

“Is *That* the Church That?”
A, Pentecost; 10:00 am
Acts 2:1-21; June 4, 2017
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

I. PENTECOST!!

Ah, Pentecost! That day, fifty days after Easter, when the Church celebrates the “arrival” of the Holy Spirit. The Gift of the Counselor, the Advocate, the “Paraklete” if you want to speak Greek, to the Church all over the world.

As if. As if the Holy Spirit, the Divine Presence, the very breath and power of God has not *already* been here! As if, since Easter, we’ve just been muddling along, wondering *where* Jesus has gone, and if he’ll suddenly appear in our midst again without warning and give us some guidance, some proof—like nail-scarred hands—that he’s real and still walking with us!

Pentecost, like the cycle of nature and Spring that comes around every year—with the new life budding up from the depths of the soil—is *not* an announcement that God has finally arrived, where God had been *absent* before now. It is a waking up *in US* that God has been here *all along* and *we* need to shake off the sleepiness of winter and know that Presence in a new way. Every day. Starting today.

In a nutshell, Pentecost is a Choice, capital C. Catherine the Great, in the 18th century, said: "A great wind is blowing, and that gives you either imagination or a headache."

The Book of Acts tells us:

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit

spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them. And.... the people thought they were drunk!

So, which is it? This gift of the Spirit—given, or woken up to—once again on Pentecost? A great wind blowing, stirring imagination and renewed life and walking in the presence? Or.... a headache?

A wildfire of love and community blowing through the people so that they *finally* come to understand one another—even understand different languages!—or just a bunch of babbling, drunk nonsense? Too much wine, too early in the morning?

II. WITH, NOT FROM

David Lose says it’s easy to look at the big “arrival of the Holy Spirit” that we celebrate every year as some “saving from” the rough stuff of being alive, and of being church. Say, we have all the hoopla, the tongues of fire, the breath of the spirit blowing through us, lighting us on fire.

And, then, when the *next* Sunday arrives, and things are pretty much the same as always, we think that was “much ado about nothing.” But, the Holy Spirit did *not* come for the disciples (and that means us, too) as some kind of Super Hero sent to rescue them *from* challenges and hardships, but rather equips, comes alongside, joins arms. So that we can persevere, even flourish, amid the challenges. In the midst of the “same old, same old.”

Parakletos—the Comforter, the Advocate—actually *means* the one who “comes along side” of us, the one who advocates *for* us, remains *with* us, strengthens and helps us. Pentecost is all about “with” rather than “from.”

As much as we want to be rescued from the headaches—the challenging or difficult situations, God as the Spirit instead comes along side of us to strengthen and equip us to endure,

and even to flourish, amid challenges and difficulties.

“Why?” wonders Lose? “Perhaps because God may actually be working *through* us for the common good, to care for the need of our neighbors, community, and world. We have a **purpose**: to care for those around us as God cares for us, to make wherever we may find ourselves a better place, to share God’s love in word and deed that others may know they are not alone and, indeed, are loved. We are here, that is, not simply for ourselves but for those around us.”

III. HAPPY BIRTHDAY, CHURCH

Every Pentecost is a Choice. How will we welcome the Gift? How will we wake up to the Presence of the Divine Presence in and among and through us and each other?

It’s also a Happy Birthday moment, a landmark for the Church. A significant step on the Journey. A chance to “take stock”; look at where we’ve come this year. How we’re growing and embracing our future.

What does another year look like on us—in the rearview mirror? And, what does *another* year *ahead* promise, as we look out forward—through the windshield and over the hood of the car?

Has the year just passed worn us down? Tired us out? Has the gale force wind given us a headache? Or, has it stirred our imagination? Are we gaining in wisdom and stature? Widening our outreach? Broadening our welcome and embrace?

IV. THAT CHURCH OVER THERE

Consider what is being heard in the air, about *this* church, as we celebrate our Birthday; take stock of where we’ve been and where we’re going into another year.

I call this report, “That church over there!”

That church over there, on Crossman has a full parking lot all the time! Bike Fest, AA and Al-Anon meetings. Groups of every flavor meet there, all the days of the week. Republicans, Democrats, quilters, singers, dancers. And, then, did you see that celebration of life service, when the church couldn’t hold all the people celebrating the lives of the saints?

Did you see that the community dance was there at that church, and the great banner they’ve got on the wall, “Be the Church?”

We were in there for a play practice, and the walls are filled with bright, colored posters of Jesus, and Scouts, and mission projects and articles about young people and seniors involved in the community.

Isn’t *that* the church that sends out Mission Teams all over the place? Of all ages—the adults go on the “Youth Mission Trips” too?

Isn’t that the church where the young people go fix the roof and clean the gutters and work in the yard at the older folks’ houses? Where they stripe the parking lot at the medical center to raise funds for the Mission Trip? Where they deliver a lift chair for a senior and show him how to use it?

