 2: 1-12, Luke 24:50 – 53, Acts 2: 13 Acts 8:1b, Matthew 13:31-32, 1 Peter 2:4-5 (As presented by the Women's Bible study). I may amplify a verse or two but the is about it.

**Synopsis:** The coming of the Spirit is this big and awesome event. It can fill us with wonder. And, many times, questions. Our expectations about what this looks like, how it can work and what it then means for us can lend a discordant note to our anticipation of the Spirit. How are we to understand and work with the Spirit in our lives?

Yet notice that comes of the Spirit's inspiration: the church is launched, people are emboldened to take on the stuff of following Christ. Gone, largely, are the notions of political confrontation as is often held up with the disciples and now we are given the work of doing the Kingdom in the here and now. That same Spirit moves the Kingdom in and around us even today,

**[Scriptures to be read by women's bible study presentation]**

This is a day of celebration. It may not feel it. Our world is heavy many ways. As the Chinese curse would have it, these are interesting times that we have been given to live through. But it is a celebration day all the same; it is the day of Pentecost—the coming of the Spirit and the celebration that we have not been left alone. I would argue it is perhaps among the most important days for the church. It is here when the Jesus movement transitions from the following of the few into the movement that has made and will make its way even to the ends of the Earth. It is the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.

In my experience though, Pentecost is a holiday somewhat in the same way as Groundhog day is a holiday. The simile is apt, spare that Groundhog day gets a far more notice if only to know whether the rodent has wisdom to impart as to the coming of spring. In the church year, this is the completion of the circuit that we have every year. From Advent to Christmas, celebrating Christ's birth, then the preparations of Lent and the darkness of Holy Week to be replaced by the bright whiteness of the Easter. Now seven weeks later, we mark Pentecost to wrap up the whole thing for another year so we can move on into the sexily branded "Ordinary Time". We celebrate this more as the culmination of the really special stuff than anything that is, of itself, of particular significance.

Which is why we got so excited when we heard from the Women's Bible Study about what they had been working with in the last months. They have been sitting with the movement of the Spirit and finding inspiration and meaning within it. When we were floated the notion of doing something different for Pentecost growing out of this, Emily and I saw an opportunity that was simply too good to pass up. We haven't made a massive deal about it; perhaps we missed an opportunity for a slick branding for a sermons series like *Seeing the Spirit* to lean into the alliteration, but we have been working toward this day by speaking about the ways that the Spirit lives and breathes today. Along the way if you have been listening, you have heard us mention, more than once that Spiritual thought is not the Anabaptist super power. We say that with good reasons as we have tried to explain. But what I want to do today is actually flip that assertion on its head. I think we claim this day as much as anyone else if not more so precisely because this was when we go from being the select disciples to doing church and being body. That is something that we know and love, even if we do not all that frequently know what to do with it let alone how to explain it. We are not Pentecostals in the way the word is commonly

used. Yet we can not dispute it: the work of the church is the work of being the Kingdom right here and right now. When that is our work, we move within the realm of the Spirit, and we cannot live the kingdom without the enabling work of the Spirit.

That is a statement that needs some support. What I appreciate about the readings that were pulled together for us is that it gives us what amounts to a biography of the Spirit in general and Pentecost in particular. Whether you readily know the term or not we all live with operating systems in our world. The operating system is the base level software that makes the stuff of our lives just work forming the foundational mechanisms of how software makes the hardware do what we want. At least most of the time. There are the ones that we know: Windows is where we most likely have heard the term. But our phone software also sets the terms for how our pocket gismos behave or not. Even our cars are more a software system than any particular piece of metal and gears any more.

What does that have to do with Pentecost? I would say it is the time when God enables the operating system of covenant and the church. Pentecost, like many of the Christian holidays, corresponds with a historically Jewish holy day. In the context of the ancient near east was one of the few times of the year that observant Jews were obliged to appear in Jerusalem for a celebration of the harvest and a commemoration of the giving of the law to Moses on Sinai<sup>1</sup> (the other holidays with this requirement being the Festival of Booths and Passover). In the context it was first and foremost the moment where the whole of the congregation in Jerusalem, swelled by the numbers, were occupied with remembering what made them who they are: their operating system, if you will, in the giving of the law.

