

The Spirit is Alive
Acts 2:1-21
June 4, 2017 – Pentecost Sunday

What a wonderful day!!! It's Pentecost, the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, a day that has sometimes been called "the birthday of the church." You may remember that last week we heard Jesus promise to his disciples: "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." And so today we remember and we celebrate the Holy Spirit of God taking hold of the disciples that they might go forth to preach the Good News, that they might go forth to further the ministry of Jesus, that they might go forth to establish the Christian community, a community of love and peace and joy that we today call the church.

It's a wonderful day. It's an exciting day. I'm excited about today, not just because today we celebrate the beginning of this great institution almost 2100 years ago. No, I'm excited about today because I truly believe that this church, North Olmsted United Methodist Church, is undergoing its own Pentecost. I believe the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God, is alive and working in this church. I feel it. I feel it in my bones, and I'm excited.

Friends, all across our country, churches are closing, congregations are aging and dwindling; and, while our country is in the midst of a cultural revolution our churches are locked into an early twentieth century model; and refusing to change. But you, the congregation of this church have said, "Not here." You, the congregation of this church, have said, "No, we're not going to allow this church to fade away. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is too important!"

Yes, we are in the midst of a cultural revolution. It's been called the Technology Revolution. It's certainly the greatest change in culture since the Industrial Revolution of the late 1800's; and, when it comes to communications, it's the greatest change in culture since the invention of the movable type printing press in the late 1400's; and, in fact, our current revolution may eclipse both of those events.

And the church needs to change. The church needs to adapt. The church needs to recognize what's happening in the world, and be the church for the twenty-first century; because the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News of God's love, is too important; and we, the church are called, called by that same Holy Spirit to spread that Good News – at all times, in all places, in all manners.

Now, as I've said before, "Worry not." We will not abandon the tradition. We will not abandon the rich heritage that makes us the church we are. But, while we maintain the tradition, we also need to adapt. We need to reach out to our under thirty population, to reach them in the world they live in.

Now some of you out there are saying to yourselves, “What in the world is he talking about?” And I need to tell you, “I don’t know.” Oh I have ideas: We need to be more active on social media; we need to provide more opportunities for service projects where folks can really be excited about making a difference in the world; somehow we need to be more accessible to folks that demographics refer to as millennials; and somehow we need to convey to all those folks who call themselves spiritual-but-not-religious, the value of community. To use John Wesley’s words, there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. No, I don’t know how we do all of this, but the Spirit knows; and the Spirit is at work. The Spirit is at work through our committees, through our various work teams, and through the hard work of several individuals.

Nothing is going to happen overnight. As I said last week, we need to have patience. Despite the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles on that day of Pentecost, despite the baptism of a few thousand people – the church was not built in a day. The changes in the church will be more evolutionary than revolutionary. Still, I believe the Spirit will lead us. I believe those changes will happen; and we will make a wonderful difference in the lives of those with whom we connect. Yes, the Spirit is alive at NOUMC.

I’m also celebrating today, because this is Confirmation Sunday. This is the day when three of our youth will come forward and state, “I affirm personally the promises that were made at my baptism.” And that alone is reason to celebrate. You know, I often hear people say, “The youth are the church of the future.” To that, I always say, “No. The youth are the church of the present, and anyone who doesn’t believe it has never been on one of our youth mission trips.” Derrick, Amy, Shane, this is your church; and I tell you, “The Holy Spirit is calling you.” There are things about this church that you think are great; and there are things about this church that you really don’t want to have anything to do with. And we need to hear those things. We, each of you, and each of us needs to work together on those things, because we need to adapt. This is your church, your community, and we’re calling on you to help make this the church for the twenty-first century.

And then there’s the rest of us. I’m 64 years old, and I’m probably pretty close to the average age of our congregation. But the Holy Spirit is calling each of us to be the church in the twenty-first century. As I lay hands on our confirmation class, I also, symbolically, lay hands on every member here. Today, our confirmation class will pledge to support the church with their prayer, their presence, their gifts, and their service. I pray that will also be your pledge. We’ll probably need some financial help. You’ll hear about that down the road. Some of you are already actively involved in volunteer efforts, and more opportunities will be coming. Today, I ask for your prayers. Prayers to support of confirmations; and prayers for the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the Spirit is alive in this place. Do you feel it? Will you live it?

Let us pray. . .

Lord,

Pour out your Holy Spirit on our confirmands,
and indeed on every member of our congregation.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on this church.

Lead us and guide us, as we go forward
to spread the good news of your amazing love
now and into the future.

This we pray in your holy name.

Amen.

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor
North Olmsted United Methodist Church