

May 11, 2008 - Pentecost (Red)

Acts 2:1-21

Revised Standard Version of the Bible

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹²And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; ¹⁶but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷'And in the last days it shall 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; ¹⁸yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. ²¹And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b (UMH 826)

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Revised Standard Version of the Bible

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of

service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. ¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

John 7:37-39

Revised Standard Version of the Bible

³⁷On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Pentecost

Today is Mother's day and I would be remiss if I didn't mention it in the sermon. (Not to mention that I would likely get whapped up along side my head by Carol.) One day a year we set aside to thank our mothers and grandmothers and all the women that do so much to guide and teach us. As my tribute to mothers this morning, I found a list of things that a mother would **never** say:

1. *"How on earth can you see the TV sitting so far back?"*
2. *"Yeah, I used to skip school a lot, too"*
3. *"Just leave all the lights on ... it makes the house look more cheery"*
4. *"Let me smell that shirt -- Yeah, it's good for another week"*
5. *"Go ahead and keep that stray dog, honey. I'll be glad to feed and walk him every day"*
6. *"Well, if Timmy's mom says it's OK, that's good enough for me."*
7. *"The curfew is just a general time to shoot for. It's not like I'm running a prison around here."*
8. *"I don't have a tissue with me ... just use your sleeve"*
9. *"Don't bother wearing a jacket - the wind-chill is bound to improve"*

If it's easy to joke about a Mother's quirks, it's even easier to find something good to say. Take for instance the Apostle Paul in the 16th chapter of the letter to the Romans. At first glance, the chapter is nothing more than a long list of people's names, most of whom I can't pronounce. Most people probably skim over the list so they can get to what they consider to be the real Gospel message. But if you take a closer look at this section, some interesting things appear. For example, it's interesting to note that of the twenty-six people who Paul singles out for his personal greeting, six were women. Now that strikes me as being kind of interesting and important, since Paul has frequently gotten a bad rap for being a male chauvinist. I think it also shows us the tremendous influence that women had in the early church. In male oriented first century Palestine, it is telling that Paul could not describe the church without mentioning the significant role of women.

Verse 13 of chapter 16 is particularly interesting, and it is one that scholars have puzzled over for centuries. Paul writes: *"Give my greetings to Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine."* Now this statement could be interpreted in two ways. It could mean that Paul had two distinct women in mind--the mother of Rufus and his own mother. Or, he could be saying: *"I salute Rufus and his mother, who is like a mother to me."* If that is what he meant, and most Biblical scholars agree that is indeed what he meant, then it raises some interesting speculation. When and where did Paul meet Rufus' mother? Did she nurse him through some serious illness?

Did she receive him into her home for an extended stay during his missionary journeys? How did this woman and Paul form such a close bond that he refers to her fondly as being like his mother? Mark tells us that Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus's cross, had two sons: Alexander and Rufus. Was this the same Rufus to whom Paul was speaking? If that is true, his mother would be Simon of Cyrene's wife. No one knows for sure who this remarkable woman was who served as a mother figure for the great Paul.

In today's scripture reading from Acts, we once again hear the familiar story of Pentecost. Pentecost means fifty, and so understandably, Pentecost occurs each year 50 days after Easter.

Depending on your church traditions, you may know a little, a lot, or maybe nothing at all about Pentecost. Some churches, like the Roman Catholics, or the Orthodox, for instance, celebrate Pentecost as an integral part of the church year, just like Easter, and Christmas, and Advent. If you were a part of one of those church traditions, you probably know what Pentecost is all about and why it is

important.

On the other hand, some traditions don't really pay much attention to the church calendar or the traditions of the church year. They are on the other end of the spectrum from the Catholics and Orthodox, in effect rejecting the traditions of those churches. Somewhere between those two extremes lies the United Methodist Church, and most of the mainline Protestant churches. We take note of Pentecost, but put less emphasis on it.

In recent years, the United Methodist Church and Protestants in general are trying to reclaim some of the Christian traditions that we lost or rejected when we broke from the Roman church. That is why you hear more about things like Pentecost, Ascension Sunday last week, Ash Wednesday, and Good Friday. Carol and I both support this return to the traditions of the Christian church, which is why we make a point to include them in our services and sermons. It is why I would like to take a few minutes today to talk about Pentecost.

