

God's Greatest Miracle
Acts 2:1-21
June 9, 2019 – Pentecost Sunday

Friends, it's fifty days after Easter. Welcome to Pentecost! Now, as I welcome you to Pentecost, I have some news that may shock some of you. The Holy Spirit was not born on Pentecost. The Holy Trinity was not born on Pentecost. The Trinity, those three natures of our one almighty God always existed, and always will exist. Our Bible opens with the words:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was void and without form, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

Your translation might say “the wind of God swept across the waters.” In Hebrew, the word for “wind” and “spirit” are the same word. And I find that appropriate and exciting. In today's scripture, we read how a fierce *wind* filled the entire house; and all that were there were filled with the *Holy Spirit*. But I get ahead of myself.

In Genesis Chapter 2, we read how God breathed the breath of life into Adam had he become a living being. By the way, in Greek the word for breath and spirit are the same word. And then, you may remember how Jesus came to the house on the evening of the resurrection, breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” No, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the living God, has always been present, working within the created order to bring love and peace to God's creation. So what's the “big deal” about Pentecost?

Pentecost initiated what I have referred to as the greatest miracle of all time. Pentecost has been called “the Birthday of the Church” because, on Pentecost, the church of Jesus Christ was born. If Pentecost had never happened, Christianity would have remained a small sect within Judaism, and probably would have eventually died out. (By the way, it was not called “Christianity” until several years after the Pentecost. Christians were simply called “followers in the way.”)

But the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of Jesus, and allowed them to speak in tongues. Now, as the Book of Acts talks about “speaking in tongues” don't hear that in the same light as our Pentecostal friends might use those words today. Acts is not talking about some “mumble-jumble” that at least outsiders don't understand. Again, I say that with all due respect to those who find “modern day speaking in tongues” meaningful. But, what Acts, Chapter 2 is all about is giving the followers of Jesus the gifts of foreign languages, so they could spread the Gospel, spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, spread the Good News of God's amazing love, to people across the world: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of

Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, and the list goes on. Pentecost initiates the gathering of “followers in the way” and the planting of churches across the known world. And, how often I have stated that the greatest miracle that has ever happened is that the Christian Church not only survived but thrived, grew in leaps and bounds through the first century, despite severe persecution for the Roman government. That’s what Pentecost is all about.

I have frequently told this congregation why I’m a United Methodist. I’m a United Methodist for three reasons: 1) I believe in and resonate with the Wesleyan doctrine of Grace; and most especially the belief in Prevenient Grace; 2) I believe in the Social Gospel, and the call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, and visit the sick and imprisoned, and I majorly support the United Methodist Committee on Relief as they reach out to help wherever help is needed; and 3) I find strength in our connectional system, the fact that every United Methodist Church is connected to every other United Methodist Church. Now, as you know, our denomination is currently in a struggle that may, in fact, result in a denominational split. Still, I trust that even if our connection becomes a bit smaller, we will continue to be a connectional church. That’s why I’m a United Methodist; but, why am I a Christian?

Have you ever ask yourself why you’re a Christian, besides maybe being born into a Christian family. I’m a Christians, because of the Holy Trinity. There is a common debate among “academic type” theologians: Is God transcendent; or is God immanent? Is God the creator, separate from creation, working from outside, observing the created order; or, is God a part of the creation, actively working within creation? I was a member of a graduate systematic theology class, when my professor asked that question; and I responded: “Yes.” The professor said, “What do you mean, ‘Yes’; God is either transcendent or immanent, you can’t have it both ways.” I replied, “The Holy Trinity allows me to have it both ways. I worship a God who is creator, who placed the entire created order into being, and who is continuing to create. And I worship and personally experience the Spirit of the Risen Christ, present in creation and present in my life, leading, guiding, strengthening, caring, and loving.” Yes, the Holy Trinity allows me to have it both ways; and that’s why I’m a Christian.

I have studied many of the major religions of the world. I have taught units in Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. I have a lot of respect and I might even say appreciation for these religions; but only Christianity allows me to have a true appreciation for the infinite and ultimate nature, the total vastness of our creator and at the same time have a truly “up close and personal” relationship with that same God. Only Christianity allows me to experience that amazing grace, the amazing love of God truly working within my life. That’s why I’m a Christian; and Pentecost is where it all began.

We would not be here today, at least not as a body of Jesus Christ sharing the love of Christ, if it were not for Pentecost. You see, while it sounds a bit simplistic, Pentecost truly is “the Birthday of the Church.” Pentecost is where it all began. The church has adapted in amazing ways through the ages. The first century church did not look like the fifth century church which did not look like the thirteenth century church which did not look like the eighteenth century church which does not look like the twenty-first century church. Yes, the church has been amazingly adaptable; and the church will continue to adapt. But the love of God and the ever-present spirit of the risen Christ in our lives has remained constant. And the Spirit of the Living God will remain with us truly until the end of time.

Thanks be to God for the presence of the Holy Spirit; and thanks be to God for the church, the vehicle that would spread the Good News of God’s amazing love, in the past, in the present, and even forever more.

Let us pray. . .

Holy Lord,

Thank you.

Thank you for your Spirit alive in our lives.

Thank you for your love renewing and refreshing our lives every day.

Thank you for your church, the body of Christ,
the source of all goodness, love and peace.

Help us to be the church you would have us be,
sharing the Good News of your Amazing Love
with your people everywhere.

Amen.

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