

“The Spirit at Work”

June 9, 2019

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Acts 2: 1-8, 12-13

Today we celebrate Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. It is the day the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples and both empowered and embolden them to speak and heal and share the Good News of Jesus Christ in a way that people came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is a day filled with energy, excitement and power along with crazy sounds and images. It began with “a sound from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind that filled the house where they were sitting... Then there appeared tongues as of fire... resting on each one of them.” That must have been an interesting sight. Then they began to speak. They were probably thinking in Greek and forming words in Greek like they had been doing their entire lives, but when the words came out, they were in different languages. It says there were spectators there from all over the known world who spoke all the different languages of the known world, and each one heard what the disciples were saying in their own native language. For us that would be French, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, German, Quichuan, Swahili, English, and even southern.

For years we have tried to bring some sense of the day of Pentecost into our worship experience. We have filled the baptistry with decorative fire. We have had multiple people read the Scripture lesson in multiple languages at the same time. A year or so ago we even found a way to use flash paper with each one of us holding those tongues of fire if for a moment. This year I suggested we find a way to use some kind of “string of fire” that would allow us to light the string in the back of the sanctuary which would then make the flame zip down the line to the front and light our candles in an instant. Luckily, the worship team didn’t even try to figure out how to make that work – something about safety, burning little children, new carpet, smoke alarms, and a dozen other reasons. It is challenging to recreate the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost because the wind and flames and speaking in foreign languages is not a normal experience for us. Which got me thinking, are we missing it? Because we do not experience those crazy Pentecost moments, are we a spiritless people? Personally, I have never spoken in tongues – whether in a different earthly language or in a special, divine prayer language. I have never had a crazy moment when my body has been taken over and I start to dance or fall to the ground motionless or bark like a dog. Those things happened to folks at a rival in Cane Ridge, Kentucky as our denomination was being formed, but never to me. Don’t get me wrong, God has put words in my mouth that were not from me and my wisdom, but they were still regular, thoughtful words spoken in English in a calm, rational manner. God has answered my prayer for healing before and even given me an idea that something new was coming, but there was no rushing wind or booming sound or fiery tongues. Where is this spontaneous, unpredictable, uncontrollable, world shaking Spirit? Are we a spirit filled church? Am I a spirit filled person?

Well, one of the other assigned readings for today comes from the 14th chapter of the gospel of John. In it, Jesus is talking about sending the Holy Spirit after He is gone. He says in verses 16 &

17, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth... to dwell with you, and be in you." For John, the Spirit is the very presence of God in our midst – just like Jesus was – to dwell with us and be with us. So if we want to know what the Spirit is like and what the Spirit will do, we just need to look at Jesus and what He was like and what He did. As a matter of fact, when we read on in verse 26, Jesus says, "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

I don't know about you, but I could really use that kind of Holy Spirit – a presence of God with me to dwell in me that will remind me of all Jesus said. I don't want to be constantly reminded of the laws and commandments like some strict drill sergeant, but I do want the stories. In those times when I look at stupid decisions people make and arrogantly think "no wonder their lives are in such a mess", I need the Spirit to remind me of when Jesus told the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. How the Pharisee thanked God he was not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even tax collector. He went on to boast about how holy he was and what a good church goer he was, but the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but humbly pleaded, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus said it was this tax collector, not the righteous Pharisee who went home right with God. "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 18:14) There are days I need to be reminded of that story. In other times when I am feeling like Jesus' commands are a burden because 10% of my income is a lot of money and I have other things to do with my time as well; I need to hear last week's story of Paul and Silas chained to a prison wall and singing praises to God. God asks so little of me. Of course there are those not-seldom-enough times when I goof up, when I miss an opportunity, when I lose my cool, when I forget something important or make a bad decision; and I need to hear again that Jesus died for me. He didn't die for the idea of me or the vision of what I was supposed to be or even could be, but for me. The me I have become and am still becoming. I need the spirit to remind me of these stories – and it does. Does that mean I have the Holy Spirit is in me? Jesus says, "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." Each week we gather together in worship and many of you in Sunday School and Bible studies to learn more about Jesus and be reminded of all He ever said and did. Does that mean we as the church have the Holy Spirit in us and are doing the work of the Spirit? I believe it does.

It is true, we do not show all the gifts of the Spirit which were present in the early church and present in different congregations today. We have more people with the gift of administration than the gift of speaking in tongues. We have more people with the gift of teaching and hospitality than the gift of exercising demons or prophecy. There are some gifts that are just not present here, but we do have all the fruit. -Galatians 5, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." We have that fruit in abundance, and you will know a tree by its fruit. That means the Spirit is present.

Church, we are not the perfect church, but the Holy Spirit is alive and well and dwelling at First Christian Church. That makes us a good place to connect and stay connected to God, but we need to step up our game. The reason the Spirit came on that first Pentecost was not to fill the disciples with warm fuzzies, but to empower them to speak the Good News of Jesus to those they knew and those they didn't. The Spirit is not present in this place just to make us better people and help us sleep at night. The Spirit is the very presence of God to empower and embolden us to speak and heal and share Jesus in a way that people come to know Him as their Lord and Savior. It is the power to bring salvation to the earth and thereby free its people from death on this earthy being the end of life.

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