

“What Does It Mean”

Acts 2: 1-12

Pentecost Sunday

May 27, 2012

Carbondale Community United Methodist Church

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Dramatic Reading of Acts 2: 1-4

Reading of Acts 2: 5-21

I. What Does This Mean: The Pentecost Setting in Jerusalem

What does this mean? Violent rushing of wind. Divided tongues of fire. People loudly talking in other languages. What in the world does this crazy cacophony of sound that the church celebrates as Pentecost really mean?

At this very event itself, people asked, “What does this mean?” The scripture says, “All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” For those 120 or so followers assembled inside, the rushing of wind meant an end to their waiting. Jesus had been with them for forty days after the resurrection of Easter. Ten days ago, Jesus had ascended into heaven. For almost two weeks now, the disciples and their small band of followers gathered in Jerusalem to watch and pray. These first Christians waited for what God might do next.

They waited together while still celebrating the Jewish festival of Pentecost. On the 50th day after Passover, Jews from the surrounding countryside brought their first fruits from the barley harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem. They remembered the giving of the 10 commandments on Mt. Sinai. Jews from Jerusalem and the diaspora celebrated God’s faithfulness.

Perhaps this Jewish band of the faithful to Jesus had already given an offering earlier that morning. Now they waited. They talked softly among themselves, wondering

if Jesus was coming back soon. Perhaps they whispered how John the Baptist promised them several years ago that Jesus would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. (Luke 3: 16). Perhaps they remembered how Jesus, Mary, and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they wondered to each other if the breath of the Spirit might come upon them, too.

Suddenly, in the midst of their murmurings, wind filled their assembly room. Fire, with columns that looked like divided tongues rested on them. The Holy Spirit filled them. The Jews from all over the Middle East and Africa who gathered out in the streets for the festival of Pentecost heard these disciples proclaiming good news in their own native languages. They heard and could understand this amazing story about Jesus who is Lord. Still, though, they wondered what such amazing events meant for their lives, for their faith.

II. What Does It Mean: Contemporary Times

We might entertain similar wonderings. What does this mean—for us? What does this story of bewildering languages and the rush of the Holy Spirit mean for those of us living today? What difference does it make that wind blew and tongues of fire flamed? What does it matter that 2,000 years ago people heard the gospel news miraculously proclaimed in their own language?

The whole story appears a little far-fetched, doesn't it? Imagine a tornado blowing through this sanctuary and flames appearing among us today. (ask people what they would do). We would probably call 911 and have the fire department put out our fire (which could be a telling commentary on the state of the church that we don't want to be on fire!)

The people gathered on that Pentecost day wondered what all the fire and wind meant, but they didn't try to analyze the working the Spirit. Questions about the historical veracity of what occurred on that day of Pentecost aren't important. The author of Acts isn't trying to write a documentary or news account. Instead, what's important about this story is the truth about what is being claimed. What Acts chapter two claims is that a new community is formed by the Holy Spirit. What all this talk of wind and flame means is the spiritual formation of the church. As a result of that outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the community was empowered to proclaim the gospel. Peter, in fact, proclaims a powerful sermon right after the wind and flames die down. What that Pentecost event means, what that story of our origins as a church means, is that we were given the gift of proclamation. Pentecost means we've got a story to tell.

III. What Does It Mean: Our Church and Our Lives

A few of you may think—'well, I'm not good at proclaiming. The thought of telling others stories about Jesus unsettles me.' Truth be told, the inbreaking of the Spirit is profoundly unsettling. Being set on fire by the Holy Spirit sounds quite frightening. Fortunately, the fires of Pentecost are communal; we burn together. Just as the Holy Spirit came on that day long ago to birth the church, so too we are to be a corporate witness to Christ. Pentecost means we've got to let these sounds from heaven and flames of fire have their way with us. We've got to let this story have its way with us. We've let the wind blow things loose and break things open. Where do we need God's power like tongues of flame to lick at us and set us on fire for the gospel?

