

Wesley United Methodist Church

June 4, 2017

“Unity of the Spirit.”

Acts 1:3b-5, 2:1-21

On the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the waiting disciples, there were a number of extraordinary events that happened: there was the sound of a rushing wind, tongues of fire appeared, and they all began to speak in other languages as the Holy Spirit gave them ability. The Jews who were visiting Jerusalem, from all nations, hearing them speak in their own tongues, were amazed at this startling phenomenon. They came to the hasty and false conclusion that the disciples must be drunk, and accused them, saying, “They have had too much wine.” “Not so,” said Peter, “It’s only nine in the morning.

Far too early to be polluted. They are not drunk, but rather filled with the Holy Spirit. This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

In other words, the Holy Spirit cannot make you drunk. The Spirit will not cloud your mind, it won’t cause you to talk stupidly, it won’t make you an unsafe driver, and it won’t give you a hangover. The disciples were not inebriated, but rather filled with God, the Holy Spirit. They had not indulged on the fruit of the vine, not had they drunk the nectar of the gods, but they had been filled with the Divine Nectar, the new wine from heaven.

Before his Ascension, Jesus had wanted his followers to know that the same Lord who had called them and ministered to them in his physical presence would now, through the Holy Spirit, always be with them. They must realize that the crucified, resurrected, and now ascended Lord would return.

The same Spirit which dwelt in him would now dwell in them.

On this anniversary of the Day of Pentecost, when the Christian Church was born, let us be deeply grateful that the Spirit of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, has come to us. Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be impossible. We would have no understanding of spiritual things without the Spirit of truth. We would never enjoy Christian fellowship with one another without the unity of the Spirit. We would never be effective Christian witnesses without the Spirit’s power. In fact, we would have no life without the life-giving Spirit.

Just as the body without breath is a corpse, so a church without the Holy Spirit is dead!

Since the Holy Spirit’s presence in our midst is so essential for our very existence, we should long for the Holy Spirit, pray for the Holy Spirit, and open ourselves to his coming. What do you suppose would happen to us as individual Christians, and as a church, if we adopt the same formula to ready ourselves for the Spirit as did those early disciples in the upper room?

The disciples met in the upper room, and for ten days they waited and prayed for the promise of God. Jesus wanted his disciples to be people who would not rush in headlong on their own, independent of God’s guidance.

He wanted them to wait for God. What an impossible task that must have seemed to those early believers. Christ was alive and they wanted to act.

Jesus said “wait” and they wanted to “move.”

“Wait,” is a cruel word for our frenetic, frenzied, busy selves. We are so impatient. Why write it when you can phone, fax or email it? We expect instant results and instant action. After all, we have instant foods, and instant drinks, so why not instant results and instant responses? We can’t wait. We want people to understand now! We want people to change now! Waiting for the Lord’s leading and timing is so hard, but still Jesus said to do it: “Wait for the gift my Father has promised.” Don’t run ahead of God, for if you run without waiting on God, you will run with no power and often with disastrous results. If you try to “hurry up” the hatching of a baby bird or chick, you only destroy the baby to be born.

So, too, when we run ahead of God do we destroy the wonderful plan that he has in mind.

So, having to be told to “wait,” the disciples went to that upper chamber to wait and to pray. In fact, they devoted themselves to prayer. What must it have been like as they met in that room for the first two or three days? They would be gathered in close physical proximity, but their wills might well have been miles apart. The confinement would lend itself to arguments and dissension.

Remember, these were normal people like you and me. There had been lots of disagreements among them previously. They had experienced sharp divisions over rank, importance, and who would have the highest seat. They were strong-willed persons with conflicting ideas. But the waiting and the praying began to do something, for the scripture say that they (on the tenth day of waiting), when the Spirit came, were of one accord! Imagine that! As they prayed and tarried they became fully open to God and more loving toward each other.

Such harmony and peace prepared their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit.

A man tells of being on a bus tour in Rome which was led by a guide who spoke English. Their first stop was a basilica in a piazza which was surrounded by several lanes of relentless Roman traffic. After they were all safely dropped off, the group climbed the steps for a quick tour of the church. Then they spread out to board the bus, which was parked across the street from the church. The frantic guide shouted for the group to stay together. He hollered out to them, "You cross one by one, they hit you one by one. But if you cross together, they think you will hurt the car." There is always much to be said for unity, particularly in the unity of the Spirit.

Contentious people cannot receive the Spirit's presence. If, as individuals, and as a church, we desire the Holy Spirit, it might be well to ask ourselves: "Am I in unity with God? Is everyone forgiven? Has restitution been made?

Am I holding a grudge? Am I in love and harmony with God and neighbor?"

Until we are of one mind and heart, until we love each other as Christ loves us still, until all broken relationships are healed, the power of Pentecost cannot come to us!

It is rather remarkable at how specific the scriptures are concerning the events of the Day of Pentecost. We know a lot of the particulars of this gift from heaven. Have you ever noticed that everything that is precious to you is related to time persons and place? For instance, I will never forget the first time I met my husband, Walt. It was March, 18, 1972 in the afternoon. It was at a birthday party at a distant town. I recall what he wore, I even know what I wore.

We remember more detailed when we have a time line. Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus to persecute members of the Way (new Christians) when he was near Damascus, he was blinded by a light from heaven and a voice spoke to him, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" We know the events that followed. How he was blind and did not eat or drink for three days.

John Wesley's wonderful witness of the Spirit came in a particular day of the week (Wednesday May 24), at a particular time (8:45 pm), on a particular street (Aldersgate), in a particular city (London), with a particular people (Peter Boler and some Moravians).

And the precious promise of the Holy Spirit came in a particular and specific way as well. It was 50 days after the resurrection, ten days after the ascension, in the upper room, in Jerusalem, some time before 9 am with the waiting disciples. There was a sound of wind, the sight of tongues of fire, and a speaking in other languages. Important events are enhanced with detail.

So we rejoice that the result of the waiting, the praying, and the obedience of the disciples was the promised Holy Spirit. What glorious consequences accompanied the event. Remember, these were the less-than-perfect disciples of the Lord. They had been cantankerous, frightened, brash followers of Jesus, and now they react as men possessed—indeed they were—possessed of the mighty power and presence of the Holy Spirit! They went everywhere preaching the Word and witnessing for the Savior. Peter stood to preach on that Day of Pentecost and under the power of the Holy Spirit such conviction fell upon the hearers that 3,000 souls gave themselves to Christ.

We would do well to remember that conditions do not always have to be the best of God to do his mighty works. It is the powerful, life-giving Spirit that always makes the difference. Amen.