

"The God of Pentecost"
Sermon for Day of Pentecost
Lectionary Year C
May 23, 2010
Text: Acts 2:1-21
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Today is Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Church, the day we remember and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit that made possible all the amazing acts of the apostles in establishing the Church of Jesus Christ. As you heard read a moment ago, something amazing happened at that first Day of Pentecost. You know the story well. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and other followers of Jesus huddled together in one place in Jerusalem. Something indescribable occurred, but Luke, the author of Acts, attempts to picture it for us by telling us that the Spirit's coming appeared among the disciples as tongues of fire. That is why we use the flame as a symbol for the season of Pentecost and a representation of the Holy Spirit in many of our churches.

Because they had received the Spirit, the disciples were able to preach to those who were gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Pentecost. And every person who heard the followers of Jesus share their faith in him were able to understand what was being said. No matter what language the disciples spoke and no matter what

language the people who had come to Jerusalem spoke, the Spirit allowed each person to hear about Jesus in his or her native tongue. Now that's something. That's even better than the universal translator that got used from time to time on the original *Star Trek* television series.

I don't want to spend a lot of time this morning talking about what happened at Pentecost as much as I want to talk about what that event means for our understanding of God. What does Pentecost help us to know about God? Who exactly is the God of Pentecost? That's what I want to explore with you this morning.

I think the story of Pentecost helps us to see that **God has an incredible sense of timing**. As I suggested last week, God operates at the right time, the appropriate time, the time most likely to achieve God's redemptive purposes. It is no accident, then, that God chose to send the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

You see, the Festival of Pentecost was a Jewish celebration each year to praise God for a successful early harvest of crops. It was one of the observances in Jerusalem that faithful Jews were expected to attend. Since it fell in the spring, when travel was easier, more people could come to Jerusalem at Pentecost than at any other time of the year. Hundreds and thousands of Jews from all over the eastern world would have made pilgrimages to the city for this celebration. So what

better time could there have been for God to act in a mighty way to proclaim the truth of Jesus as the Messiah? The book of Acts tells us that three thousand people accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord that day in Jerusalem.

God's sense of timing is impeccable. His sense of timing may not always agree with my timetable or yours, when we want things to happen, but God always operates at the right time, the appropriate time, the time most likely to achieve God's redemptive purposes. We may from time to time be early or late, but God is always punctual. He is always on time.

Not only does Pentecost show us what great timing God has, I think the story of Pentecost helps us to see that **God makes every effort to communicate with us clearly.** The miracle of Pentecost is really not so much that the apostles were able to speak in foreign languages as much as it is that *all who were there that day could understand exactly what was being said* when the followers of Jesus began sharing their faith. That's what seems miraculous to me.

After all, I preach every Sunday in the same language all of us speak, but I'm not completely sure everyone who hears what I talk about from week to week understands what I am saying. Every once in a while one of you will share with me your feelings about a particular sermon, "I really appreciated your saying such and such." But I know I

never said what you think you heard. *God* may have been saying it to you. I believe he reserves the right to do that, thank goodness. But you didn't hear it from me.

The miracle at Pentecost points to *God's* desire to make his will known and to do so clearly and plainly, so that it is easily understood. Now I know that not everything in the Bible makes complete sense to us, but as a friend of mine once said to me, "I'm not as concerned about the parts of scripture I don't understand as much as I am about the parts I understand completely and do nothing about." I think *God* has communicated clearly what he expects of us—with regard to him, with regard to ourselves, and with regard to each other. It's up to us to act on what we already know to be *God's* will.

There is one more thing I think the story of Pentecost helps us to see about *God*. ***God invites all persons into fellowship with him and one another.*** The gift of the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost to establish community among believers. As Paul states in our lesson from Romans for today, it is a spirit of adoption that helps us to understand we are all children of *God* together, joint heirs with Christ, brothers and sisters in the faith. As today's narrative from John's Gospel lets us see, the Holy Spirit binds us together through our knowledge of the truth, through obedience to Christ's commands, and through the teaching that allows us to live authentically. All persons

are invited into this fellowship; that's what Pentecost shows us. *All are included by God; all are to be included in the community of faith that is the church.*

The God of Pentecost is still operating in our world and operating in the same way he did on that first Day of Pentecost. How do I know? Because I've seen him at work. Let me tell you a story that some of you may have heard me tell already, but a story that is in its own way a modern day Pentecost.

One Sunday morning when I was the Pastor of FUMC in Sachse, a woman was vacuuming at her home. While performing this rather mundane duty, a voice spoke to her and told her that she needed to go to our church, and that if she did, there would be something there for her. The woman was surprised, to say the least. She had never been to the Sachse church. In fact, though a deeply spiritual person, it had been a long time since she had been to any church. And going to church that morning was not exactly on her "To Do" list. She had a full-time job, a husband, two small children, and a whole day of activities planned just to stay ahead of her chores. The last thing she needed to do was to go to church.

Yet something compelled her to hop in the shower and come to the worship service on that Sunday morning. With her hair still damp, she walked into the Sachse church for the first time, wondering what

it was the voice she heard while vacuuming wanted her to receive there.

After the service she came up to me and asked if she could visit with me during the week. We set up a time, and she came by the office. She told me how the voice had spoken to her, and then she told me that she knew what it was she had been sent to that church to hear that morning. She quoted one sentence from my sermon that Sunday, quoted it verbatim, just as it had appeared in my manuscript and just as I had stated it in the sermon. She said that when she heard those words, she knew that she was where she was supposed to be, that she had found a home in that congregation, and that the Spirit of God wanted her to become active in that church.

As she told me all of this, I was awe-struck and almost numb from amazement. I was stunned, partly because of what she had told me, but also because of what I already was aware. Then I shared with her the part of the story she could not know. As I told her, I had the habit of coming over to the sanctuary from the parsonage across the parking lot early every Sunday morning to preach through my sermon. It's the time I made my final editions and corrections to it.

On that particular Sunday, while I was practicing preaching the sermon, something told me to make an addition to it. It was the only change I made in the whole sermon manuscript: *the addition of the*

very sentence the woman had just quoted to me. And that is the completely true story of how Shawn Turner came to the Sachse church to become such a vital, significant, and important part of that congregation. The God of Pentecost still has incredible timing, still makes every effort to communicate clearly to us, and still does so to invite all persons into fellowship with him and one another.