"The Ends of the Earth"

I Corinthians 12:12-16, 26-27; Acts 1:3-8, 2:1-11 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – October 4, 2026
World Communion Sunday

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might truly feel our unity with all your people deep in our bones, our guts, and our souls. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Sometimes it's interesting to read a scripture passage "out of season." When we read Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost each, the focus is usually on the work of the Holy Spirit or maybe the disciples. But as we read this portion of it today, I find that I am more interested in the crowd. In the earlier chapter, Jesus has told the apostles that they will carry their witness to "the ends of the earth." But once the Holy Spirit shows up, it becomes apparent that the ends of the earth have come to them.

It makes me realize that Jerusalem in the time of Jesus and San Diego right now have something in common that we might not usually recognize: there are people here from all over the world. Clearly, we know that about San Diego. But have you thought of it as something we have in common with first-century Jerusalem before? What I love about this crowd is that their astonished response to the outpouring of the Spirit through the disciples seems to almost take the form of an organized inventory. A note in your study Bible will tell you that the list of countries and locations moves from east to west; this isn't any haphazard shouting out of

hometowns. Now, of course, we can easily assume that the orderly nature of this geographic check-in was constructed by the author of Acts, bringing structure and meaning to the story years later, as opposed to a particularly detail-oriented member of the crowd who got everyone to hush so they could be lined up by longitudinal coordinates. But still, whether in the moment or literarily, there is something meaningful about the thoroughness with which they covered their known world, from right to left.

Two thousand years later, we are privileged to live in a metropolis that also includes people from "the ends of the earth." But we're also privileged to know that the earth doesn't have an end. Sometimes we even manage to remember that our hometown is not the center of the universe or the spherical planet upon which we live. And some of us are lucky enough to have experienced that in our own lives. So today, we're going to take inventory like that crowd hearing about God's deeds of power, and see how far our witness to God's love has traveled.

We've got this globe, and I have these stickers. We have four different colors of stickers, so we're going to use four different categories. We're going to start with red, which is for any country someone here has lived in, long-term, like that was your only or primary home at the time. We're going to use green for anywhere that you stayed for an extended time, like as an exchange student or on deployment or something like that. Yellow is for everywhere you've visited as a tourist or for

business or whatever. You can decide if it requires having spent the night or whether an airport layover qualifies you. And then blue with be for any place that you know someone from, whether they live here now or still live there. So let's see how much of this globe we can cover! Those of you on Zoom, please use the chat box to tell us which countries are which categories for you.

Red is for countries where someone has lived.

Green is for extended stays.

Yellow is for visits.

Blue is for someone else you know that's from there.

Now that we've decorated this globe with beautiful color, I want to think back to those scriptures. The crowd on the day of Pentecost didn't just hear their own languages from all over. They heard about God's deeds of power in their languages. Paul's words from First Corinthians remind us that this kind of unity – drawing together all these languages and cultures and places – is a deed of power. Us living into this geographic diversity that we're connected with, right here in our little congregation, is one of God's continued deeds of power. These connections that we have with places and peoples all over the world are one of the ways we stay in touch with the body of Christ. It's how we hear when one part of the body is suffering; it's

how we know to rejoice when something good happens somewhere. It's how we learn more about God and God's love, and what it can look like in contexts very different than our own. Christianity's willingness, indeed enthusiasm, for breaking beyond cultural barriers is one of the things that made empires nervous from the earliest days. (It is, of course, also something that empires then learned to occupy and exploit, appropriating the name of Christ for their own ambitions.) Sadly, we live in a world where growing beyond cultural barriers is still seen with suspicion. That's why the good news of Jesus is still fresh. Because we're still learning the lesson that what we have in common is stronger than anything that separates us. When we open our hearts and our lives to the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made one across all sorts of barriers. Our lives are enriched, and the world is mended just a little better each time. Hallelujah and Amen.