

What is Pentecost? Some may answer that question by citing historical data that it was an agricultural festival during the time of the Bible in which the first fruits of the harvest were brought to the Temple 50 days after the Passover. Some may answer that question by saying that it is the birthday of the church. Some may answer that question by saying it is the day that we celebrate the Holy Spirit descending upon the earth. Some may answer that question by saying, "I don't know" but I am told that I am to wear red to church.

Any of those answers are correct. But in reading the story of Pentecost this week there is one piece of the story that many times we overlook. The story of Pentecost is the story of God's Holy Spirit appearing to a group of people. And that is a new thing in the Bible. In the past, God usually spoke through individuals or small bands of followers. Whether it was Moses following the cloud and ascending a mountain or Jesus being transfigured on a mountain in front of three followers.

Pentecost is a new story. A new story of a group of sons and daughters gaining access to God's interpretation of their past for their present and for the future. Pentecost is not about God revealing to one person or a select few. Pentecost is about God's revelation to a group of misfits. Galileans they are called. Outsiders and foreigners is how we would know them today.

It is true that Peter, one of the Apostles, helps to interpret the event. He cites the Old Testament prophet Joel's words. Although he does slightly change the Joel text to accommodate his words to the current context. Peter preaches a sermon in which he uses Joel's words and tells about what God has done in Christ. In response, a megachurch of 3000 is formed right away.

Does God speak to individuals? Of course God does. God can choose to speak to whomever God chooses. But even when God speaks to individuals I think it is important for those individuals to gather others around them and ask if what they are hearing is indeed from God.

I think about the ministries around here that have stuck. I think about bluegrass, I think about preschool, I think about mission trips to the Gulf region. Those ministries took hold because more than one person caught a vision of something beyond themselves. The ministries that did not take root were ministries where one person, many times me, said God has spoken and this is what we are supposed to do and you are to follow.

But the story of Pentecost is the story of God speaking to a group of people. And so it would seem to me that if the church is going to be a Pentecost and Spirit based church, then we need to be a place that encourages groups of people to listen together to what the Holy Spirit is guiding us to do.

Some may lament that after today we are limiting our Christian Education for the summer to just one adult class and nothing for children and youth. But I see this as an opportunity. We could say, "Let's take a vacation." Or we can rather say, "Let's look for opportunities to get together with other people and figure out together what God's Spirit is guiding us to do together. "

I know that in 3 weeks there is going to be some people gathering together to reflect on what Christian Education should look like in a new time. Connected to my work for my doctorate, I am looking for a group of people to help me look at the history of this church, the historical culture around the church, compare this history to current models of leadership, and then offer ideas for what current and future leadership looks like at ACPC.

I invite you to be thinking about a group that you can gather together around a certain topic and ask, “What is God’s Holy Spirit guiding us to do together?” Each church committee should be guided by that question, “what is God’s Holy Spirit guiding us to do together?”

As part of worship today, we have celebrated the accomplishments of our high school and college graduates. Even though your degree only has your name on it, you did not achieve that diploma by yourself. You had parents who supported and guided and taught you the value of achieving an education. They were the ones to get you were you needed to go with the supplies you needed to achieve. You had friends who were a part of a study group that helped you learn.

You achieved the diploma on the shoulders of lots of others. Go out into the world with a vision to be a part of a community that works together to accomplish important achievements. In fact, I recently read that the greatest indicator of academic achievement is whether or not the student is part of a study group.

Today we are sharing in Holy Communion. In the Presbyterian Church, we do not take communion by ourselves. Even when the pastor takes home communion to shut ins, we go with an elder who represents the wider church community. We take together because we believe that God works within communities of believers.

God is calling us out. God is calling us to look outward and forward as a community of believers. How is God working through you to be a part of a group that is moved to action by God’s Holy Spirit? AMEN.

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-Text: Acts 2

-Given: May 23, 2010 in Allison Creek Presbyterian church (York, SC)