

All Together in One Place  
Texts: Numbers 11:24-30, Acts 2:1-21  
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – May 31, 2020  
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Picture for a moment the scene on that first day of the Church. The Jewish people had come together to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost was also called in ancient Jewish times the “Feast of Weeks.” It was one of three major annual feasts, a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. After the close of Biblical times, the feast was celebrated to commemorate the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. In this story, however, they were here to celebrate the harvesting of their crops. The text tells us that “they were all together in one place.” Kind of like how we are all assembled – not in person, but across cyberspace. Each of us comes from a different family, a different background, a different life history – yet all of us are assembled in this one place for one purpose, just as the Jews were on that day.

Suddenly, a blowing, violent wind came down from heaven. The wind filled the whole house where they were all sitting. Then, it says that what looked like tongues of fire separated and came to rest upon them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. What must they have thought as they gathered? Were any of them scared? Were there screams of fear? Of excitement? Of uncertainty and ignorance?

“God-fearing Jews,” who were residing in Jerusalem, came together. The Jewish people at that time were pretty spread out across nations and different lands. When they heard what was happening, a crowd formed “in bewilderment.” They were shocked, they were astonished, they were stunned, they were amazed. What was going on? How was it

possible that each person there was able to hear the other speak in their own native language?

The text goes on to tell us from where everyone originated – the Jews were not living in Palestine because they had been dispersed throughout the world through captivities and persecutions. But here they were, all together in one place, speaking the same language and being understood. Amazed and perplexed, the Scripture says, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” What did it mean for them? What does it mean for the church today?

Today is Pentecost Sunday. This is the day that we celebrate the birth of the Church. It all started with this group gathered in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit descended upon them, and they came together as the first body of Christ. As I have prepared this week, I have thought a great deal about what it is like when we all gather together in one place. I imagine the reason this has come to mind is because of how much I miss it – how I miss us gathering together in the sanctuary for worship, prayer, singing, fellowship and hearing God’s Word together.

During the passing of the peace every single week, something pretty spectacular happens. Our church displays what it is to truly be a church family. We come from different backgrounds. We are different ages. Some of us are in school. Some of us are working or raising families. Some of us are retired. We have different friends. Different interests. Different everything. And yet, despite all of those differences, when we are together, all of those differences go by the wayside. There was more than just a short “hello” going on. There was investment in each other – there was genuine caring. I chuckle each week watching Frank and little Luke holding court on the windowsill on

this side of the sanctuary. I look for Lori in the back giving me the “Let’s wrap it up sign.” I watch people go from one corner of the sanctuary to the other. There is a bond.

Last week, we talked about that bond which unites us is Jesus Christ. And that is definitely true. However, as we think about Pentecost, there is another bond. The bond of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we are brought together into the family of God – into the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood with Jesus Christ and with one another. Just as those first church members were united to each other and able to “speak the same language” to one another, so are we able to gather together and speak a common language, share a common life together.

Through the Holy Spirit, we speak a language that crosses the barriers of age, gender, generation, theology, maturity of faith. It is a language of love, peace, grace and unity in the name of Jesus Christ. Friends, this kind of faith in and this language of God are what God wants for each of us. It is the kind of faith that is fully and truly led by the Holy Spirit. But it is not easy to do that today, is it? People differ and disagree about most things today. Yet even in the church at Pentecost, there were those that tried to downplay it and discourage it. In verse 13, we read, “Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’” They tried to blame this newfound gift on alcohol. Our goal should be to pray to God that we can be the body of Christ, to search for the Spirit’s leading, and then wait patiently to be led to do God’s will, even and especially during these days.

And I think this bond, this unity, this common language is going to be even more important in the days, weeks and months ahead. As things start to reopen, as the Session begins to talk about what the church reopening might look like for us, I know we are not

going to agree on everything. I know that some of you may not be happy with the pace that the plans are made by the Session. There will need to be patience on all of our parts. There will need to be understanding and grace, compassion and love as we navigate these uncharted waters. As a pastor, I will boldly proclaim that I have never led a church through and past a pandemic before. I do not have a guidebook or rules on it. There was no “Pandemic 101” course in seminary. And your Session has no experience with pandemics either. So, the key – and what will help us best move forward – is love.

We must freely love each other, even and especially during those times when we do not feel like loving each other or do not understand each other, and most of all, we must worship. We must worship the God who created us, the God who envisioned and set into place the body of Christ, and the God who sent His Spirit to those first believers at Pentecost. Then and only then can we truly gather in one place. Then we can speak the same language – a language of Love, of unity, a language of peace, a language of grace. That language, my dear friends, is a language of service and worship to Almighty God. That is what happens when we are all together in one place – that is what could happen when we take it out there and move forward in these times. Let us pray...

Spirit of the Living God, we thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to those gathered in the house on that first Pentecost. We thank You that through Your Spirit, the people were able to understand one another in ways they could not before that time. In these times, dear Lord, give us understanding and patience, grace and Your agape’ love as we follow You. Through Your Spirit we pray, Amen.

