June 8, 2025 Sermon – Wild

When you think of Pentecost, which symbol usually comes to mind? Fire, right? Have you ever watched a flame burn? When we’re kids and we’re asked to draw a picture of fire, there’s generally one color we use, red, but if you’ve ever looked into a campfire, you see so much more. There are blues, oranges, yellows, and more. As I started to think about what I wanted to discuss today, I kept getting distracted. You see, I was looking out at all of the buds and plants starting to sprout in my yard, and it dawned on me. Like the variety of colors we see in a fire, the beauty we see in the flowers around us and in bouquets we get and receive is much the same as the influence those first disciples had all those years ago. Some were more tame, and some were more wild, but they all had a meaning and a significance, just as how the flowers we see in beauty around us have a deeper meaning than we realize, and it’s the beauty of those qualities all working together that can teach us more about ourselves, about the kinds of people we want to be, and about the things we can accomplish when we put all of that together. (GET OUT VASE)

Alstroemeria – This often-overlooked flower has one of the most powerful meanings: a combination of friendship, love, strength, and devotion. While we know that the disciples had a deep love for each other and had an incredible sense of friendship, think about the strength and courage it must have taken for them to branch out from where they were, to go places where they were unknown. Think about how it feels for any of us when we try something new. Often, there’s this combination of excitement and abject fear. Now, put that in a new location. We know that many of the disciples were persecuted, but we also know that they would form friendships and bonds with others that they hadn’t imagined and that the kindness they showed to others would be felt well beyond their own years.

Mum – Often we think of mums as “the sturdy flower,” able to withstand a variety of temperatures, but looking deeper, they symbolize qualities both we and the world as a whole could use more: joy, life, friendship, luck, and rebirth. Yes, I think many people would say that could use more joy in their lives, but let’s combine that with the ideas of luck and rebirth. I’m sure we can all think of moments in our lives when it felt like all hope had been lost, like all joy was gone, when all of a sudden, a friend, neighbor, or relative reached out at the right time. Cheesy as it may seem, I call those moments pockets of hope. They recharge us; they give us a rebirth in just the right moment and help us find joy right when we need it. What about the luck part of the mum? I think that’s part of it. Sometimes, we truly are in the right place at the right moment, whether by chance or by God’s driven force that we didn’t realize was sending us there at the time, and it’s moments like those that help make us more like the sturdy mum and strengthen us for life’s next trial.

Daisy – I once heard daisies referred to as friendly-looking flowers. When you look into their symbolism, they represent innocence and purity, and even new beginnings. How many of us have ever wished we could return to a time in our lives that seemed simpler? I know I have! What I think we need to remember is that even in the midst of complication, we all still have that childhood innocence inside ourselves. How do I know? Watch the faces in this room when we have visiting children. Watch someone’s eyes light up when they talk about how that met their best friend or partner. Look at a garden; ever looked at a field of daisies? The way they move with the wind makes them look like they’re dancing. The innocence is still in us, no matter how many years we’ve been on this earth, and it’s that innocence and purity that helps us build connections with others.

Sweet Wiliam – These flowers actually date all the way back to ancient Greece and Rome, symbolizing admiration, love, and gratitude. Just as how the disciples looked up to Jesus and tried to model his teachings when they went out into the world, every single one of us has people in our lives who we see as role models. What’s interesting is when we get to a point where we suddenly realize we are also now a role model to someone else. We might not have been looking to do that, but it happens to every single one of us, thus once again allowing us to pay it forward and help others well after our years on this earth are done.

Virginia pepperweed – Many would consider this just to be a weed. Heck, the word WEED is in the name!, but this “weed” has a meaning that’s so much deeper. Above all else, the pepperweed symbolizes healing, to the point where it’s actually used by many people around the world as part of salves and other teas and is edible and sometimes used in salads in place of black pepper. This one goes a step farther, though, in that it’s often used in Passover satyrs as a bitter herb, thus connecting our current world to Biblical times thousands of years ago. Sometimes, it’s the most common-looking appearance that can have an incrediblly deep meaning and impact.

Hens and chicks succulent – Like the pepperweed, this is sometimes discarded, but we can apply this simple plant to so many aspects of who we are as humans. When you look at the structure of this simple green plant, you see a rosette shape that surrounds another and another and another and so on, layers on layers on layers. What we see on the outside has many layers inside and that our interactions help develop those layers, which then branch out into actions that affect others. Take our church, for example. On the outside appearance, we’re a tiny building far smaller than many churches in our area, but look at the impact we have. From meals to community to special collections to the way we look out for each other during both happy and not so happy times, our little church has a giant impact on more people than we probably realize.

Almost there. Stay with me.

Lilies – Renewal. In recent weeks, we’ve talked a lot about our recovery since the storm, and I often hear similar comments. They’re usually something like, “Yes, I had it bad, but I consider myself lucky when I hear how others had it.” In the midst of tragedy, we’ve watched others band together to take care of each other, finding renewal not just in others but in themselves as well. Are there still things to do? Absolutely! However, we’re finding ways to find those pockets of hope and renew our faith and joy.

Tea rose – These mini roses pack a powerful meaning of friendship and gratitude. Though not as prominent as their larger, more famous rose relatives, tea roses remind us that sometimes it’s the little moments, the gestures, and the thank yous that keep us going. While the big things are important, it’s important to sometimes remember that a lot of little things add up to a big thing.

Lilac – No spring drive around northern Michigan would be complete without the beauty of these spring flowers, and I think these represent us as people more than any other mentioned today. Lilacs represent renewal and hope. No matter the winter, no matter the storm, no matter the conditions, lilacs come back. Relating this back to the Pentecost where we started this, we know that the disciples’ journey was difficult. We know they had it rough. We know we’ve had it rough, but we also know the power of working together and that no matter the trials and tribulations, there’s always something worth coming back for. There’s always beauty to see.

So there you have it, a Pentecost bouquet. As I was working on the revising this last night, Aaron yelled upstairs, “How’s the flower Ted Talk coming?” In thinking about that, I’d like to conclude this much like a Ted Talk, by looking at the common themes mentioned: friendship, love, strength, devotion, joy, love, friendship, luck, rebirth, innocence, purity, admiration, love, gratitude, healing, layered love, friendship, gratitude, renewal. Think about how many times friendship is mentioned, how love, joy, and gratitude, are woven in with rebirth, innocence, luck, and strength. As we move forward into the busyness of summer, let’s remember the seeds that were planted thousands of years ago. Let’s remember that the seed we plant with a kind word, with a smile, or with a hopeful message has the power to transform someone’s day and have an effect far longer than we could imagine. Let’s remember that just as how a bouquet can make someone’s day better by combining different flowers, we too can better our own lives, the lives of others, our communities, and our world. It’s wild.