

BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH MAY 20, 2018

“WE”VE GOT THE SPIRIT”

Pastor Becky Smithey

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Olivia participated in Upward Cheerleading this past winter. Because she needed a One-on-One Buddy, I was the 2nd adult with the group. That was fine, except that I became the Assistant Cheerleading Coach! Becky Smithey—assistant coach?! Totally not me! Anyway, Olivia did some cheers that brought back some memories for me as I attended my school way back when. One of their cheers was, "Two bits, four bits, six bits a dollar, all for Upward, stand up and holler!"

And whenever the little basketball teams would hit a little dry spot, our cheerleaders would eye the crowd and yell out, "We've got spirit, yes we do! We've got spirit, how about you?" From across the court the fans would respond and yell back the same cheer: "Yes, Yes, yes we do. We've got spirit, how about you?" This would go on until it reached a fevered pitch.

Personally, I think I the little Upward Cheerleading Squad reminds me, in so many ways of the church we're a part of today. Most of us believe in Jesus Christ and much of what goes along with Him, but when it comes to speaking of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit we are much more garbled in our speech. Oftentimes, our robust yells fade into quiet whispers.

Now for the most part, we are familiar with the Holy Spirit's name, and we know that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. But can we confidently say, "We've got spirit, yes we do! We've got spirit, how about you?"

What do we think of when we think of Pentecost? Many of us think of fire and wind and the onslaught of a violent storm. We think of speaking in tongues and that unusual experience of "foreigners" hearing and understanding the "noble things of God" without the assistance of an interpreter. But there is much more to Pentecost. Sometimes we get so involved with the mysterious details of Pentecost that we miss the greater meaning of Pentecost.

The reality is that the Holy Spirit moved the disciples from sadness to joy and from survival to renewal. The reality is that the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus' followers at Pentecost. So what does Pentecost really mean?

First of all, Pentecost means that Jesus is forever present!

The ascension has occurred and Jesus has gone. The somewhat incompetent followers of the now-departed Jesus are in Jerusalem. Like numbers of others, they plan to participate in the Hebrew Harvest Festival known as Pentecost. Pentecost, as its prefix suggests, comes fifty days following Passover. At any rate, these followers of Jesus simply have no clue as to how they could carry out Jesus' last directive "to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth."

Abruptly, as unpredictable as a tornado crossing a Tennessee highway, He's present with them. Mysterious and powerful, He's alive and near.

So who is this energizing invisible presence? The followers speak of Him as the Holy Spirit. The same God who moved and worked through the earthly Jesus continues to move and work in the present.

The late Dr. Albert Outler, Methodist theologian and scholar, expressed this beautifully when he said, "Pentecost's consequence was that Jesus became alive again, and powerful, and forever thereafter present, wherever two or three are gathered in His name." Then he said, "Jesus was no longer a has-been."

If the truth be told, Christianity could not have survived for long on the strength of its historical memories of Jesus of Nazareth.

Explaining why prayer was so difficult for her, a woman stammered, "It's just that Jesus seems so long ago and so far away."

It is simply astonishing that Jesus has not been forgotten long ago. As you recall, He lived a very short time in a backward part of the world. He wrote no books and left no pictures. He shied away from all publicity. Even after his miracles, He would whisper, "Don't tell anybody." He died on a lonely hillside between two thieves, and even His resurrection occurred rather quietly. Thus, every day Jesus is ignored or denied or overlooked by countless numbers. So why has He not been forgotten?

There is simply no other explanation than the activity of God through the Holy Spirit. What happened back then 2,000 years ago is made contemporary by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes the manger, the cross and the empty tomb all relevant to us today.

Several years back I received a letter from a lady who was regularly attending our church. She spoke of how her life had been changed in the last couple of years. She spoke of finding renewal and meaning and peace. But her opening sentence said it all, "I am writing you at this Easter time to let you know of the resurrection of one 'continuing visitor' me." This visiting church friend had experienced Jesus Christ anew through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Pentecost means the church community is empowered! Initially, we see this empowerment in the community "coming together."

