

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost Sunday is based on the text that we are about to read from Acts. We will be told that a crowd gathers on the day of Pentecost which is the festival that was celebrated 50 days following the festival of Passover. You may remember that the disciples gathered in the upper room on Passover for what would be their final meal with Jesus before his crucifixion and resurrection.

50 days after Passover we are introduced to the festival of Pentecost which was originally a harvest festival. Pentecost also came to designate the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Today we celebrate Pentecost 50 days after Easter.

This story will occur in the 2nd chapter of Acts. Acts begins in the first chapter with Jesus returning to earth after his resurrection and teaching the disciples. After this period of instruction, Jesus ascends into the clouds to be with God. The apostles then choose a person to replace Judas who had betrayed Jesus and died so that they can be 12 apostles again.

Let us now read about what happens during the event we call Pentecost.

Read Acts 2:1-21

The basic premise of the Pentecost story is a story of God bringing together a unique and diverse group of people, blessing them with the Holy Spirit, and blessing them for ministry. And not just a simple blessing. The Holy Spirit gives a profound blessing upon them to go out and do ministry.

We are told that they are Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Africans, Middle Eastern Arabs, Jews, and Gentiles. We are told that they speak lots of different languages reflecting the reality that they come from so many different places across the Middle East and Africa.

And because they are so different and unique, others view them with suspicion. Others sneer at them and say that they are not blessed for ministry but that they are merely drunk. But Peter stands up to the crowd of naysayers and announces that this crowd of blessed disciples are not drunk.

Instead, Peter quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel and says that these people are giving witness to a vision from God. A vision where the Holy Spirit calls men and women to speak God's words. A vision where God calls free and slave to speak God's words. A vision where the young see possibilities and the old envision the impossible.

Today we recognize that this Pentecost experience is the birth of the Christian Church. So, let's think about this. The first vision of the organized church is one where young and old share dreams and visions. The first vision of the organized church is one where men and women share equally in speaking God's words. The first vision of the organized church is one where the privileged and the oppressed both speak God's Words.

So, let's critique the organized church today verses this first vision that we uphold as God's vision for the church. Let's look at the universal church and let's look at Allison Creek Presbyterian Church.

So, let's critique the church based on these three categories from the words of Joel which Peter quotes. 1. Young and old share equally. 2. Men and women share equally. 3. Privileged and oppressed share equally. According to Pentecost, these are three essential elements for the church.

When I glance at the organized church, I'm not sure we measure up very well against the Pentecost vision. From where I sit, in most churches I know, I sometimes hear people say, "The youth are the future of the church." I always respond by saying, "No, the youth are the present of the church." By youth I am including the voices of young adults as well as teenagers and younger children.

By not listening to the voices of young adults and teenagers, many churches have a hard time connecting to these groups. The other way that churches respond is by setting these groups apart from the older ones in the church. Youth ministry is separate from the rest of the church. Programs for young adults separate them from older adults.

The other experience I see is that churches focus so much on young adults that the voices of older adults are overlooked. Churches become faddish without understanding the importance of their history. So, from where I sit the organized church is not doing a very good job of affirming both young and old together.

So how well do we at Allison Creek affirm the voices of both the young and the old? When we look at the direction that God is calling this church, are we listening to the voices of both the young and the old? If we listen to all voices and not discriminate, then we are being faithful to the Pentecost model.

The second focus from Pentecost is that men and women share equally in prophesy and vision. It distresses me when I see so many churches and denominations that prohibit the voices of women in leadership. God creates both women and men equally in the eyes of God so the voices of both men and women are equally valid.

So how well do we at Allison Creek affirm the voices of both men and women? I am so thankful to serve as pastor of a church where that is not an issue. When we choose our leadership, we are intentional to select both men and women. When sermons are preached in this pulpit the voices of both men and women are heard.

The third focus from Pentecost is that both slave and free have the Spirit poured out upon them. In other words, both the oppressed and the oppressor have the Spirit of God poured out upon them.

We know that sinful human nature leads us to listen more to the voices of people who have greater influence. Those with more financial resources, social clout, and family connections are granted greater influence in church decisions.

But in the Pentecost model, the voices of the privileged are not greater than the voices of those without power, without prestige, without privilege. The privileged and the underprivileged share equally. The majority and the minority both have the Spirit poured out upon them.

So, if we at Allison Creek want to be faithful to the Pentecost model then we work hard to not show preference. We must be intentional in reaching out to all kinds of people and inviting them to be a part of this community of faith. We structure our worship and our actions such that all are included and welcomed.

If we are called to be a church based on a biblical model found in the Pentecost story, then we will be a place that affirms young and old, men and women, and that we value diversity and inclusion of all kinds of people. If we want to be faithful to what Pentecost gives witness to, then this inclusion of all is what we should be seeking to live out.

Is Pentecost possible today? If we affirm young and old, men and women, and value diversity and inclusion then we will continue to see the Holy Spirit poured out upon us.

If we are faithful to this model, then we will experience the words from Acts of seeing everyone who calls on the name of the Lord experience salvation. AMEN.

+++++