“Surprise!” - Stephanie Sorge, 6.8.25

Today we kick off our Pentecost Summer of Surprise! So, surprise! Things are a little different today. This story of Pentecost would have been much different if Peter had been the only one to rise and speak. It was the diversity of voices, as much as the wind and flame, that drew attention. Languages that were not only quite foreign, but in some cases, ancient, were suddenly being spoken, and somehow, each person could understand what was being said. What the devil was happening?

Peter saw his moment, and rose to preach. He pulled out a text from the prophet Joel: “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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” See? It had all been foretold by the prophet. Were they surprised to see this democratizing Spirit that would incite everyone to prophesy? Knowing the prophet’s words and then seeing them come to life are two very different things. We know that God is always with us, but we often don’t expect to see or experience that reality.

Peter’s sermon was very “come to Jesus,” but if it hadn’t been for the diverse group gathered there, this would have been a different story.

We are the body of Christ, and we are all gifted by the Holy Spirit for the work to which we’re called. No leader has it all; we’re all incomplete. We need each other. We need to hear voices that speak different languages - literally and figuratively. We need to make space to learn from people who think differently.

One of my favorite sections of Scripture is 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Paul waxes poetic about the body of Christ - a collective whole made up of many different parts. Each part is critical, each part has value. If we were all the same, what kind of body would that be? If we were all noses, or ears? When I read this, I always picture disembodied parts zooming around in space. It’s ridiculous! It would be chaos! We need each other, and we need the full diversity of the body simply to function, baseline.

Last Tuesday we had a beautiful service celebrating Joanie’s life and witnessing to the hope of resurrection. It was more participatory than many services we have - some of that was planned, and the rest was a Holy Spirit surprise. It was wonderful.

Nancy shared about Joanie’s time in the Explorers’ Class with Pastor Dan Grandstaff. Of course there were heady theological conversations, but each week, Joanie would sum it up - “Jesus loves me” - a complete statement of faith. Joanie’s cerebral palsy made speech more difficult, especially as she got older. She was so wonderfully patient when people couldn’t understand what she was trying to communicate. This body was so much richer because of her presence with us. Her voice was a Pentecost voice - an undeniable sign of God’s presence, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

I haven’t forgotten our reading from Galatians - those familiar fruits of the spirit. These are such difficult days, in so many ways. It’s hard to grow good crops in depleted soil. And yet, we can find these fruits growing. Paul named these as signs that we are living according to the Spirit. If the Spirit is guiding us, these are the fruits that will grow. But I also think the Holy Spirit is planting and tending seeds all over the place, for our sustenance and delight. Even if your soil is depleted, there is Spirit-grown fruit to be found, sometimes where you least expect it. In fact, if you reach under your chair, you might find a surprise! Go ahead and check. If you’re in an armchair, it might be in the pocket. You should each have your very own fruit of the spirit on your slip of paper. Take a moment to think about it. Where have you experienced that fruit recently? ….

….Thank you for sharing. In this summer of surprise, I’d like to invite you to hold on to that fruit of the Spirit. Look for it, especially in places where you don’t expect it. Reflect on it, and think about the ways you bear this fruit in your own life. Maybe growing more of that fruit can be an intention for the summer. It certainly wouldn’t hurt!

These days are difficult. Thank God we don’t have to go through them alone. May the Holy Spirit surprise us and inspire us to bear good fruit as we seek to follow Jesus. Amen.