

**JUNE 5, 2022**  
**ACTS 2:42-47**



# **A PANDEMIC PENTECOSTAL CHURCH**

**PENTECOST SUNDAY EXPERIENCE BY REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY**  
**@PASTORHJW**

**#PANDEMICPENTECOSTALCHURCH | #PENTECOST | #WEAREALFREDSTREET**

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**Date:** June 4 and 5, 2022

**Preacher:** Rev. Dr. Luke Powery

**Sermon Title:** "And"

**Scripture:** Scripture: Acts 2:1–21 (NRSV)

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

*Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 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—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."*

*But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews[a] and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through 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. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'* "

## **SERMON SUMMARY:**

Rev. Dr. Luke A. Powery, Dean of the Duke Chapel at Duke University, reminds us that from the beginning of creation God is a God of “and” and not of “or”. Rev. Powery illustrates this by sharing many uses of the word “and” in the creation story, the Pentecost story, and throughout the biblical text. The designs of God, from colors of nature, the variety of plants and trees, the wondrous range of creatures that fill the earth, and to the multiplicity of people who populate the planet; all show that God is a God who delights in and affirms the “and” and the resulting diversity that defines creation.

God functions within the space of “and”, Rev. Powery declares. Indeed, the diversity of God is fact, and it is God-breathed. The day of Pentecost affirms the “and” of God’s plan for the church and the diversity that underlies it. While naming the particularities of their origins, God forms the church out of a diversity of nations and tribes. From its inception, God intended the church to be a grand multiplicity.

But, sadly, the world does not always embrace diversity and the blessing of “and”. The world pushes toward uniformity. Yet, Rev. Powery pushes us to ask how we can strive, not for uniformity but for *unity* in the beauty of our diversity.

Dr. Powery leaves us to ponder these thoughts: “Why can’t we embrace the “and” of God?” “How will you join God in the dance of diversity that is breaking out in our churches, classrooms, courtrooms, and boardrooms?” “How will we join with God in affirming that ‘and’ is an inclusive act, and that ‘and’ means all?”

Beloved, how will we observe Pentecost this year? How will we join God in the “and” of living?

## **KEY POINTS:**

1. Pentecost provides the first glimpse of the first fruits of God’s diverse Kingdom.
2. God works within the conjunction “and”.
3. God’s “and” leads to a diverse and varied creation. This diversity is a gift of God and Pentecost reveals that God embraces difference without erasing our individual nature. Yet, forces in our world would deny the power of “and” to construct a world of uniformity.
4. We are called to join God in the work of “and” in the celebration of all of God’s inclusive diversity.

## **GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS:**

1. Please share a time when you were the target of exclusion. How did you handle that situation? Did you feel empowered to stand up for yourself?
2. Can you think of a time when others were challenged by your identity, or operated in the ‘or’ rather than the ‘and’ of God’s creation at work, in friendships, or at home with your family?

**ACTIVITY:**

1. In your devotional time with God this week, reflect on the ways that God's "and" shows up in your spiritual life. List out your favorite worship practices, hymns, and spiritual gifts on scraps of paper, and put them in an envelope or your favorite container. Each day, pick one to activate and meditate on for twenty-four hours. Reflect on the question, what would it look like to practice God's 'and' in your daily/weekly/monthly walk?

**INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS:**

1. The sermon scripture, Acts 2:1-21, references the ability to speak other languages as a manifestation of God's "and". In other places in Scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and Galatians 5:22, we see a multiplicity of gifts, fruits, etc. What do these scriptures reveal about the nature of God's "and"?
2. Joel 2:28 and its preceding verses are words of compassion and promise. How is this prophecy similar to or different from the other places in the Bible where God promises to restore and reward us after times of struggle, such as Romans 8:28, 2 Chronicles 7:14, etc.?

**LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

1. During times of division, when there is hate all around us, how do you maintain an 'and' spirit, which is a spirit of acceptance without fear of difference?
2. Xenophobia, or the fear of difference, is thought to be the root of many divisions in our churches. When churches have been able to move beyond these differences, how did it affect the spiritual growth of the church body?

**"CAN I PUSH IT?" QUESTION:**

1. Has the diversity of God's 'and' changed your views of people and communities different from your own?
2. As we begin Pride Month and see the struggle for inclusion of our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters, are you emboldened to make your voice heard in your church community?
3. In the case of Bishop Michael Curry, the first Black presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, we can see his position as a historical landmark in terms of race. What might this tell us about the practice of God's 'and' in terms of systematic inclusion or exclusion in formal roles of authority in the church?
4. How are the challenges with acceptance into God's family based on race and ethnicity similar to or different from those of acceptance based on gender and sexuality? What does this reveal about the nature of the world's practice of 'or', as opposed to God's practice of 'and'?

**SPIRIT WORK:**

1. Dr. Powery speaks of the demonization of difference; how, as growing Christians, can we better live out God's 'and'?
  - a. Have you had difficulty in accepting the worship styles of friends or family of different denominations or religions?

**Additional Questions for Married Couples:**

1. How have you been able to embrace your differences and recognize the beauty in your 'and' as husband and wife?
2. How can we support our Same-Gender Loving (SGL) brothers, sisters, and families in affirming their place in God's kingdom?

**Additional Questions for Young Adults:**

1. How has the diversity of your environment impacted the development of your identity? How does it affect your self-expression in terms of personality, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical attributes, political positions and, religious beliefs?
2. How has the work world embraced or not embraced God's 'and'? What has been your experience of corporate culture's attempts at diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility?

**Additional Questions for Parents:**

1. What is the conversation that we should have with our children to prepare them for a world that does not see them as equal, simply because of their skin color?
2. How can we model and teach our children to recognize when 'or' is operating, and how to interrupt it with the spirit of God's 'and'?

**Additional Questions for Women:**

1. As women, we have been fighting for inclusion in the workplace, in society, and in the pulpit. How do we continue to use our voice in the spirit of God's 'and'?
2. While our sermon focuses on God's 'and', theologies of exclusion based on gender in the church date back to Paul's time. How do these divisions of gender show up in churches today?



### **Additional Questions for Men:**

1. As Men, we have been raised in a culture where men have to be in charge. For example, the church has had issues with Women in pastoral roles, and to this day, some churches won't allow women to preach from the pulpit. How has diversity changed, enriched, and fostered your personal and professional growth?
2. How can we support our Same-Gender Loving (SGL) brothers and sisters in affirming their place in God's family?

### **Additional Questions for Returning Citizens:**

1. Dr. Powery shares a quote from the father of Dr. Onye Awkwari, "all human beings breathe free air, and no human being is bigger or better than you". Have you been able to embrace and believe this fact, given that you may have made mistakes in your past?
  - a. How have you been able to see the beauty in your 'and'?
2. The sermon mentions the diversity of the Bible, with multiple voices, language, culture, authors and genres.
  - a. We also know of the life of Moses, the acts of Peter, and Saul's persecution of Christians. What does their past and their witness tell you about our 'and' God?

### **Additional Resources**

For more information on Bishop Curry, please refer to this article:  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-44180777>