Gifts of the Spirit - Pentecost

I Corinthians 12:4-14, 27 Kimby Young

Acts 2:1-8, 12, 14, 16-18, 21 June 4, 2017

Pentecost is an unusual holiday. It is probably the least noticed of the main church holy days – maybe because it always falls at the beginning of summer. It has the fewest common rituals or customs, so Christian churches celebrate Pentecost in a wide variety of ways, and unlike Christmas or Easter it is not usually linked with family celebrations. We remember the story from Acts which we heard for today, and we think about the coming of the Holy Spirit – the power and presence of God – into the world, into our own lives, into the church. We sometimes call Pentecost the birthday of the church – because, as recorded in scripture, it is when the disciples first left the upper room and hit the streets – announcing who they were and proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And later on in the chapter, after a stirring sermon by Peter, 3000 people become Christians that day. 3000 people!

Today the idea of that many people learning about Jesus and being touched by the Spirit of God is almost unimaginable. 3000 people. And it happens again and again in the book of Acts – thousands converted, thousands learning about the Risen Christ, thousands committing to serve Jesus every day and for the rest of their lives. It is hard to imagine. It’s hard to think how this experience could possibly apply to us today. But it does.

That same Spirit that poured over the disciples on Pentecost – in fire and wind, power and might – that same Spirit moves here in this congregation. That same Spirit fills each and every one of you. Maybe a little more quietly – maybe in a little more orderly Presbyterian way – but just as authentically, and just as deeply.

Today we celebrate that Spirit of God. We celebrate that the Spirit still comes, and still flows through a community of gathered believers. We celebrate that the Spirit still gives gifts to each of us – gifts as many and as varied as the people in this room. We celebrate that the Spirit still inspires us to use those gifts for the common good, and that God’s Spirit still and continually opens new doors of understanding and outreach, of sharing and caring, of giving and growing. Today we celebrate the Spirit of God among us.

The reading from Corinthians for today helps to clarify the gifts of the Spirit among us. It was written several years after the events of Acts – written to a church trying to figure out how to live out faith and commitment to Christ much like we continue to do today.

They were arguing about which gifts were more important, which gifts proved you had received the Spirit of God. They thought that some gifts were obviously better than others. They thought it was better to be a great speaker than to be a quiet person of prayer, or that it was better to speak in tongues than to tell a Bible story. The scripture for today says, no, no. All gifts of the Spirit are good gifts of the Spirit. The key is to use any gift from God to glorify God and to help others. One gift is not better than another. Every person who receives the Spirit of God receives the SAME Spirit of God. I am not any more or less filled with the Spirit of God than you are. One person is not any more or less blessed by God’s Spirit. We ALL are one in Christ – we are all equally blessed, equally empowered with God’s gifts, and equally called to share those gifts to serve God in the world.

I have said it before, I will probably say it again. This church – First Presbyterian Church of Gardner – is at a critical time in your history. You have been active in this town for 150 years. In the last few years, you have struggled a little to find your identity in Christ – much like the church in Corinth who first heard the scripture for today about gifts of the Spirit. The call of that scripture is to quit focusing on yourselves and your place in the church, or worse focusing on the shortcomings of others, and to let the Spirit of God move – explode really – in and through you. Let God’s Spirit excite and inspire you – and the power of God will transform. The scripture says “You are the body of Christ.” You have gifts to share. You have a part to play. You have a job to do. You have been filled with the one Holy Spirit of God. And collectively, God can work miracles of grace and healing, energy and hope.

The number one goal of session this year is to help this church grow. But session cannot do it alone. It is up to each and every one of us to listen to the Spirit of God moving in you, to be inspired, and to respond as you are called. Let God’s power move through you to transform the world. Let God’s presence empower you to reach out to others and share the good news.

Right now I don’t know what that will look like – probably you don’t either. But God knows. And God is already working in you to inspire and empower.

As you came in today, each of you received a paper dove with a word on it. If you didn’t get a dove, raise your hand now and I ask the ushers to get one to you. There are 9 different words on the doves – from the verse from Galatians 5 which is printed in your bulletin. The words are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Each of you received one of those words. Sometimes things happen randomly and sometimes God uses the randomness to inspire. I am going to invite you to receive the word of God from your dove as inspiration for your Pentecost meditation. Maybe you received the word “love” because you are a very loving person – because that is a gift of the Spirit you already possess. Maybe you received the word as a challenge, because that is a gift of the Spirit you need to work on. Maybe you received the word you received on your dove because you might have an idea how to move this congregation forward with that gift, or how to help the town of Gardner or the world. And if you prefer – if the word you received doesn’t speak to you today – receive all of the 9 words as your gift of God today, your inspiration from the Spirit of God.

In a few minutes we will share communion – a time when we believe God communes with us and fills us with all that we need. I invite you as we pass the bread and juice, as you listen to the music, as you pray, as you experience this body of Christ gathered together as one – I invite you to think about the word you received today on your dove. Let God speak to you about its meaning. Let God move in you to build up the body of Christ. Let God inspire you to help share the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

On that first day of Pentecost the Spirit of God was visible among them. On that first Pentecost, the disciples received courage and power, energy and joy, passion and inspiration, so that they ran into the streets and told everybody what miracles were happening among them. That first Pentecost, 3000 people were touched by God’s grace and moved to serve Jesus Christ. There were only 12 disciples but 3000 people were moved by those 12 in one day. How much more can God use us to live the good news of God’s love – if we just get out of the way and let the Spirit of God pour through us into the world? You have been called. You have been touched. You have been transformed. You are alive in Christ. You are gifted by the Holy Spirit. You are the body of Christ in the world. Live in God’s love and serve God.

Amen.