

### PENTECOST – THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH

Acts 2: 1 – 21 May 23, 2010|

Pilgrim Bud Precise

I love Pentecost. It is the birthday of the church. The Spirit of God is poured out on these gathered disciples. This unorganized and mournful band of eleven disciples gathered at the home of one of the group. They were a group. They had been formed together by Jesus. They knew the devotion of Jesus to God. They also remembered the connection of their ancestors to God – ancestors whose stories we know – Abraham, Sarah, Hagar as well as Isaac and Rebecca. They believed this Jesus was Immanuel – “God with us.” Although they had been apart, they decided to gather early in the morning to worship.

They needed the support of each other because they were a religious minority. As they worshiped, there was a noise so loud that they could not ignore it. The Spirit rested on them as tongues of fire. This sound came like the rush of a violent wind and it filled not only the room, it filled them. I think of the wind in this story of Pentecost as the same “wind” that blew “in the beginning” – God’s creation in the Genesis story. Here at Pentecost, God is still creating. This time, God is creating the church. Our text says there were all these other people living in Jerusalem. And I am sure there were many gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of

Pentecost – the celebration of harvest. None of these people seemed to have trouble understanding the voice of the Spirit. They each heard in their own language. And they were amazed and astonished. “How do we hear these Galileans speaking in our own native tongue? There is this chorus of praise. But not everyone, even on this day of Pentecost, was convinced that a good thing was happening among those caught up in the Spirit of God. Some, in their amazement were willing to attribute the spirit to God. Others simply thought the disciples and other visitors were drunk. But Peter steps forward to speak. This same Peter we remember as quick to speak, and the one who denied Jesus on the night of his arrest, he becomes this rock. I don’t know what he said. It is one of those sermons I wish had been recorded in the scriptures. Peter did draw upon the Jewish prophetic tradition and he called the names of their ancestors. The crowd could identify with his words. He reminded them of the prophet Joel who had written words about this very moment of Pentecost.

Peter uses the words of prophesy. The Holy Spirit will be poured out on all people – young, old, men, women, free and slaves. No one will be excluded. In response to this sermon, 3000 people

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joined the church – truly the Birthday of the Church. It is an amazing story. Now, take a moment and look at us. How did we get here? How did we become a part of this fellowship that gathers around a common table? How is it that we are called “God’s People?” For that matter, how does any congregation gather together today? I think we are like the people on the day of Pentecost. Somewhere, sometime, some place this Spirit of God descended upon us. In our different ways of speaking, in our differing opinions, our conflicting doctrines, the spirit came among us and we began to hear one another. We who were strangers were made into one family. It was the birthday of the church. We are not here, all together, because we share the same opinions, we all share the same socioeconomic level, or have the same backgrounds. We are here through the miraculous, unexpected work of God’s spirit. The transforming power of the Spirit creates new life, a new community, and a new world.

I have a friend who likes to describe signs of the Holy Spirit. Are any of these true for you? The Spirit’s presence is the peaceful power of the still small voice, and the warming of the heart. Sometimes, the presence of the Spirit brings tears to our eyes. The Spirit manifests itself in loud praise and in quiet meditation, in shouts and dances of joy, and in an overwhelming sense of gratitude and release. The Holy Spirit brings a sense of calm, clarity, and of things coming together. The Holy Spirit is God’s life-giving gift to us.

Do you think you have any life-giving gifts? I hope you do. Let me remind you of some of those life-giving gifts we are going to need in this new place. This is the first church home that many of our children will remember – I am thinking of Larkin, Austin, Liam and Memphis. And we have other children that will need our life-giving gift of teaching, of listening, of encouraging,

Of affirming, of love. As members of Christ’s body, we will need to use our gifts with these children. There will be people who walk in here who will need to know and feel that they are accepted and belong here. They are people who have been told by society, family, and even some church fellowship, that they must repent and change their sexual orientation if they want God to love them. There are other people who at one time loved and served in a church who came to understand that they were not welcome because of their way of thinking about God and Jesus. I believe the life-giving Spirit of

God can call them to life again. There are people living in poverty who need not only food and clothes from us, they need us to be advocates for them in our society, to speak up for them and to stand with them. Aren’t you just excited about being in this place today? I stand here and look at you. We have made hard decisions, we have set a course that has brought us to this day. It has taken a lot of work, a lot of praying, a lot of decisions. I think of Ethel, who worked on

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clearing the land for the church on Montclair. And it seemed right that John, who played on the grounds as they built that church, to be our liturgist for today. I think of Mary Lou, and Pat, and Fran, and Grover who will not have to find a space to park and catch an elevator to get to worship. I think of our children who will have a safe play ground. I think of those who will come to share our labyrinth when we get it ready. Each person here today could stand and speak words of thanksgiving today.

Pentecost. The birthday of Pilgrim . Pentecost, that life-giving gift of the Spirit of God. It is not just the change of address that we need to celebrate today. Let us celebrate the coming of the Spirit of God among us – for that Spirit of God will change us forever..