

Pentecost Sunday

Happy birthday, church. Pentecost Sunday is the day we celebrate the birth of the church. It's our birthday. And on our birthday, God gave us a gift. The Holy Spirit. To be a part of the church is to say, "We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Of all the religions in the world - The particular gift of Christians - that which is particular to us - is the Holy Spirit given to all - This living, active, dynamic presence of God in Christ that is at work in us, and at in the world - that works through us for the healing and transformation of this beautiful and broken world.

In Acts, chapter 2, we find the disciples gathered for the festival of Pentecost, a celebration of the harvest - this festival was like a big party. It happened every year! Devout Jews would come to Jerusalem from all over the ancient world. Sort of like Times Square on New Year's Eve. And it was chaotic - people from every corner of the earth descended on Jerusalem - all of them speaking languages that were unintelligible to each other.

And what are the disciples doing? Well it says they're all together in one place, Tradition tells us that they stayed in the Upper Room where the Last Supper took place. It's there that the Risen Lord first appeared to the disciples, walks right through the very walls of that room, comes and shows them that he has risen from the dead. Comes again, a week later so that Thomas can see his wounded hands and feet: so that Thomas can believe. (beat) And they've met the risen Lord elsewhere, walking beside them on a road, he eats with them, breaks bread with them, calls to them from the shoreline.... They have him back!

But not for long. Before they know it, he disappears, rising up in a cloud, with a promise that somebody's going be right back. So, what are the disciples are doing? Well, they're not out there at the party. They're holed up in the Upper Room - and they're waiting for this leader that was promised. Jesus said God would send them an Advocate. They're sitting there waiting, probably thinking about that last look - the soles of Jesus' feet before the heavens swallowed him up. Their praying, "Come back soon because we can't do it alone! We await the establishment of your kingdom on earth, just please... don't make us do the work."

And then, whoosh. The sound of a mighty wind blows like a freight train and tongues of fire start dancing on the disciples' heads. They're filled with the Holy Spirit and they spill out into the streets. They join the party! ----And this wild, indiscriminate Spirit, the same spirit that moved across the face of the deep at creation, it doesn't descend just on Peter, or John, or James. No. suddenly, for just a moment, the veil is lifted and these people from all over the world can understand one another's speech. We're back to the beginning, before the tower of Babel, before the language was confused, before we divided ourselves into different tribes and nations. For just a moment, we see humanity in unity again.

The gift God gives us at Pentecost is the gift we most desperately need. It is the ability to see God's vision of a united humanity, an undivided humanity.

Maybe Peter was the first one to see it because he stands up and he says, Listen, I know what's going on here - understanding each other's languages - humanity united again - why this right here is the fulfillment of God's promise when he said "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young shall see visions and your old shall dream dreams."

About 2000 years ago, the church was born. The Holy Spirit descended with wind and with fire and one of the gifts of that Pentecostal Fire was vision. The church was born a visionary

community, born to see visions and to dream dreams and every generation must move out of its closed doors with the vision of God in our eyes and with the prophecies of the God's Kingdom of Peace upon our tongues - speaking the vision of all God's creatures living together in peaceable harmony.

God's vision of common worth and unity, where everybody gets a place at the table, where everyone is heard - it runs throughout the whole of scripture - the peaceable kingdom - valleys will be lifted and mountains brought low - God's vision runs throughout the pages of scripture but here! Here on Pentecost - we get an actual snapshot of it - in real time - happening right before our eyes a picture where justice and peace are made manifest - if just in that moment - on that day of Pentecost. This vision was given to the church and each generation must incarnate that and work for that in the day that we been given them.

Our world has been interrupted by Covid-19. And we are tired of sitting behind locked doors. But there's also an opportunity here. What will the church do with this interruption that we're living through? How are we going to be God's visionary church in this community - on the other side of this lockdown?

On Monday, Memorial Day, George Floyd, an unarmed black man, was wrongfully killed by a white police officer. Its excruciating to watch the footage of a man's life being snuffed out with his face planted on the pavement and a knee on his throat.

For the last 5 days, there have been peaceful protests and there continue to be peaceful protests. But also riots, all across this country. We've all seen it on the news. And it makes me mad when I see small businesses being destroyed, housing and municipal buildings set on fire, looting, the wanton destruction. And it's frightening to watch, 5 days now and there no sign of it stopping.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "a riot is the language of the unheard."

Now, MLKing didn't support violent tactics, including riots, but he understood that the way to stop citizens from rioting is to acknowledge and fix the conditions that they are rioting against, fair access to justice, economic inequality and racism continue to be alive and well in our country.

Add when you to that the disproportionate number of African Americans who have died from Covid-19. Black Americans represent 13.4% of the American population and yet they're dying at close to three times the rate of white people. Over 100,000,000 people have died so far from this virus to date and 60% of those who have died have been people of color. The result is despair and despair leads to anger and anger leads to riots.

What is God calling the church to do at this time? How will the Holy Spirit work through us for the healing and transformation of this beautiful and broken world. We're a primarily white church here at Crete United Methodist. How will we address the racism that savages our land? How will we, in all humility, hear the unheard, hearing with a deep understanding of one another's speech and experience.

God has already given us what we need, the gift of the Holy Spirit. The ability to see what could be.

When the Holy Spirit arrives, it doesn't matter if we aren't speaking the same language. The Spirit has a workaround for that. When our hearts and minds and ears can't understand each other, the Spirit bridges the gap, provided we have not already tuned one another out.

The Spirit wraps around our hearts, animates us, sustains us, pulls us forward, binds us to one another with an unbreakable bond, and allows us to see a vision, God's vision. Our best laid plans don't mean a whole lot, but vision does. And "God, by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."

On the day of Pentecost we were given a vision of what could be, a united humanity no more separated by tribe or language - a vision of God's intended future. And we were given the Holy Spirit to work through us that we might be the ones who work for that future to be actualized in our day.

We may not be able to see it all yet. But the Spirit is moving - as it has from the beginning of time. Amen.