

“Charity May Begin At Home, But It’s Not Meant To End There”
Acts 1:1-9 and 12-14; Acts 2:1-8; 11b-17; 22-23; 32-33; 37-38; and 41-42
Sunday, May 11, 2008 – Mother’s Day, Pentecost, Communion
Mike Pulsifer

You may have come to worship today thinking that this is Mother’s Day, and indeed it is. But this is also Pentecost Sunday. Today we are celebrating the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, if this were Christmas or Easter Sunday, I wouldn’t have to remind any of us of the significance of this day, because we would all know.

Yet it can be argued that without Pentecost – without the gift of the Holy Spirit – those first disciples would have remained in hiding in some back street room in Jerusalem, afraid that the next crosses on Calvary would be decorated with their own nail torn bodies. Without Pentecost – without the gift of the Holy Spirit – Peter and the others would have never had the guts to preach on street corners, sail across seas, and die in coliseums for their faith. Without Pentecost – without the gift of the Holy Spirit – the church would have never been born, and you and I would have never even heard of Christmas or Easter.

So, today is a very important day. It’s the Church’s birthday. It’s the day those first Christians received the gift of the Holy Spirit and were set on fire for their faith. It’s Pentecost Sunday! Listen again to what happened on that Pentecost day.

(Please read Acts 2:1-8; 11b-17; 22-23; 32-33; 37-38; and 41-42)

When Billy Graham held a crusade in Montgomery, Alabama, in the early 1960’s, he insisted that the crusade’s community choir be integrated. The day after the crusade began the local newspaper critized Graham for this decision. The editorial concluded, “Dr. Graham has come to Alabama and has set the church back a hundred years.”

That night before his sermon Graham mentioned this editorial, and specifically the comment about setting the church back “a hundred years.” “If this is true,” said Graham, “I’ve failed in my mission. I intended to set (the church) back two thousand years.” (from Look Out World by Jamie Buckingham)

The specific date that Graham was referring to is this first Pentecost when the Spirit of God

**seized the disciples;
leapt over the boundaries of language, race, and nations and
spoke to all those different people about Jesus Christ.**

**In today’s first Scripture lesson Jesus says, “Be my witnesses,”
not just in Jerusalem, but in Samaria;
not just in Judea, but in Egypt, Greece, Macedonia, Italy, Spain, and
to the ends of the earth.**

“Be my witnesses,” says Jesus...not just in Aramaic with a Galilean accent, but also in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Armenia, Persian, and all the other languages of the world.

“Be my witnesses,” says Jesus...not just to your kind of people, but to my kind of people....to all people.

In the Gospel of John Jesus says, “For God so loved the world.” (John 3:16) Now that the Holy Spirit had come at Pentecost that love was on the move, reaching out to the whole world.

Notice: The Holy Spirit does not come to Jesus’ disciples to enable them to start a nice, exclusive club, but rather to enable them to tell and live the story of Jesus Christ to everyone.

**This is why after Pentecost the church begins to welcome
Gentiles as well as Jews;
slaves as well as free men and women;
those seeking to believe as well as those who already believe.**

Pentecost is one of the reasons why the Presbyterian Church is a founding member of the World Council of Churches.

Pentecost is one of the reasons why we Presbyterians celebrate World Communion the first Sunday of every October.

Pentecost is one of the reasons why many of us learned in Sunday School to sing “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.”

Pentecost is one of the reasons why we in this church have mission trips to Guatemala as well as serve meals to the homeless at Broad Street Ministries.

Pentecost is one of the reasons why your giving and mine not only builds new churches in Philadelphia, but also supports St. Luke’s Hospital in Palestine; not only finances a chaplain at Presbyterian Children’s Village in Rosemont, but also feeds starving children in Zimbabwe.

Pentecost is one of the reasons why something sounds so superficial and incomplete about the proverb “Charity begins at home.”

Pentecost is one of the reasons why many Christians today believe that building walls and conducting mass deportations are incomplete, impractical, unjust solutions to America’s undocumented immigrant challenge.

Pentecost is one of the reasons why the Bible is translated now into almost every known human language in the world.

Pentecost is one of the reasons why our hymnal has hymns from other churches and countries in other languages.

Today Christianity is a world religion

**because the Gospel is meant to go to and to include all the world;
because everybody is meant to hear and to know that they are a child
of God created in God's image;
because, in the words of Paul, every knee is destined to bow and
every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.**

(Philippians 2:29)

In 1983 the armies of Israel invaded Lebanon to try to stop Hamass from shelling their villages and cities near their northern border. In West Beirut a small Presbyterian congregation pastored by an Arab Christian named Fuad Bahnan started stockpiling canned goods and other nonperishable foods in the event that the Israelis laid siege to Beirut.

Two weeks later when that siege came, the city of West Beirut was totally surrounded. No one could enter or leave. No food was allowed in. The session of Pastor Bahnan's church met to decide how to distribute the food that they had stockpiled. It was proposed that they would give their food first to the members of their congregation, then as supplies permitted, to other Christians in West Beirut, and lastly, if any was left over, to their Muslim neighbors. However, during their discussion a second proposal was brought forward. This motion stated that the food should be distributed first to their Muslim neighbors, then to other Christians, and lastly, if there was any leftover, to their own members.

The session meeting lasted six hours. The discussion became very heated. Finally it ended when an older, quiet, and much respected woman elder stood up, and cried out: "If we do not demonstrate the love of Christ in this place, who will?" The second proposal passed. The food was distributed first to their Muslim neighbors, then to other Christians, and finally, to their own members. In the end, there was enough for everyone. (Michael L. Lindvall, The Christian Life, pages 125-126)

That day Pentecost happened all over again. That day the Spirit of Christ prevailed. May we continue to allow this same Spirit to fill our hearts and to work in our lives and in the life and ministry of this congregation.