At Pentecost, God filled the disciples with power. The Holy Spirit came with the rush of a violent wind, like the wind from God that “swept over the face of the waters” on the first day of creation (Genesis 1:2). The Spirit danced with divided tongues, as of fire, like the burning bush that revealed God to Moses, a bush that “was blazing, yet it was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). The Galilean disciples began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability, making it possible for them to communicate with devout Jews from every nation. The Holy Spirit was a Universal Charger.

This same Spirit is available to us today, and it is charging us in the same way that it charged the first followers of Jesus. Our challenge is to receive what the Spirit offer us, and then to share that divine energy with others. We are being given a Holy Spirit Hi-Charger which puts God’s power in just the right spot to accomplish God’s purpose.

**One and Many.** First, the Spirit is a creative force in our lives, just as the wind of God was a creative power in the making of the heavens and the earth. In Acts, the Spirit creates the Christian community, which is why Pentecost is sometimes called the “birthday” of the church. Notice that God’s Spirit is poured out on a collection of believers. “The Holy Spirit is not a ‘personal’ gift from God that each believer privatizes,” says biblical professor Robert Wall. The fact that the Spirit appeared to a group is “the distinguishing mark of a people belonging to God.”

We have an individualistic view of faith in the United States, and many people talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus. There is nothing wrong with that, but what is created by the Spirit on Pentecost is a distinctive and powerful community faith.

The challenge for us as the Christian community is to be simultaneously both one and many. We are *one* in our worship of the Triune God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. We are *many* in our expressions of the faith, because we are connected to the Trinity as Christians who are male, female, young, old, middle-aged, conservative, liberal, Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latino, White, musical, tone-deaf, native-born, and recent immigrants.

“One and many” may seem like an impossible contradiction, but the Triune God is also both one and many: One God in three persons. In God’s own Self is a single God who is also a community composed of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit came on Pentecost to a diverse collection of believers, and this Spirit created something new and powerful: The Christian community. God is our Universal Charger, energizing our faith family to new and greater acts of service.

**God Is with Us.** Next, the Spirit shows us that God is right in front of us, just as the fire of the burning bush told Moses that God was present in his life. On Pentecost, “divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among the disciples, and a tongue rested on each of them” (Acts 2:3). This fire was impossible to ignore; it brilliantly showed that the power of God was with them.

Such fire is nothing new in Holy Scripture. When God liberated God’s people from captivity in Egypt, the Lord went in front of them “in a pillar of fire” (Exodus 13:21). Then, “the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” (Exodus 24:17). As the prophets Elijah and Elisha walked, “a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). The Lord “will come in fire,” promises the prophet Isaiah, “and his chariots like the whirlwind” (Isaiah 66:15). And in a vision in the book of Revelation, John says that the eyes of Christ will be “like a flame of fire” (Revelation 1:14). Pillar of fire. Devouring fire. A chariot of fire. A flame of fire. What unites these blazing sights? All are signs of the presence and power of God.

Again, and again, God comes into the middle of human life and appears to us. Sometimes these appearances are brilliant, like tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost. Sometimes they are more subtle, like the squeeze of a hand, an encouraging word, an expression of forgiveness, a card in the mail, or a statement of love. But whether God comes in blazing fire or in warm words, God is always present and powerful.

The promise of Pentecost is that God is with us, always with us, and this is true for all Christians. It echoes the promise made when Jesus received the name Emmanuel, which means “God is with us” (Matthew 1:23). God is our Universal Charger, giving us the healing and help we need, in every time and place and situation.

**Share the Charge.** Finally, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to communicate with people of every race and culture, just as it enabled the first followers of Jesus to connect with the diverse Jews of Jerusalem. The apostle Peter quickly discovered that the gift of the Spirit was not a private gift to him. It was given so that he could share God’s deeds of power with others.

Taking a bold stand, Peter announced to the people of Jerusalem, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:17). God’s Spirit came to fill not just Peter and the other followers of Jesus, but a diverse group of sons and daughters, young and old, men and women, people of all status and from all nations. The Spirit came to break down all the cultural barriers that previously existed, said Peter, and now “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (v. 21).

Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggemann claims that “Pentecost is God’s response to the power failure of the world.” The Holy Spirit came to connect us to God’s power. But, as we learned in science class, for an electrical charge to flow from a wall circuit into a light bulb, and make the bulb glow, there must be a complete circuit. Cause a break anywhere in the circuit — a frayed wire, a broken filament or a bulb insufficiently screwed in — and you will have no light.

The miracle of Pentecost is like that. God prepares spiritual power to flow into creation, but no inspiration will take place if the circuit is not completed. We need to position ourselves in such a way that the connection is made. Had the Jesus-followers not been “all together in one place,” ready for something miraculous to happen, there would have been no miracle, at least not in that place and time. The first and essential action of a spiritual life is showing up, being open to the Spirit working in and through us.

The Holy Spirit remains a creative force in the world, one that is continuing to form the Christian community. The flame of God’s presence is always with us, working powerfully in our lives. The Spirit pushes us to reach outward to every race and nationality, sharing the good news and divine energy with others. That is a Hi-Charge Holy Spirit, one that fills us, and others, with the power of God.

Holy Spirit: With astonishment, we see that you renew our strength constantly. Allow us not to forget your presence, even in adversity. And, in our turn, we will renew our gratefulness and we will sing of your love. Amen.

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**Universal Charger**

Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021 Acts 2:1-21

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

A dozen major car makers are now building electric vehicles, and the market is expected to grow. Tesla, Chevy, Nissan, Porsche, Audi, and Volkswagen all have electric models. But there is a problem: The charging ports are all over the cars. When you go to a gas station to fill up your gas-powered car, you can be pretty sure that you will pump gas into the tank from the side of the car, near the rear. But where do you put the charger into your electric car? It could be in the front, or the back, or one of the sides. It can be very confusing.

The Korean car-maker Hyundai recently embarked on a project of building public charging stations in the city of Seoul. Wanting to accommodate as many car brands as possible, Hyundai tapped the consulting firm McKinsey to design a universal charger that would easily accommodate any electric car. The result is the “Hyundai Hi-Charger.” Reportedly inspired by self-serve car washes, the Hyundai Hi-Charger has a halo which rotates and drops the charging cable in just the right spot, depending on the make and model of your electric car. The Hyundai Hi-Charger is a universal charger.

The book of Acts tells us that “there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem” (2:5). There were “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs” (vv. 9-11). Lots of people. More variety than what you find today in electric cars.

The first followers of Jesus were just one brand of Jew: Galileans. They were tradesmen, and most people expected their language abilities to be limited. But God was at work on a surprising design. The followers of Jesus were “all together in one place,” says the book of Acts (v. 1). They had come together to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, which focused on God’s gift of the law to the Israelites.