

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

EPISTLE READING: ¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. ¹⁶And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” ¹⁷The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁸Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“Come, Holy Spirit, Come”

One of the great preachers, Fred Craddock, who was Professor of Preaching at Chandler Divinity School at the time, tells a story on himself, of when he was interrupted by a student at the start of a lecture he was giving as a guest at another school. The student, an earnest young man, asked, “Are you pentecostal? The room grew silent. Craddock looked for someone from the school that might moderate and ask the student to hold his question until the end of the lecture, but Craddock got no help. Realizing he was on his own, Craddock responded to the student: “Do you mean, do I belong to the Pentecostal Church?” The young man said, “No, I mean, are you pentecostal?” Craddock said, “Are you asking if I am charismatic?” Again, the student said, “No, I am asking you if you are pentecostal?” Rev. Craddock said in surrender, “I don’t know what your question is.” The student said, “Obviously, you are not!” And he left the lecture hall.¹ Hmm...let’s come back to this in just a bit.

Today, we celebrate the birthday of the church. It has been seven weeks since Jesus was crucified. It was Dawn and the followers of Jesus were still gathered in an upper room, waiting and praying, as they had done every day since the Ascension. But then, on this otherwise quiet morning, there was an eruption of sound from heaven and of wind. It must have seemed to the disciples that the world was coming loose; breaking open. They had to have wondered, “*Was this the same wind which on the very first morning swept across dark waters, the wind of creation? Was it the ruach רוח, the breath that first brought life?*” Then...what they heard became visible. “Tongues like fire” came to hover over their heads. And these “tongues” then expanded into tongues of SPEECH. The disciples began speaking in other languages!²

A crowd gathered. It consisted of “devout men from every nation” who were in Jerusalem celebrating the Jewish Feast of Weeks, otherwise known as Pentecost. They were very bewildered because, from the street outside, the languages they heard being spoken by these simple Galileans were their own various tongues. They understood what was being said! Some of them, in an effort to explain it all away, accused the disciples of being drunk. But many

¹ Fred Craddock. In: Fr. Almquist. “A Church with a Pentecostal Spirit” www.wmchapel.org/2013/05/a-church-with-a-pentecostal-spirit-acts-2-1-21/ (accessed 6-6-2019).

² Will Willamon, eds May, Miller, Achtemeier. *Acts. Interpretation.* (Atlanta: JKP; 1988), 30-31.

wanted to know more. Their questions spurred Peter to preach. Peter, the uneducated fisherman who only a few weeks earlier had not been able to utter a word about Jesus to a servant woman, now eloquently spoke convincingly of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Over 3000 people accepted Christ that day and were baptized. The disciples became apostles. Their story belonged now to the world. It entered the public domain. The Church was born.

Now, going back to the incident with Rev. Craddock. Sadly, the Church, has too often celebrated Pentecost as a noun, as this specific event which occurred over 2000 years ago, rather than as an adjective.³ Consequently, people can be confused if asked, “Are you pentecostal?” Yet we shouldn’t be. For ‘pentecostal’ describes a way of thinking, of being, of doing, of seeing. You see, when the church was born, the Spirit was set loose into the world, and the Spirit continues to be loose to energize the Church, as it will, to accomplish Jesus’ ministry. I love Bill Muehl’s description. He says that the Spirit is “God continual coming up in and through us.”⁴ Consequently, pentecostal describes the state wherein the very power of God is coming up in and through the Church. Thomas Long describes it too...it’s when the Church has had the *moss shaken off it, the cobwebs blown out of its sanctuary, and God’s electricity and excitement allowed to energize it.*⁵ Pentecostal!

Being pentecostal is also, and maybe most importantly, a state of knowing how to speak about it all, not simply being energized and then holding all of that energy inside like a shaken-up bottle of soda pop. On Pentecost, God gave to the church its voice. As one commentator has said, “*The Church stood up and spoke. It moved from silence to language. It talked and the whole world heard the good news.*”⁶ This should not surprise us for when the Spirit inspired the prophets of old, THEY spoke (“*I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,*” said Joel, “*and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,*” (Jl 2:28)), and of course, when the Spirit anointed Jesus, “*he proclaimed good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery*

³Fr. Almqvist. “A Church with a Pentecostal Spirit” www.wmchapel.org/2013/05/a-church-with-a-pentecostal-spirit-acts-2-1-21/ (accessed 6-6-2019).

⁴Quoted in KC Ptomey. *A Homily for Pentecost Jn 14:8-17, 25-27* In: *The Westminster Pulpit 1981-2008* (Nashville:Westminster Presbyterian Church, 2008) 54-57.

⁵Thomas Long. Sermon: “*What’s the Gift?*” http://day1.org/3822-whats_the_gift (accessed 5-31-14).