Luke reports that "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." (2:1) Were they all there? Yes. Were they all together? Yes. Were they all in one place? Yes.

This community context is also mentioned in Acts 1:14 where the followers of Jesus are said to be "all united in their devotion to prayer." In addition, it is clearly stated in Luke 24:49 where Jesus invited his followers "to stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." It is almost as if being together in the context of community, ready and expectant, provides the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

At any rate, Pentecost was a communal experience, and it was only because they were together that "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." (2:4)

Billy Graham said in his travels he often met men and women who were very different from him! And yet after a few minutes it was almost as if they had known each other all their lives. Why? Because they both knew Jesus Christ. Their common spiritual bond cut through all the barriers that separated them, and they enjoyed fellowship as members of God's family.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit blows where He wills, it is clearly in the direction of community building. The Spirit blows in the direction of overcoming divisions, removing the barriers that separate people and bringing them together. As we recall, "In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. All are one in Christ." (Gal. 3:28) Wherever community building is taking place, there is the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, being in community, ready and expectant, gave birth to the church.

Next, we see this empowerment in the community "going public."

This has to be one of the main points of Acts chapter two. Jesus had been raised from the dead, shown to be Lord and Savior, but nobody knew how to talk about it. And few possessed the courage to speak of it. But then at Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended and things were brought to speech. People began to talk to one another and then to those on the streets.

Pentecost means that a new wind of mission work is let loose upon the earth. Pentecost means that God is empowering the church to reach out "to offer them Christ." At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit shoves the church from the safety of locked doors in the Upper Room into the struggles and realities of the world's needs and meaninglessness without Christ.

Yes, what happened at Pentecost can happen to us. Somewhere, besides the Bible, I read that on the night of the crucifixion, it was Peter near the fire. He followed afar off and warmed himself by the fire. Then it was Peter in the fire when he failed to live up to his boast and denied his Lord and got into trouble. But on the day of Pentecost, it was Peter on

fire, empowered by the Holy Spirit to courageous witness. And we are told that what happened to Peter happened to all the disciples. And, indeed, it can happen to us.

A large number of new members were received into a church and were asked what brought them to this particular church. Several answers were given--newspaper advertising, hearing the services on radio and television, the minister, the youth program, the music, etc.--but by far, the largest number said, "I came to this church because of a personal invitation from one of the members."

Pentecost means that the church community is empowered.

And, finally, Pentecost means that there are certain languages that everybody understands! One of the real miracles of Pentecost was not so much charismatic speaking but charismatic listening. The listeners heard about "God's deeds of power" in their own multiple tongues or languages. Thus, Pentecost was a powerful miracle of hearing as well as speaking.

Now, this truth should also speak loud and clear to the contemporary church. For sure, preachers should preach the Gospel of Christ in a biblical, relevant and vital way. The Gospel message should also address the people where they actually live. Then, it should speak to them in languages they can truly understand and move them to ask the question, "What does this mean?" (2:12)

There was a little Christian lady from my hometown named Ethel Young. Every Sunday for 25 years Miss Ethel went to the City County Jail to teach the prisoners their Sunday School lesson. It didn't matter to her whether these prisoners had committed a major or a minor crime, whether they were black, white or whatever. Every Sunday for 25 years she was faithfully there.

Then one Sunday Miss Ethel had to miss because she was ill. During her illness she received many get well cards, the kind you and I might receive or send. Because we were friends, Miss Ethel showed me one of the cards she had received. When I opened it, there written in the messiest handwriting I have ever seen were these words: "We miss you very much." Signed, "Your boys at the City County Jail."

I repeat, as God's people we are to share God's story in languages that people who have never heard it can understand. Come, O Holy Spirit! Do it again!

Let us pray, please. Lord, as at that first Pentecost, we ask that you do it again. Let your Holy Spirit so fill us as individuals and churches that we may be empowered anew to become your instruments of healing and hope and transformation in a world of desperate need. So bind our faith and works together in a new wholeness that we may make a profound difference and bring glory to your Holy Name. Amen.