So why is Pentecost so important? If you were paying attention during past sermons about Pentecost, then you probably already know. Pentecost, as described in the second chapter of Acts, marks the beginning of the Christian church. Before Pentecost, there was Jesus and the Apostles and the other followers of Jesus. After Pentecost, there was the Church - with a capital "C". Pentecost was the event that started it all. So in effect, our church, St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Copperton, Utah, began that day as well.

I like to visualize the church as like a huge tree. Our little congregation in Copperton is one of the leaves on the tree, as are all the other congregations and denominations that form the Christian church. If you trace back from the leaf to the twig attaching it to the tree, then you are tracing back to the people and churches in the past that came before ours. Like the Methodist congregations from Bingham Canyon, and Highland Boy, and Lark that came together to form St. Paul.

Tracing further back down the tree you come to the Methodist missionaries that first came to Utah in the mid to late 1800's. Further back, to the first Methodist circuit riders and revival meetings of frontier America. Then to John Wesley and his brother Charles; John a priest in the Church of England who reluctantly formed the Methodist Church in America when the Revolutionary War threatened to destroy what he had spent his life working to build.

Trace further back down the branch and you come to King Henry the 8th of

England, who formed the Church of England when the Pope wouldn't let him divorce one of his wives. We are now back to the year 1525, more or less. Before that, England was a part of the Roman or Western Church. If you trace further back down the branch you come to the year 1054. In that year, in what is referred to as the Great Schism, the Western Church that we are a part of split with the Eastern Church. The Eastern Church comprises the Greek, Russian and other Orthodox churches, and the other Christian sects such as the Coptic Church of Egypt and the other Christian churches in the Middle East.

By now we are to the trunk of the tree, and the trunk of the tree extends down to the great councils of the early church; like the Council of Nicea in 325, the Council of Constantinople in 381, the council of Ephesus in 431. These councils formed and codified the foundations of the beliefs that we Christians all adhere to - the creeds, the books in the Bible, and so forth. If you go all the way to the bottom of the trunk, past the formation of the churches by the Apostle Paul, and the other early Christian missionaries, you end up at the day of Pentecost, as described in today's scripture reading in Acts.

The tree is why Pentecost is important. Any church, any congregation, any sect, any denomination, any lay member, any pastor, anyone at all that is anywhere on that tree is a part of the Christian church - known as the apostolic Christian church. We are all related and we can all trace our beginning to that day in Jerusalem. That is pretty amazing when you think about it.

That day in Jerusalem was an amazing day as well. Most people focus on the tongues of fire that appeared above the Apostles, certainly the most dramatic manifestation of the Holy Ghost. That is why the color red is symbolic of Pentecost - why today is one of a handful of days when there is a red cloth on our altar. That is why some Italian churches drop red rose petals from above on the worshipers on Pentecost Sunday.

But there were other amazing things happening on that day. Listen to this passage from Luke's description of the scene that day:

⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and

residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

The Galilean apostles were suddenly able to speak to the Jews from far and wide, and be understood. To give you an idea of what that meant, here is a list of all those places I just read to you, and where place that is now.

- Parthia = Northern Iran, southwest of the Caspian Sea
- Media = Northern Iran, southeast of the Caspian Sea
- Elam = Southwest Iran, near Kuwait, north of the Persian Gulf
- Mesopotamia = Iraq and eastern Syria
- Judea = The West Bank of Israel and west to the Mediterranean
- Cappadocia = Eastern Turkey
- Pontus = Northern Turkey on the Black Sea
- Asia = Western Turkey
- Phrygia = West-central Turkey
- Pamphylia = Southern Turkey
- Egypt = Northeast Africa on the Mediterranean
- Libya = West of Egypt on the Mediterranean
- Cyrene = A small part of Libya on the Mediterranean
- Rome = Rome, Italy
- Crete = An island southeast of Greece (and belonging to Greece)
- Arabs = Saudi Arabia

To see the scope of the nations involved, look at a modern map of the area. I wish I had one of those pull down maps and a long wooden pointer like my grade school teachers did. Start at Rome, and move east to Turkey and Iran — then move west and south through Iraq and Saudi Arabia — then move west through Egypt and Libya in North Africa — and then move north across the Mediterranean back to Rome. You will find that you have traced a rough circle with Judea and Jerusalem at the center. Being able to speak to people from all those countries is something truly amazing.

I hope you leave here today understanding a bit more about Pentecost and why it is an important day for the church and for Christians.
Amen.