

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Pentecost Sunday – May 15, 2016**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Acts 2:1-21**

**Ritual: Bringing Fire**

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, first given by John's Jesus, descends in tongues of flames on the Christian community gathered in Jerusalem. They are empowered to tell the story of Jesus – the new, sacrificial paschal lamb – in every language of the known world.

*[Light Candles]*

**The imagery of fire represents the outpouring of the presence of sacred being and of creative power. Fire transforms, destroys, purifies, enlightens, inspires, and protects.** But post-modern, “first world” people have no experience or appreciation for that kind of power. In order to live with and through the Pentecost fires – whether of ancient commitment and sacrifice, or of the certainty of a transformational message – would-be prophets must remember that fire does not care what feeds it.

**Fire can be fed by injustice as well as justice-compassion. Perhaps that is why the ancient Priests were careful to remind the people to leave something for the poor and for the alien seeking hospitality in a hostile world.**

<http://gaiarising.org/2011/06/liturgy-for-a-celebration-of-pentecost/>

**For Reflection**

**“The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'.**

**Having been borne across the world, we are translated men [sic].**

**It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation;**

**I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained.”**

— Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, India (b.1947)

**“All religions are based on obsolete terminology.”**

— Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, Russian-American novelist (1899-1977)

**(Lost & Found) In Translation**

I came to this text and wrestled with it – and came up with – nothing new to say. Actually I came up with NOTHING to say. So this morning at 7 a.m. I turned to Patheos.

Patheos is a non-denominational, non-partisan online media company providing information and commentary from various religious and nonreligious perspectives.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patheos>

And this is what they had to say.

For Christians, Pentecost is a holiday on which we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the early followers of Jesus. Before the events of the first Pentecost, which came a few weeks after Jesus' death and resurrection, there were followers of Jesus, but no movement that could be meaningfully called "the church." Thus, from an historical point of view, Pentecost is the day on which the church was started. This is also true from a spiritual perspective, since the Spirit brings the church into existence and enlivens it. Thus Pentecost is the church's birthday.

The English word "Pentecost" is a transliteration of the Greek word *pentekostos*, which means "fifty." It comes from the ancient Christian expression *pentekoste hemera*, which means "fiftieth day."

But Christians did not invent the phrase "fiftieth day." Rather, they borrowed it from Greek-speaking Jews who used the phrase to refer to a Jewish holiday. This holiday was known as the Festival of Weeks, or, more simply, Weeks (*Shavuot* in Hebrew). This name comes from an expression in Leviticus 23:16, which instructs people to count seven weeks or "fifty days" from the end of Passover to the beginning of the next holiday (*pentekonta hemeras* is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture).

*Shavuot* was the second great feast in Israel's yearly cycle of holy days. It was originally a harvest festival (Exod 23:16), but, in time, turned into a day to commemorate the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/what-is-pentecost-why-does-it-matter/>

So basically, Pentecost is an English word translated from Ancient Greek translated from Ancient Hebrew.

Pentecost is the fiftieth day after Passover – it is a harvest festival which became a celebration of the origins of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Hebrew scriptures) – then coopted by the Jesus Movement when they had a profound spiritual experience involving a mighty wind and multiple languages being spoken – and they sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had told them would come and be with them and inspire them to *do good work and stay in touch* – with G-d and one another.

Pentecost. Today. Here we are. Now what do we do? How about two things?

First, I have to confess – and this may put my job on the line but – I am not Pentecostal. I have had a few dreams that could be categorized as “spiritual” or “cosmic” – but for the most part – I have never had the experience of being “overcome” by the Spirit, moved to speak in tongues, raise my hands and do extemporaneous liturgical dance. (You may want to thank G-d for that...)

I was told before my ordination that when everyone lays hands on me to do the actual ordination – I will feel the power of the Holy Spirit and it will be awesome. What I actually felt – was the weight of several hundred people pressing down on my head and shoulders – and I couldn’t wait for the prayer to be over so I could stand up and shake it off.

This may account for wanting my installation prayer to be done in a bouncy house.

But I also know – not in my rational mind but in my intuitive self – that there is a spirit of sorts that resides in each and all of us. Mine is really low key and utilitarian – humorous and comforting – sustaining and long-suffering. There is no way to really translate that experience externally – but it’s something that shows up when I least expect it – and when I am in most need – at bedsides and adoption agencies – in the car and at 3:30 a.m. in bed. So I believe I have a spiritual life – it’s just not very organized or disciplined.

As you can see – it is something that finds me – although it gets lost in translation if I try to explain it.

Okay – now for the second thing: You.

What is YOUR experience of Pentecost? Are you Pentecostal?

Do you have regular or intermittent spiritual experiences? What are they like?

How do you find G-d? How does G-d find you?

How would you celebrate Pentecost if you could design your own festival?

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Thank you for you. Cohen out.

## **Acts 2:1-21**

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 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. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

**5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."**

14 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. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

**17 '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. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.**

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

# Liturgy For A Celebration of Pentecost

BY SEARAVEN, ON JUNE 7TH, 2011

**Servetus Society**

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Frederick, Maryland**

**Sunday, June 12, 2011**

The Servetus Society at UUCF is a chapter of **Unitarian Universalist Christians**. Michael Servetus (1509 or 1511-October 27, 1553), was a Spaniard martyred in the Reformation for his criticism of the doctrine of the trinity and his opposition to infant baptism; he has often been considered an early unitarian. Widespread aversion to his death signaled the birth in Europe of religious tolerance, a principle now more important to modern Unitarian Universalists than antitrinitarianism.

## WELCOME

*Liturgist:*

Pentecost is perhaps the first festival appropriated from an ancient tradition to serve the purposes of the new Christian Way. We celebrate “the Church’s birthday,” and proclaim “Christ is our Passover,” but what does that really mean?

Pentecost is the Jewish Festival of Weeks, which takes place fifty days after Passover – and Passover, as we know, is the commemoration of an archetypal deliverance from oppression and injustice. So Pentecost – fifty days after Passover – is really about life after liberation. In Leviticus, we find that the Hebrew people were directed by the priests (God’s representatives) to make holy offerings of grain, bread, lambs, and incense. The purposes for the ritual sacrifices were for sin – for which a goat was sacrificed – and for well-being – for which two male lambs were sacrificed. This seems to be a very practical acknowledgment of what usually happens in normal human civilization after liberation is accomplished. Pretty soon, we get back to the usual failures and fights.

But, once the ritual sacrifices are done and all is well again between God and the people, it’s party time, and work is forbidden. Just in case the people might forget why they were liberated in the first place, the priests made it clear that “when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: *I am the Lord your God.*”

In the midst of a holiday, certain that sins have been forgiven and that future well-being is assured, the people remember that God’s kingdom, God’s reign, God’s imperial rule, means that God’s people live in distributive justice-compassion.

## **CALL TO WORSHIP/CHALICE LIGHTING**

Reading: John 20:19-23

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[Light Chalice]

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