

They Were All Together In One Place
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Acts 2: Pentecost/Communion Sunday

Last week we talked about Acts 1 and how it is packed with action and adventure; however the irony is that – before all of this action and adventure begins - the disciples are told to WAIT first, in the city for the Holy Spirit to come. The WAITING for the Holy Spirit was necessary for the plan of God to be actualized...for the church to happen....

I just want to make a distinction between two kinds of waiting;
There is the kind of waiting we do that looks like this



More like passive waiting – sort of fatalistic – whatever happens happens
Then there is this kind of waiting



This is active waiting or what I like to call holy waiting...

Holy waiting is active waiting, never passive

And I think this is a better image of how the disciples waited. They actively waited - in prayer, they waited in community, they waited in worship and in praise. They were in communion with God while they waited.

They *stayed disciplined and toned spiritually*- tuned into the Divine Presence...so that when the shot of the Holy Spirit came...they were ready to respond...

Acts 2 tells us how the Holy Spirit *did indeed come* to the disciples and how they were ready to respond; we call this in church lingo "*the story of Pentecost*"

Very few people on the street would have a clue what the word Pentecost means is if you asked them...sometimes when we talk about Pentecost, people might think we are talking about being Pentecostal but That is something entirely different...

What does Pentecost really mean?

For the first century Jew, **Pentecost was the fiftieth day after Passover**

It was an agricultural festival

It was the day when farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop and offered it to God partly as a sign of gratitude but partly also as a prayer that all the rest of the crop would be safely gathered in and preserved

But For the Jew neither Passover nor Pentecost were simply agricultural feasts These feasts brought back for the Jews the EXODUS story - when God fulfilled his promises to Abraham by rescuing his people

You may remember that Passover was the time when (the Hebrew people who were groaning under the lash of the whip of the Egyptians) sacrificed lambs, put the blood on the door, and the people were saved from the angel of death who killed the firstborn of every Egyptian. The angel "**Passed - over**" the door with the lambs blood on it...and spared the first born child.

Off went the Israelites that very night escaping as slaves from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and entered into the Sinai desert.

Then 50 days after that first Passover, they came to Mt Sinai, where Moses received the law.

Moses goes up to Sinai...and comes down with the Law

In the same way here in Acts 2 there is a parallelism to Moses...**Jesus ascends...goes up into heaven...and brings down the Holy Spirit**

Pentecost, the fiftieth day THEN isn't then JUST ABOUT the first fruits – the sheaf which says the harvest has begun; although that's very significant in one sense because the Holy Spirit is on the move harvesting people for the kingdom...

but also

Pentecost is about God giving to his redeemed people the Holy Spirit way of life by which they must now carry out his purposes, just as the Mosaic law had done before.

Now at Pentecost the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Convictor, the Healer is given as a law written not on tablets of stone, but rather a law written on the human heart.

Now the church has the Paraclete – which means “One alongside to Help”.

Today the church is meant to be - filled with people who themselves are filled with the Holy Spirit! Acts is OUR 21st century book...we are called to participate in this mystical adventure too....We are called to be A mystical people, not just simply a moral people (as we said last time) tuned into the presence of the Holy Spirit and following his leading and guidance at every turn.

How did the Holy Spirit come? As the sound of a rushing wind that filled the whole house, and as fire...

Fire and wind are untamable forces. Jesus said to Nicodemus “**the wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it. But you do not know where it comes from or where it goes...So it is with the Holy Spirit.**”

We are perhaps more familiar with the Holy Spirit working quietly in our hearts, or what we call the still small voice...and that is common.

But on that day, on that first Pentecost after Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit came and launched a movement that hasn't stopped moving. As a strong wind will launch a set of sailboats onto the sea, so this wind launched the beginning of what we know today as Christianity...

We can't simulate the fire part but I asked Todd to come up with the sound of rushing wind for you...a powerful rushing or as some translations say a “violent” wind – because it says it filled the whole house that day...listen and imagine you are one of the disciples on that first day when the Holy Spirit came...



(Read text – with sound in background?) terrifying and exhilarating...

If this hadn't happened folks, Christianity never would have come on the scene. Secular Bible scholars cannot explain how uneducated men most of them, suddenly changed to be fearless articulate and bold witnesses of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit being poured out is the sheer energy of heaven itself come down to earth to create a new thing...the law written on human hearts, and the very power of God in us to act it out

Smith Wigglesworth was an evangelist who was a powerful prayer warrior and experienced God's provision and healing again and again in his life. He would always say, "**It is impossible to overestimate the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit.**"

and

"In me is working a power, stronger than any other power. The life that is in me is a thousand times larger than I am on the outside."

This was the experience of the disciples, and it is our experience too when we are convicted of our sin, or have a moment when we know Jesus is Lord. That's not of us, that's the Holy Spirit;

And that same Holy Spirit stays with us throughout our lives continually forming us into a new creation...it is God's power at work in us that makes us more and more like Jesus...not our own efforts.