It is in this context that the disciples are instructed to wait for the coming of what was to be next: the long promised Spirit. The Spirit is the operating logic of God with us for the apostles, and it was to be what would change them from those who followed the singular Christ to those who witness to and act within the name of that Christ. The Spirit becomes the enabling mechanism for the church to be the church, and to take up the work of building the Kingdom of God in the ways and means that Jesus promised. As remarkable and meaningful as the signs and symbols of the gifting of the Spirit are in the context of Acts, the result of these gifts were even more significant. From this day forward the church is enabled to be the body of Christ, activated to unite and move into doing the work of being brought together, often despite very real

challenges to become the kingdom of God not in the eventual by and by, but in the immediacy of being active and present right here and now. This is the work of the Spirit: where ever the kingdom is not just declared but lived, then the Spirit is alive and well. This the mission to which Jesus points us is to do the work of the kingdom already arrived even as we await it full realization in the work of heaven.

I think this is an important point because it is part of who and what we are that makes us so unique. The daring thing about the Anabaptists is this inclination to read the work of the church and life of the Kingdom not as something to which we are auditioning now in order to achieve reward later. The basic insistence that the Kingdom of God was not only real but present with real world impacts in the here and now was a hallmark of those who come before. Last week Emily named some of those who take this operation of the Kingdom a bit too far. What makes the notion of being a people of God drawn together in hope and promise so radical is that the church has spent a fair amount of time distancing themselves from that very proposition. Delaying the Kingdom as an eventual side effect of following the right prescription of sacraments and behaviors through our life so we can get to the next one is a far more practical way to institute and operate a global church. Hierarchy makes sense because it is how we run the world. But time and again the thinking is clear: the work of the church is the work of discerning the Spirit together, trusting its guidance and being called into the work of the Spirit not because we have the easy answers or it is a particularly successful way to run an organization (I often have wondered myself whether there is room for the Spirit within Robert's Rules of order), but because that is what God's Kingdom can and should be. In that Anabaptist thought is always seeking this way of the kingdom, and that is a working of the Spirit. Because it has to be.

The gospel of Pentecost for me today is that regardless of how we understand it, how we perceive it, how we feel it, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus is at work in the present just as it has in the past. The good news of the coming of the spirit is that God, who came and dwelt among us in human form, who taught us the way of love, the way of the cross, transcends the physical barriers of time and space to connect us with one another and with the cloud of witnesses that have come before. Immanuel, God with us, is a reality now and always because we are held together in the spirit of the one who made us, who loves us, and who calls us to be one in following in the way of the leading Lord. Pentecost is the day it is because it reminds us

of our calling and invites us to reboot our orientation toward what God is doing right here and now to bring the Kingdom ever closer into view. That is the work of the Spirit that we celebrate in Pentecost, and the work that we must rely on all the time.

None of this is to say we are particularly good at this either. We know that the Kingdom now can feel frightfully far away. We know that the working of the Spirit can be abused and manipulated to the ends of those who crave power more than God's Kingdom. But this too is a work of the Spirit. We are reminded that this work of doing kingdom on the move is not a work that relies solely on us. We easily can articulate the wrongness of the world, even if the individual items of our lists might be different here and there. We are called to do what we can to work at that list, but we are not left alone; the Spirit intercedes for us where our mere words and deeds fail to even touch the matter at hand. Of course we act out of the Spirit for the growth of the Kingdom. It is what we are called to do. But we must always remember that this is not ultimately or solely our work alone to do.

The kingdom is come because the comforter is here. May we each feel the flaming of the Spirit, be moved by its call and inspired to new things as the kingdom continues to move as God wills it. Amen.