

One Church, Two Congregations
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West Valley Presbyterian Church and Onnuri Church of San Jose

June 2 WV/Onnuri Joint Service

Text: Acts 2:1-4 NIV

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Sermon:

When I moved to the Bay Area ten years ago to become the pastor of Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church, another local pastor invited me to a retreat. Unlike most Pastor's Retreats that only include ministers from one denomination, this one was made up of pastors from lots of different churches and denominations in the Diablo Valley. They call themselves Church Without Shoes.

That is funny name, so I got curious. My friend explained: A few years ago some of us got together and said, "Different denominations are like different types of shoes. Calvary Chapel and Vineyard churches are like flip flops – they want to be casual and would rather be at the beach. Covenant churches are like tennis shoes – comfortable and flexible. Mainline churches are all about being professional, so it's dress shoes for them. And of course, the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches are passionate about spiritual warfare. When you think of them, you think of combat boots."

"But when we take our shoes off, our feet are all the same. When we take our shoes off, we are all just like the disciples in the Upper Room who submit to our Lord, allow him to wash our feet, and then follow his example by serving one another (John 13:15). That is why we call ourselves Church Without Shoes."

He then went on to explain, "We see ourselves as one church, but many congregations. If God is going to bring revival to the Diablo Valley, then God will use all of us. Church Without Shoes pastors have decided to stop competing, and start supporting."

I arrived late to that first retreat. When I came into the meeting room, I saw some 20 pastors – from all kinds of traditions wearing all kinds of shoes – surrounding one hurting pastor and bathing her in prayer. At that moment I knew: These pastors were not going to merely talk about unity. They intended to live it.

Since I started as Transition Pastor last November, I have seen how Onnuri and West Valley do not merely talk about unity. We live it. We are two congregations, who worship in two languages, representing two cultures. And we are one church.

There is great power in the unity and the diversity of Christ's church. Here, in Acts chapter two, the community – all 120 members – are together in one place. Together they experience three miracles, two responses to those miracles, and the ability to share one message in multiple languages.

The three miracles are the sound from heaven, the divided tongues, and the ability to speak the new languages. Because the sound comes from heaven, the source of this new thing can only be God. We cannot see it or anticipate it. It is not ours to control, manipulate, distribute, or withhold. We cannot earn God's blessing. We can only wait for it. Because we did nothing to earn it, we must instead honor it. How do we honor God's gift of power? By sharing it as freely with others as it has been freely given to us.

At the sound of the rushing wind, the Spirit comes. The Holy Spirit's power is visibly evident in divided tongues of flame. From God's Spirit, unity is revealed in diversity. The Spirit comes to the whole community, indwelling each member, and empowering every single one to proclaim the gospel in a unique way.

When the tongues of flame are divided, these Galileans are suddenly able to speak all the languages of the known world. This gift has come at just the right time, when Jews from all over the world have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts. They likely came two months earlier to celebrate God's rescuing power at Passover. Now, 50 days later, they are celebrating God's covenant power at Pentecost. The church that Jesus brought together is now proclaiming the gospel together. It takes many tongues to fully express God's plan for salvation.

Later in chapter two, after Peter preaches his first and probably greatest sermon, there are two responses to the message. Some say, "What does this mean?" They are expressing honest curiosity and openness to the new thing God is doing. These were the ones who heard the message, repented, and were part of the three thousand that were added to the church that day. Others say, "They are filled with new wine." They are the cynical ones, the ones who reject anything and everything that might require

them to change their mind and change their ways. The one response we don't see here is apathy. When the Holy Spirit speaks, the human soul may embrace it or reject it, but cannot ignore it.

Taken together, these three miracles confirm God's good pleasure with, and eternal purposes for –the newly gathered church. When the Holy Spirit moves among us, we enjoy God's good pleasure, and we are set aflame once more to play our part in God's saving mission for the world.

This is the mission that West Valley and Onnuri share – not only with one another but with every church in our valley. Renewal, restoration, and revival are God's work. Each of God's people is called to share her or his Spirit-gift to the work, so that we all may reveal the unity that only God can cause to happen among us. We are many disciples. We are two congregations. We are one church.

When we live as one, the world notices. Last month, at the Teddy Bear Fair, West Valley elder Brenda Gips was working at the costume booth. Kids dressed up as firemen, princesses, and super heroes to get their pictures taken. While this was happening, a parent asked Brenda about the worship services. She explained that we have two Sunday morning services, one at 9:30 and one at 11. She went on to explain that the 9:30 service is in English, and the 11am service is in Korean. The man looked at her, confused and curious. What kind of church would do such a thing?

Only a church that does not merely talk about unity, but lives it. Only a church that lives according to the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4, a church that is “completely humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love”... that “makes every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” and knows itself to be “one Body of one Spirit, called to the one hope to which we have been called –one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph 4:2-6) Amen.

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