

Great Balls of Fire!

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

Pentecost Sunday is an interesting Christian holiday. It is an extremely significant event in the life of the Christian church. Many have said that the first Pentecost was the birth of the Christian church. What I find interesting is the inherent lack of commercialism about this day. Many of our Christian holidays and traditions have been taken to the extreme by local retailers and greeting card companies, all destined to take a Christian tradition and turn it into a sale or a picnic event or a black letter day. Yet Pentecost Sunday commemorates a very special Christian event.

There are some keys in this scripture passage that I think need to be considered. First, the disciples were all in one place. The disciples, numbering about 120, were all together in an upper room. It sounds a bit like a church service. The people

were gathered, they were focused on discerning God's will for them, and they were assembled together for the purpose of worship. Jesus had instructed the disciples that they needed to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit – the advocate being sent to help them. By our standards today, 120 men and women represent a small to mid-sized church, yet the idea of 'church' as we know it had not been established at this time. People typically gathered at large homes or synagogues to converse together, read scripture, and at this time recall and reflect on Jesus' life and ministry. I can imagine people sharing their experiences surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection.

There were those present that had witnessed Jesus' resurrection first-hand. Perhaps there was a bit of impatience as they were instructed by Jesus to wait – often that is the most difficult task.

Now if we thought of the events of that day in modern terms, we could see this church 'service' being conducted a little differently. Pastor Melvin Newland suggests that we may see this gathering as being initiated by Peter, who says something like, 'I make a motion that we should start a church, with regular services and duties assigned to willing volunteers.' John would second the motion and the general vote would go out with the 'I's' carrying the vote. But human beings were not in charge of this church service, God was. The scripture says in verse 2, that "suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting."

God started the first Christian church. God controlled the process. God was intimately involved from the ground up.

They were all together in one place and of one accord, and God was able to do wonderful works.

Another key that cannot be denied in this scriptural passage is the work of the Holy Spirit. I think many folks shy away from this particular passage of scripture because of the controversy surrounding the gift of speaking in tongues or other languages. If you can picture the scene, Jerusalem was a bustling, active place where people from all over would come. Jews would come to worship in the Holy Temple, while Romans were occupying the city along with countless other cultures. I want to thank our liturgist for getting through the three verses of scripture that tell us the great variety of people that were present at this time in Jerusalem. It seems each of these cultures had different languages or dialects within languages. The main key here seems to be communication – God wanted everyone to hear the gospel and understand it in their own language. In comes the Holy Spirit sitting on each of the 120 gathered as “tongues of fire” resting on each of them, and this group of simple people,

mostly laborers from Galilee, began to speak in other languages to the point where no one was left out. Everyone within the sound of the disciples' voices could hear the good news in their own language.

I think perhaps there was more going on than just a group of people reciting in different languages. The term "tongues of fire" catches my attention. There was an excitement blossoming from this small group of 120 people. God sent the gift of the Holy Spirit with a layer of joy. There is a difference in saying, "there is power in the blood of the Lamb", and "THERE IS POWER IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB!" The disciples probably didn't think things could get better than Jesus' resurrection, and yet just 50 days later, they are inspired beyond words. This is exciting stuff! God reminded them that they are not alone and that God was going to remain involved in their

lives. Once you have tasted the Pentecostal joy for yourself, you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is in control. In spite of our guilt from sin, we are forgiven. That's at least worth a Halleluiah!

Another key from these scriptures appears to be the fact that even in the midst of God's incredible work, there are the naysayers in attendance – those who want to quickly dismiss God's work as something to be explained in human terms. They just assumed the ones speaking in other languages were drunk with new wine. There are two problems with this assessment. First, it was too early in the season for new wine – the fruit wasn't even ripened yet, hence there was not new wine available. Second, as Peter points out, it was only 9 am – a little early to be drunk. Had Peter and the others listened to the criticisms of these naysayers, I believe the church may never

have been established. God presents us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, yet we maintain our free will. We can choose to put those gifts aside and ignore God's calling, or we can press on through the resistance and do what God wants us to do. Peter chose the latter and reminded those present of the scriptural passage from Joel, where in the last days God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams, and your sons and daughters will prophesy.'

Are we dreaming dreams today? Are we seeing visions today? Are we inspired to continue to be a presence in our community in spite of all the naysayers? Are we bold enough to invite others to church with us? Are we willing to share God's incredible joy with a world that could use some good news?

A final key I want to bring out from today's scripture is found when we look at Peter. Peter – the one who was always a little quicker with his actions than he should have been. Peter - the one who stepped out of a boat onto a raging sea with his eyes fixed on Jesus only to turn aside and begin to sink. Peter – the one who denied Jesus three times in one day only to have to face Jesus and the realization of Peter's own actions. Peter – the one who was almost lost after Jesus' death, for he returned to what he knew how to do and could have easily given in to despair and walked away from his calling. Peter – the rock on which the church was to be built, suddenly found his courage in the midst of tumultuous times. Other disciples had their gifts, but Peter was the rock – the foundation. Peter boldly addresses the on-looking crowd, and I can picture a glow on his face that could not be denied. I can picture the others standing with him like the

members of a vast choir all sharing that same aura of joy. They were a united unit. They were a church.

As the saying goes, the rest is history. It is our history. It is our Christian heritage that we all share. As different as each of us may be, we are united under the same umbrella of God's incredible love. We are the body of Christ. We each have our special gifts and are charged to use those gifts to share God's love with others. Are we willing to do this? Are we willing to press on in spite of the naysayers? God initiated the church. God initiated this church and God continues to move us in the right direction as long as we do not lose sight of our goal. We are here to help members of our community find a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. May God instill each of us with the passion of Pentecost to make folks wonder about and seek out the good things God is allowing to happen here at Mount

Tabor. This is what it means to be an Acts 2 church! Let us continue the legacy and revive our community to the wonder and majesty of almighty God. And the church said, 'Amen!'