V. HOW ARE YOU KNOWN?

My previous church was known for a couple things. The BEST was part of their motto: “Where faith meets life.” I think *every* church should have that as a mantra. We were also known as The Peanut Butter Church! That’s quite a moniker. For we had an entire wall of shelves dedicated to collecting peanut butter for a local food pantry. The problem? Collecting things is good, right? But for years, that was the extent of the church’s “mission work.”

There was nothing “hands on” about it. No “boots on the ground.” It’s easy, in the burbs, to bring your jars and write your checks, and “help the people,” but never get your hands

dirty. We decided “The Peanut Butter Church” was *not* how we wanted to be known anymore, and took down the shelf and took *on* countless mission projects, trips, taking sack lunches down to where the homeless live; even worked on a water project in Africa.

Here at CUCC, we *do* collect peanut butter (and jelly), yes, but we do so much more than collect the sticky stuff—we get down in the stickiness of life with people and work together. That’s something to celebrate!

My former church also got to be known as “the church that breeds Pugs!” The pastor’s wife, my sister-in-law, would get calls at the church office when people were looking for pug puppies!

It’s important to pay attention to what you get known as!

But wait! There’s more!
Isn’t *that* the church that:
Has that awesome kitchen for mixing up pancake batter (Optimists) or hosting Spaghetti Dinners for Habitat?

That hosts rafting groups and Bike & Build and youth groups from all around? That now has a Kairos Prison ministry group from all over the state meeting there for training and prep?

That now has the biggest, coolest raised bed in a Community Garden you ever saw!

Isn’t that the church that has that Lady Pastor? The one with the horse? Do they do Cowboy Church? Hmm.....

VI. SEE HOW THEY LOVE

It was said of Christians in the early days of the Church (by pagans): “See how they love!”

Nowadays, I fear we as a culture forget what we’re looking for. The Church universal has gotten caught up in a numbers game.

We compare ourselves and any of our groups or organizations to others, and value “success” by how many numbers we have.

The Early Church was guilty of this too. How many times in the Book of Acts do we read some crazy number: “And 1,289,483 were added to their numbers that day!” (historians would say this was probably not likely and a little wishful thinking for that day and time!)

The Spirit calls us, on this Birthday celebration—Pentecost—to remember that ancient “word around town”: “See how they love!” To make a choice on this Pentecost day to look—not for numbers, but for connections.

NOT: “See how big they are! With a building expansion projects, or adding parking spaces.”
BUT: See how they love! See how they garden; care for the community. Send out Mission Teams to places near and far. Fill those bags of food every week, all year long for those hungry kids!

Look at the relationships, across the generations, that are being formed. See how they color together, serve together, come alongside one another.
“See how they CONNECT.”

VII. DWELLING IN PRAYER AND ROCKS

Clarke and I (and the dogs) we worked some more on our Prayer Labyrinth on Memorial Day. And, as we toiled, we remembered. Remembered the sacrifice of those who have laid down their lives. Those who have serve and serve still in the military.

And, we remembered this church. As I thought about the Church’s Birthday—Pentecost—coming upon this week, I wanted to embed you all in our Labyrinth as a birthday remembrance.

So, one by one, as I picked up rocks from the field and placed them in the maze of the Labyrinth, I called out each of your

names aloud. Your names are forever embedded in the rocks, in the earth, in the mountains.

We are the Church that.....

Lives on in the rocks and prayers of a sacred place, amidst the sacred practices done to bring one closer to God and neighbor in community.

VIII. WELCOME TO THE TRIBE!

Last evening in Buena Vista, a musical concert found the Spirit present. You may have thought that the Spirit is *only* allowed to show up “in church,” but ah, this is **so** not so. For the music in the Meadow just down the road here was moving and soulful, but it also preached a message.

A message very much in the spirit of our church. A message of inclusion of all God’s creatures and creation; of love that reaches out and around and through. I knew the Spirit had awakened for Pentecost, or, should I say, we are awakening to the Spirit, and that that awakening included the church and was far beyond the church.

One of the signs of the Spirit, was the invitation extended on the stage itself. This was no “battle of the bands.” There was no sense of competition at all. Musicians from countless other bands were heartily welcomed up to play along, and the heartfelt warmth of the welcome was palpable.

All were enjoined to share their gifts, to add to the hum and song of life. To take turns slicing a melody. The 9-year-old triplets of the keyboard player, decked in their footie pajamas, were even celebrated onto the stage to cut the rug on their favorite song, “Walk With Me.”

The crowd went wild! All ages. All styles. All gifts shared. At the close, almost 20 musicians came on stage and sang a song of invitation and welcome, with audience participation a must:

“Welcome to the Tribe!!”

It’s not about the numbers. Not about the sides, the party, the color, the stickiness of life. The Spirit moves among us, is with us, comes alongside us, when we welcome one another to the tribe.

Happy Birthday, Church!
Come, Holy Spirit, Come!
Amen.