Just maybe, the fires of Pentecost are burning within us even now. The missions committee approved this past week to work at a camp for terminally ill children. We will be going (date). We will be proclaiming the gospel---even if, in the famous words of St. Francis of Assisi, we don't use words. We will also be going on a mission trip in the summer of 2013 to the McCurdy School in New Mexico—to work, to witness, to be witnessed to by that ministry. We are going to be doing a Vacation Bible School as a church this August, sharing Christ with our own children—and hopefully those of our community. Pentecost means we let the Holy Spirit have its way with us to do something new as Christ's church.

Pentecost also means we have to let the Holy Spirit have its way within our own personal lives. As important as the corporate church is within this story, we are each members of it—and as members contribute our own small flames. What, then, does the flame and wind of Pentecost mean for your life? It means that the Spirit comes to rest upon each of us, granting us gifts. Peter proclaims, “God declares, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young shall see visions and your old shall dream dreams.”

My question to you is: what gift do you have to offer? What have you maybe allowed to collect dust—dust that needs to be blown free with the breath of the Holy Spirit? What vision do you have that you haven't yet breathed life into? What dream do you have that you are called now to light a fire under? Pentecost means that you lay aside excuses—“I'm too old, I'm too inexperienced, I'm too tired, I'm too scared.” Pentecost means that the Holy Spirit accompanies you to accomplish your dreams for Christ. Pentecost means that far-fetched visions can be the very stuff of God. Pentecost

means you let these sounds from heaven and flames have fire have their way with you—to do for God what you never thought possible on your own. Pentecost means you proclaim good news with your life.

What does this mean? What does this wind and these tongues of fire mean? The story of Pentecost in Acts means that Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be with us always. This story means that we can hear the gospel addressed to our church. It means that we as a community have the gift of proclamation. This story means that each and every one of us has a gift to proclaim. This means that young, old, male, female, rich, poor and long-time member—we all can proclaim the gospel with our lives. May we have the courage to let the wind of the Holy Spirit blow things loose and break us open for God. May we have the courage to be set on fire. Glory Halleluiah Amen.

Renewal of Baptismal Covenant

If God's presence is signified by wind and fire on Pentecost, then the waters of baptism symbolize God's grace to us. Tradition holds the practice of the renewal of baptism at Pentecost as a time for us to remember that we are part of this body known as the church. Pentecost birthed the church, and our baptisms birthed us into the church. Our baptism means that the Holy Spirit is with us always—inspiring us to dream dreams and have visions. Today we offer to each of you the opportunity to renew your baptism. (Instruct to turn to hymnals)

Prayers of the People

We go now into a time of prayer. We will give space for the Spirit to have its way with us. We will give space to hear God speak to us each in our own language—to

Speak to us in the language of our own hearts. Let us begin this time of with a sung call to prayer.

Spirit of the Living God

Silence

God of tongues of fire and heavenly wind,

Come Holy Spirit. Come into our hearts. Come into our lives. Come dust off our dreams. Come give life to our visions. Come have your way with us, even if we are frightened. Be with us now in the silence as we pray over how you might light a fire within us. Be with us as we pray over how you have gifted us, and how we might use those gifts through the Holy Spirit. We pray for our dreams, our visions, our gifts.

Silence

Come Holy Spirit. Come into our church. Come into our community. Come form us by the Spirit. Come inspire us to be the church you have called us to be. Be with us now as we pray over the proclamation of this church. Be with us now as we pray over how we might be on fire for you.

Silence

Come Holy Spirit. Come into the lives of those who are hurting. Come breathe new breath into people who are tired, sick, sorrowful, suffering. Be with us now as we pray for those whom we know need your comforting presence. (Go through the prayer list).

Come Holy Spirit. On this Memorial Day we pray for those who have sacrificed themselves, our brothers and sisters who have given their lives for the sake of others—that we may hold them in remembrance and be dedicated to working for a world where labor is rewarded, fear dispelled, and the nations made one.

Come Holy Spirit! Veni Sancte Spiritus! Ven Espiritu Santo! Komm, Heiliger Geist! Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your **Spirit** and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same **Holy Spirit** we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through **Christ** Our Lord who taught us to pray saying, Our Father. . .