It is that same power of the Holy Spirit that makes us over into a new creation, and forms the church as a new created fellowship – a harvest of spirit-led, spirit-formed mystical not just moral people, in touch with Almighty God.

How can we as a church be more open to the Spirit's leading? How can we be the mystical body that God intended the church to be. Notice the first line of this small

section of Acts..."**When the day of Pentecost had come, they were altogether in one place.**"

Given the fact that Luke was a master writer this is more than just a statement of location. *It means that those disciples were also of one heart and mind as well as all being in one location.*

They had been waiting together, in prayer and in worship. They had disciplined themselves to wait for God expectantly, like those runners we saw earlier. Together they were unified in seeking God's goal for the future. They were one in heart and in purpose, and later it says they had all things in common. They were altogether in one place...and the HS came with power!

As a church, we too need to be unified as a body so that the fullness of the Holy Spirit can come in power and work in our midst.

One way we are beginning as a church is to embrace the ELI curriculum that our denomination has put out for members of session. (SLIDE OF ELI) ELI is designed to move Session members to not be simply a moral body making good human decisions; but to become a spiritual body (or a mystical body) of people who are united in the Holy Spirit and who are listening to God's plan and purpose for the church – not our own.

So that when God calls us to take a risk, or go out in faith we will all be in one mind about that, because we are all listening to the Holy Spirit.

The Director of ELI for our ECO denomination is coming to speak to our Session at the next Session retreat. I am hoping that this initiative will allow those who serve here as elders to indeed be "all together in one place" spiritually.

So that even if we disagree on issues...we maintain a deep trust for one another because all of us share in our primary reason for being a church – our faith and love for Jesus Christ who has indeed given us the Holy Spirit which is the power of God at work in all of us to bring unity of purpose in sharing the Good News.

We are about to take communion. Sometimes we call it Jesus' last supper with his disciples – and it certainly was that- but we can forget that Jesus was actually celebrating the Passover meal with them that night.

He was the lamb of God. He was to be slain and his blood shed so that death would indeed "Pass-over" us; so he could bring us forgiveness and eternal life for all who believe.

Jesus knew that not only would he be arrested that night and eventually crucified; he also knew that 50 days after he celebrated this last meal with his disciples the Holy Spirit would come to them – and like wind in the sails of a sailboat –

Christianity would be spread to the whole world. – and that this movement would continue to change lives and bring people to God down through the centuries.

With all this in mind, do you know what Jesus' last prayer after this meal was all about? It was about unity...you can read it in John 17. **It was a desire that the church "be all together in one place" – with God, and with one another.** It's only then, when we are all together in one place that the Holy Spirit moves with power.

So as you take communion this morning I'd like you do so intentionally, bringing to the Lord anything that might be keeping you from being unified with your brothers and sisters in this room...Close your eyes with me a moment...and prayerfully reflect on what I am saying...

Perhaps you have bad feelings about church institutions in general, maybe starting in childhood when you were forced to go, or perhaps it started in adulthood when someone in the church was hypocritical or hurt you in some way...and you just haven't quite been able to buy in here at WVPC or another faith community...

As you take communion give that to God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you connect again in trust with the people of God here, who are not perfect, but for the most part are who are doing the best they can to follow God's will... The Holy Spirit is present in this room to help you do that...to connect and trust again...ask him to help you

Perhaps you are holding a grudge or resentment against someone here. Friends we must forgive. It's one of Jesus' only commands to us (along with loving one another), and sometimes it's a process...but nothing impedes the Holy Spirit's work more than unforgiveness.

As you take communion, if that's you, lift that need to the Lord. Ask him to help you forgive someone or something. Ask him to live the burden of resentment from you...

Sometimes we need the Holy Spirit's power to help us forgive ourselves too...we've been forgiven by Jesus long ago if we've asked for it, but sometimes forgiveness of ourselves is much more difficult. Often our rampant criticism of others means that we are critical of ourselves...Maybe God is saying to you today... I receive you just as you are, You are mine....

The Holy Spirit is present in this room to help you forgive yourself today...if you need that

Our inability to be unified as a church, to be of one mind and spirit – altogether in one place – sometimes is impeded by our own ambivalence about God himself. Perhaps we have prayed and not received the answer we were hoping for. Perhaps God seems distant and aloof because of unjust circumstances and we wonder why God isn't intervening to bring justice.

If that's you perhaps as you take communion today...you are brutally honest in your conversation with God telling him how you are feeling...and you ask him for a special gift. The gift of knowing in your heart that despite everything he is still in charge, and that you are loved and your name is known. And make your amends with the Almighty God who gave his life for you...

Let's have a few moments of silence before I bless the elements...

Lord you see every heart, you know every prayer that has been uttered here in this room today...Pull us all together in unity to serve you here. As we take of these elements – your body and your blood – we ask that indeed we would be altogether in one place as we do this

As your forgiven people – willing to forgive one another and trust each other in hope and in expectation of great things to come

May we as a body –unified, and altogether in one place live out the gospel message

And continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit – a mystical people unified in you