

It's the Spirit not spirits©

Acts 2:1-21

May 15, 2016

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What a very special day this is in the life of the Church – the Christian Church in the world, and in this particular church in this particular time. It is special for the worldwide Church of which we are a part, because today is Pentecost Sunday – the day we celebrate the birthday of the Christian Church.

And it is very special for us here in Holly on this 15th day in May, in the year 2016, because four young people, who have been taking classes and studying and considering what it means to be a Christian are going to profess their faith in Jesus Christ today. They are confirming the faith their parents professed for them when they were baptized.

I am a firm believer in writing down what we believe and Pastor Shaun and I worked together, helping and encouraging these confirmants to write several times what they were coming to believe about who God is, about who Jesus is in the world and to them each personally.

We talked about what it means to be a full, active member of the Presbyterian Church, (USA) – about their rights and privileges as a member. Of course, up until today, they have been what we call *baptized members*. That's what our children are (who have been baptized) until they have been confirmed in the faith that was proclaimed at their baptism.

But today, in their confirmation, they will have every right that all active members have. They can vote, can be elected as an elder, can serve on teams. And we made sure they heard that they are not what some people like to say – *The Church of Tomorrow*. No. Our youth are the *Church today*; as much a part of the Church as any of us are.

And we will be better if we take that to heart and listen to and try to implement their ideas and ask them to be leaders, along with even the oldest active member, who also continues to be equally valued and needed.

And last of all we focused on the Holy Spirit. Or, as we liked to say, imitating the fun Sparkhouse DVD, as it taught about the Holy Spirit, “Don’t worry, sweetie, it’s just the Holy Ghost!” That could have been a good sermon title for this Pentecost Sunday. But, I went with one of ideas from the men’s Bible study group.

I love having the men and women discuss the Scriptures for Sunday and then send me their ideas for sermon titles. I got some great – maybe a little quirky – possibilities for this sermon. The men won this time. It’s the Spirit, not spirits.

So there they were. The disciples and probably some of the other believers of Jesus, gathered together in a house in Jerusalem – waiting. They were being obedient to what Jesus had told them to do before he left them.

"Stay in Jerusalem and wait there until the Advocate, the Holy Spirit comes and gives you power and courage and everything you need." (my paraphrase)

Oh my! They *were* waiting and they *expected* the Spirit to come, because Jesus promised it would. But I'm guessing they had no inkling of what was really coming!

They weren't the only ones in Jerusalem that day, of course. It was a very special day in the life of the Jewish faith, you see. There was a festival that celebrated and remembered the birth of the Torah – the time when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments that would become the law (the Torah) that was followed by the Jews. What a special day it was!

There were people who came from all around – people from every nation in the world. All devout Jews who were excited and honored to get to be in the Holy City – Jerusalem! One commentator I read said they were probably all part of the Roman Empire so they most likely all spoke Greek. But they also had their own native tongue which they preferred.

Now, just picture this. Really grasp what that day was. It was a moment in time when the old faith and the new faith met. The Old Commandments and the New Commandments crashed together – meshed together and something new was born! On that very day!

Out in the streets and all over the city there were thousands of faithful Jews talking and laughing and worshipping; and up in this room there were a little motley crew of Jesus followers who suddenly had the socks knocked off of them!

We read that there was this sound like a mighty, rushing, violent wind! I know a sound like that – a tornado sound – a wild and uncontrollable, loud noise that is deafening and frightening and awesome.

And then we read that the disciples were sort of struck by something like tongues of fire over each of their heads and then a most unusual thing began to happen. All the fear they had held inside since Jesus' death vanished! Boldly – they began to speak. They began to preach. They were not speaking in their own language, however, but in different languages!

They were speaking in languages that they did not know but that someone in the crowd knew. Yes, every language of every nation that was represented there in the city that day was spoken by one of the disciples!

Can't you just imagine it? As they began feeling this unusual, mighty power within and then start speaking, their tongues not something they had control of, their eyes wide with surprise and I'll bet finally some smiles and maybe even a little – or a lot – of holy laughter at what God was doing among them.

They went out and spoke in these languages to the crowds of people. And more and more came gathering around as they heard their own native tongue spoken there in Jerusalem. And they heard about Jesus from these unusual preachers.

But of course, there are always skeptics, aren't there? There are always some who would ruin a good party. "They must be filled with new wine. Drunkards!"

And thus we have our sermon title which is basically what Peter said to the crowd. "It's the Spirit, not spirits. They are not drunk. It's only nine o'clock in the morning.

"No, they are not filled with spirits, but with the Holy Spirit." He could have said, "Don't worry, sweeties, it's only the Holy Ghost!"

And Peter went on to preach an amazing sermon that day, quoting from the Scriptures they all knew, reminding them of the prophecies of Joel, of how God said He would pour out his spirit on all people, and all shall be saved. Peter preached that now the prophecies of old have been fulfilled in Jesus.

And about 2,000 people became believers in Jesus Christ on that day. What a spiritual meeting that was! Can you imagine the joy? They went back to their own countries and spread the Good News there, and the Christian Church was born!

And people today come to worship in Christian Churches all over the world wearing red, remembering those tongues of fire. And people celebrate and praise God 2,000 years later for the coming of the Holy Spirit because it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we continue to preach with conviction about Jesus and what God has done for us through His Son.

And because of the Holy Spirit we continue to have young people, and old people, and those in between coming to profess that they believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, becoming members of churches so they too can continue to carry out Jesus' mission of healing, forgiveness and love; they can continue telling others about God's amazing love shown to the world through Christ.

Shaun and I emphasized to our young confirmands that this is a beginning. Too many times we see young people growing up in the church – going through Sunday School and coming to worship and finally, being confirmed – only to drop out and not come back again.

The church in Kansas where Fred was pastor had a huge problem with bats in the belfry (and everywhere else). Someone suggested we put them through confirmation and confirm them. "Then," they said, "we'd never see them again. That would take care of the problem!"

Confirmation is not the end. It marks the beginning of an active life as a follower of Jesus Christ and an important member of the community of faith – the Body of Christ. The Church.

Today we will hear each of our young people read what they have written as their statements of faith. Each one is different. Some are longer; some are short and sweet. But this too is a beginning. I have written numerous statements of faith over the years and each time it is a little different, a little deeper, a little more mature as I have grown in my faith.

And so – today, on this very special day as we celebrate the birth of the Church; the coming of the Holy Spirit in power – let us celebrate with great joy as Ellie Goldsmith, Emily Martin, Ben Muenzer and Angel Vliet share with us what they have written, and then profess their faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us rejoice that God continues to add to our numbers here at Holly Presbyterian Church, and especially to the Church worldwide.

Let us be in prayer for these young people as they share with us for the first time in their lives and hope it will just be the beginning of sharing their faith as their lives unfold.

As they come up, we will sing our prayer song through twice. And let me remind you all that whenever you feel afraid, you can know that you have been given the gift, the comfort, the encouragement and the power of the Holy Spirit.

And if that power ever seems a bit strong, like it did on the day of Pentecost, may you hear these words loud and clear:

“Don’t worry, sweetie, it’s just the Holy Ghost!”

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