

**Acts 2:36-47**

**A New Revival©**

**May 22, 2016**

***Trinity Sunday***

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As you can see by the heading on the bulletin, today is – according to the Christian calendar – Trinity Sunday. With the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new and powerful way upon believers, we now have this complete – although ever mysterious – sense of God in three persons.

God the Father, the Creator of all things, the Sovereign One who is always here, always working for our good, always loving but who also is righteous and just.

And we have spent a great deal of time studying and considering who the Son of God is – Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. He is the One sent by God to deliver humans from the bonds of sin; who, in his dying on the cross, forgave us our sins and in his rising from the dead gives us new life – both here and now and into eternity.

And last Sunday we observed and celebrated the One whom Jesus promised to send – the Holy Spirit – who gives us incredible courage and power to be disciples, to boldly tell the good news of what Jesus has done to a world of people who may not know it but who are hungry to hear about that kind of love and abundant life.

God in three persons. Blessed Trinity. It is a difficult concept to comprehend and I'm not sure any of us ever really can. But we don't believe that there are three beings – three gods. We believe God has three different ways of being. Kind of like the egg.

We have the shell, the yolk and the white. One egg. Three parts. Too simplified maybe. But it is one way of seeing how something – or someone can be three, yet still be one.

We talked a lot about Emmanuel during Advent and Christmas. In the doctrine of the incarnation, we hold to the believe that somehow God is with us in the person of Jesus. Emmanuel means "God with us."

And so we also have the Spirit of God – that we cannot see, as we physically saw the Son, but we can experience by the sense we have of His presence with us, comforting us when we are hurting or grieving; nudging us along when we are trying to discern where God wants us to be.

We are aware of the Spirit helping us to pray; convicting our hearts to recognize when we have sinned and need to ask for forgiveness.

We experience the Spirit giving us courage when we are afraid; giving us words to say when we aren't sure; opening our eyes and minds when we read Scripture, or hear a sermon,

Whether the sermon is a good one, or not, if we are open to the Holy Spirit teaching us, we will hear something God wants us to learn.

Last week, we heard how the Holy Spirit came like a rushing wind and like tongues of fire that touched each disciple and how, suddenly, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and were able to preach and tell all who were gathered in Jerusalem – many who came from other nations, speaking other languages – about what God had done through Jesus, the true Messiah.

And we read that thousands of people heard the good news and became believers. And those spread out to their own countries and the gospel began to spread throughout the world, and Christ's Church was born.

It was like a new revival. (I thank the women's Bible Study group for that sermon title). As I said last week, those devout Jews were gathered to observe and give thanks for the law of Moses; for the Ten Commandments God had given them.

But now, they became revived in their spirits, in their lives and in their faith as they are moving it to a new place – to a faith of joy and new life in Christ.

And they asked "Now what shall we do?" (That, by the way, was my favorite title suggested by the Men's Bible Study group.) It's a good question, isn't it? Don't you think that revival of the spirit in your faith and your heart, that repentance and receiving God's grace by being forgiven your sins would naturally lead to the question – "Now what?"

Not "now what else will God do for me," even though there will be plenty of blessings in the future, but the question is "now – in response to this grace I've been given – what do I do?"

Luke gives us an example of what the very first, earliest church looked like. He tells us "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers."

That word – "devoted" – means they "held fast to" or they "persevered in" the teachings of the apostles. They were not only determined to grow in this newfound faith but they were in awe of what God was doing!

When was the last time you were in awe of something? What are the kinds of things that cause "awe" in us today? That just almost takes your breath away? That is so stunning you suddenly feel like you are in a holy place?

My daughter, Annie, was over yesterday morning and she asked about a picture I have hanging in my bedroom. It was taken on a day when my mom and dad and my sister, Cindy were visiting us in Tennessee. We had taken a road trip through the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and had spent the night in our favorite little spot in the world – Maggie Valley.

On the way back toward Gatlinburg, my stepdad saw some big, white flowers and wanted to stop and look at them. My mother was already sick and had been awake coughing all night. She said she just wanted to stay in the car and rest.

Cindy and Dad went off across the road to look at the flowers and I started walking along the running creek that went all the way through the forest and into Gatlinburg. Cindy and I had been listening to blue grass hymns and talking about how we were “making memories,” knowing mom’s health was failing.