⁶Thomas Long.

of sight for the blind.” (Lk 4:18). Yes, the Pentecostal spirit sends disciples out to speak, and we are to do so not just with our lips but with our hands and feet, with our words and actions. We are NOT meant to hum our hymns under our breath. We are sent to sing, sing, sing, of the love which is stronger than hate, of a hope which is so much deeper than despair, of a life which is stronger than death. We are sent to sing it loud, in all ways, to ALL people, in all places!

I like the response that Jonas Salk gave TV newsman Edward R Murrow when he interviewed him following his invention of the first vaccine for polio. Until that time, polio had been a dreaded scourge, striking down the young, in particular. Edward R. Murrow asked him who owned the patent on the vaccine, for certainly with the rush of enthusiasm for the new treatment, Dr. Salk could have been a very rich man had he successfully applied for a patent on the vaccine. But Dr. Salk replied, “There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?” (repeat).⁷

No, no one can patent the sun any more than we can confine the good news of Jesus Christ. This is what it means to be people filled with the spirit of Pentecost, compelled to witness in word and deed the good news in all ways to all people in all places. And for this reason I believe we can say that First Presbyterian Church of Copperas Cove, TX is a pentecostal church, while not in any way meaning to demean those who use the word to define their unique tradition, who identify themselves as a specific branch of the Christian family, who belong to the over 700 organized denominations and independent churches affiliated through the Pentecostal World Fellowship. I think FPC is a pentecostal church for we recognize the energy and power of the Holy Spirit in our midst, and we are compelled to “speak of it”. I am convinced that this church has always been a pentecostal one for its near 55 years, but I can witness particularly to the last 5 ½ years (*pause*) And you know, I think it is because of the:

- great and wonderful diversity of those who are here; that’s a pentecostal thing. The Lord delights in it. It’s because of the:
- many welcoming programs we are able to offer.
- hard-working leadership team which oversees it all,

⁷ Anon. “Happy Birthday to you, Church” https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/ppdownload.asp?installment_id=93040963 (accessed 6-7-19)

- love that goes into maintaining the house,
- quality of educational classes which allow people of all ages to engage the word,
- joyous fellowship meals which are served Each and Every week to any and all,
- worship...worship....sacred worship. And it's because of the just
- welcoming air in this place that has resulted in many people having joined FPC, and

many others having been our guests as they pass through the Copperas Cove and Ft. Hood communities. This is holy ground, brothers and sisters, a small place crammed full of heaven. Here the Spirit is coming up in and through us, and at times, I feel like we HAVE been like that bottle of soda pop shaken up, ready to explode. It has been especially so as our children's program grows and grows, as well as our mission & outreach efforts set more and more goals. For such a small church, the generosity and compassion that flows out of here to touch the lives of others in need not just in the local area but globally are just pretty astounding. And we, each of us, can be honored and privileged to be a part of it. Certainly, it is of God....the work of the Spirit speaking through willing vessels in a pentecostal church!

Brothers and sisters, I am excited to tell you that because this church knows that we do nothing on our own but through the power of God coming up through us, the Session has recently made a commitment to be part of an initiative called Vital Congregations. This is a large initiative in the PCUSA, and we at FPC are in on the ground floor of it. Gail and I have recently returned from Denver where we learned the basics of VITAL CONGREGATIONS, and we will be telling you a great deal more about it in months to come. The initiative is a 2-year enterprise during which we as a congregation will learn and engage in new spiritual practices, and also greater relational connections with each other and with other churches like ours in the Presbytery that will take us deeper into following Jesus Christ, making disciples, and being more and more the vital community of Christians we need to be. I'm sure you are aware that it is a crucial time for all mainline denominations and for Christianity in this country. It IS a very critical time. And so, while FPC IS indeed a vital, a pentecostal. congregation, we are part of this initiative to further "speak with tongues of fire" for Christ, however and wherever

we are asked to do so. I had a Pastor who used to say that “*when the water is running, keep your hand off the faucet.*” Friends, we need let the water of the Spirit run in our midst and then let it wash us, mold us, and take us to where we need to be!

Let us pray....Praise and glory to you, Creator Spirit of God. You come like the wind of heaven, unseen, unbidden. Like the Dawn you illuminate the world around us. You grant us a new beginning every day. You warm and comfort us. We ask you to continue to energize and guide this your church. Help us to live with confidence, facing challenges with courage, with fire, with strength, always trusting you to lead us into new ventures, most of which the endings we do not see. Give us voice in word and deed to share what goods we have, to share the hope we know, and to share to whom we belong with all those in need to receive. Be with us, Holy Spirit. Change us as you move in our midst, Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Amen.