

## Wesley United Methodist Church

June 8, 2014

"Pentecost."

Acts 2:1-8, 11b-21,

A family driving a large camper pulled up in front of the church just as the pastor started toward home. Desiring to be friendly, the pastor introduced himself and expressed his admiration for the camper. The man of the family told him rather proudly: "This camper sleeps eight people." Then he asked: "What is the capacity of your church, Pastor?" The pastor replied rather glumly, "Oh, it sleeps about eighty."

It is embarrassing sometimes how little the modern church resembles the church that first Pentecost. The sound of a windstorm, tongues of fire, disciples speaking in different languages, thousands being added to the church and lots of excitement. Excitement everywhere.

Churches are more like a small town I heard about. A traveler stopped at a gas station in the town to buy gasoline. He asked if there was a place close by to get something to eat. The attendant answered, "No, there's just the cafe down the road and it closes at 6 o'clock." "What do you folks do around here for excitement?" the motorist asked. "Well," the attendant said, "round here, folks don't get excited."

Such could be said of many churches. They are an indication that we have forgotten what the church is really about. If we go back to the Day of Pentecost, the day the church was born, we will see that God gave us the church to satisfy one of the great hungers of our time, "Empowerment."

Have you heard that word before? It is a current buzz word in our society. Everyone nowadays wants to be empowered. We want to feel that we have control over our lives. We want to feel we can take charge of our destinies. We want to know we can follow the dreams of our hearts. But many of us feel powerless. Some of us are held back by our lack of initiative. Others of us are held back by a deprived environment. Others by barriers in our society. Still, we hunger to believe we can pull ourselves out of the muck and the mire of a disappointing and dismal situation. And the church is the place where true empowerment takes place.

Can we not see that Pentecost is about empowerment? A handful of farmers, fisherman, tax collectors, and housewives became empowered that they turned the Roman empire upside down. That's quite an accomplishment. It may very well be the greatest single act of empowerment in recorded history. How did they do it?

In the first place, they opened themselves to the Spirit of the living God. That's always the first step in any victory. It is to place ourselves in God's hands.

They were also empowered by their association with one another. They ate together, they prayed together, they sang together, they had all things in common. They built each other up in the faith. That's the way the Christian community was designed to regenerate itself. We are to build one another up, encourage one another. There is power in such encouragement. When children are given a word of praise or commendation, there is an immediate upward surge of new energy. When the children are criticized and discouraged, their physical energy takes a sudden nosedive. My guess is that those results could be duplicated in adults. When we are praised our energy levels go up. When we are criticized our energy levels go down. What then, is one of the most helpful roles that we can play in one another's lives as Christ's body? It is to praise one another, encourage one another, pray for one another. That's energizing, enabling, empowering.

Chuck Swindoll says that in the Marines he was taught you should dig a hole big enough for two when preparing for combat. There's nothing quite like fighting a battle alone. There's something strengthening about having a buddy with you that keeps you from panic. We all need someone to lean on. We all need another's show of support. Professional speaker Joe Larson once said, "My friends didn't believe that I could become a successful speaker. So I did something about it. I went out and found some new friends." There is some wisdom there. Many of us can think of times when encouragement from a friend made a difference in the world. Especially when that friend was a person of deep spirituality.

A Harvard University professor once sought an interview with Phillip Brooks, the beloved preacher of another generation. The professor had a serious problem and needed help. He spent an hour with Phillip Brooks and came out a changed man. Later it dawned on him that he had forgotten to ask Brooks about his problem! He said, "I did not care; I had found out that what I needed was not the solution of a special problem, but the infection (contagion) of a triumphant spirit." A triumphant spirit is contagious. That was the spirit with which Simon Peter stood up to address that large throng on the day of Pentecost. Three thousand souls were added to the church that day. And daily more souls were added by the contagious spirit of the community of faith which was the church. That's the kind of contagious spirit I dream for in this church! There's no limit to what we might accomplish if we were empowered by God and empowered by one another.

Finally, the church on the Day of Pentecost was empowered by their willingness to serve others. If they had kept the Good News to themselves, their excitement would have withered soon.

May I say to you that the church of Jesus Christ will never be what God intends it to be until we have that kind of passion for reaching out to the world outside these walls. When we have the passion that the early church had for introducing boys and girls, men and women, to the Man from Galilee, we will discover a power we never dreamed possible. Pentecost is about empowerment. A small group of folks turned the world upside down. May we, like they, be empowered by God's Spirit, by our life as the community of faith, and by our love of a world for which Christ died.