I stopped and looked back up the creek and there were these beams of light breaking through the trees and down into the water - all misty and smoky looking, and it just felt like the Spirit of God was so present, so sweet and mysterious, pouring out love right there in that beautiful spot. I got Mom to come with me and she too, felt the same awe that I felt in looking at the rays of sun on the water.

Dad took the picture, had a psalm engraved on the frame and they sent it as a gift to me. It was a simple thing that caught me off guard and filled my heart with awe. I had a new revival in my own spirit that day. It truly was a memory I hold dear to my heart.

Luke says they devoted themselves to “fellowship.” In Greek that word is *koinonia*. God’s gift of the Spirit unites the different believers into a common *koinonia*. Luke uses a well-known phrase from Greek philosophy indicating friendship: “all things in common.”

***The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*** on Acts says: “A fellowship of believers shares more than common beliefs and core values; they display a profound regard for one another’s spiritual and physical well-being as a community of friends.”

Not only did this new community worship daily in the temple and pray together, but they also broke bread together. They surely did celebrate The Lord’s Supper – probably every time they gathered – but also they enjoyed meals together. Maybe those were the first pot-luck dinners in the Christian Church.

Luke was probably recalling the practice of devout Jewish families, who, following worship would gather for a meal – symbolic of their social and spiritual solidarity with each other.

Of course, the thing we, in our modern western thinking, have a hard time wrapping our minds around is the practice of selling all their possessions and using them all for the common good – making sure there was equity among the believers.

At that point, in this early church, evangelism was important – but the primary purpose of the common life was to nurture Christian community. It was so new, so alive and vibrant, yet still vulnerable and fragile. (Of course, it is still important for us today, don’t you agree?)

The new community of faith would soon have its troubles and divisions but for a little while they held all things in common, supporting one another, learning and growing together, sharing meals, praying, celebrating The Lord's Supper, worshipping.

In the beginning the apostles were key to teaching and nurturing believers. But they all began to be nurturers as well. We today, in the reformed tradition, believe strongly in the "priesthood of all believers." That is, there may be ministers (pastors) who are key in leading, but we are all ministers in a sense.

All believers are called to use their gifts to further the growth of the Church and to tell others about God's amazing love shown to us through Jesus. All believers are given gifts for ministry – some to teach, some to heal, some to lead, some for music, some for compassion and care.

I think we, here at Holly Presbyterian, may be leaning into a new revival ourselves. At least we might be praying for that and be open to where the Spirit leads us.

And because we are blessed in so many ways, we too should be asking "Now what do we do?" What do we do to make sure those who have less have equality – have enough.

What do we do to make sure those who are being treated with injustice have someone to stand up for them in the name of the one Holy God who is Just and Righteous?  
What do we do to reach out to those who are lonely, bullied, ostracized homeless and lost?

How are we doing today as the Christian Church in a post-modern world? In an era that is actually called a "post-Christian era" the mission field is not just in foreign lands but right here in our own country.

And the poverty and homelessness and crime in our country is overwhelming – so many people who feel hopeless. Does the way our social environment look measure how the Church is doing today, I wonder?

Of course, we who are small in number, certainly cannot do it all. We have to discern what our best gifts are here in this particular congregation and use those gifts to the best of our ability with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit who is definitely among us.

You know how I know that is true? You keep coming and worshipping. You keep taking positions of leadership, of service, of caring and teaching. You keep giving to the church so that we can take care of our building – this sacred space – and we can continue on with the mission and ministry God has called us to. The Holy Spirit keeps adding new people to our church family.

And, the Holy Spirit continues to nudge people – like Sara Pettit who will be ordained this morning as Elder – like all of you who have been ordained and taken that call so seriously; like

all of you who perhaps have not yet been called to serve as Elder but never-the-less have been called to serve.

We are not here just to have ourselves fed and satisfied. That's good and necessary, and sometimes we need to just rest and *be* in worship and among our Christian friends, but we are called to be here for a purpose. We are equipped to do all the things that God wants this church, right here in Holly, to do.

So let us pray for a new revival today and let us continue to be faithful in asking "Now what shall we do?" If we ask, we can count on the Holy Spirit to show us and then to empower us to do it.

Amen.

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