

May 19, 2013 Pentecost

Scripture Lesson ~ *Romans 8:14-17*

Acts 2:1-21

Sermon *Pentecost Power*

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” This is how Luke begins his story in Acts 2, which tells about the church’s experience of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

The Pentecost, written about here, is not the same one we gather to celebrate today. Instead, the Pentecost referred to here is a Greek name given to the Jewish Festival called the “Feast of Weeks”, because it was celebrated 50 days after the Passover. Originally, Pentecost had been a harvest festival, but in the days when Luke wrote the Book of Acts, it also commemorated God’s gift of the 10 Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

And what were Peter and the other disciples doing all huddled together in their house on such an important Jewish Holy Day? Well, chances are that you and I would have had a tough time seeing any resemblance between this group of disciples and the brave band of missionary travelers they later became who went out from Jerusalem, boldly fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission. In fact, it is quite surprising that the disciples were still in Jerusalem at all, considering the kind of trials they had been through with Jesus in the weeks before Pentecost.

But something deep within told them that God had more in store for them, something more than fishing or carpentry, back in Galilee. Something would come of all Jesus had said and done, something had to! So they waited and prayed. And as they prayed, Luke tells us, they heard a loud rustling sound and a breeze began to blow through the house. As it blew, it grew stronger and stronger until it was a “mighty wind” which “filled all the house where they were sitting”, and then to their amazement there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them”, and as these fierce winds blew and the red flames danced above their head “they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.”

We cannot be exactly sure what these “other tongues” sounded like, but it appears that in this experience they were known, foreign languages. Whatever the case the people standing out in the streets heard this commotion created by the disciples in their house and they gathered outside the window to see what was going on.

Some were ‘amazed and perplexed’ and seeking to know more ~ they asked “what does this mean?” But the more skeptical people in the crowd made fun of the disciples saying, “they are filled with new wine” In other words, these people are drunk and they don’t know what they are saying.

But anyone who seeks to set boundaries for God in this way is ignoring the central message of this morning’s Acts passage. If we look carefully at this story, we can see that the focus here is not on anything human beings do or do not do – on whether we speak in tongues or not. No, instead the focus is on what God, through the Holy Spirit, does for us – on the strength and power that God gives, to those who seek to do God’s will, and on the response we make to this gift of power, this Pentecost Power which God gives to us, as we as a church make our journey of faith together.

What then are the main signs of the spirit’s presence in our local congregation or family of faith? Acts 2 speaks of three such signs of Pentecost Power in the church. The first sign is that the Spirit has empowered the people for mission. Contrast the picture of the disciples before Pentecost with the one we see in Acts 2 after Pentecost. Immediately after the coming of the Spirit, in spite of their fear of arrest, the disciples boldly stand before the crowd and Peter begins to preach with authority. He is not shy or ashamed or meek about what he has to say, but instead, as Acts says, ‘he lifted up his voice.

The point is that after Pentecost the disciples had a sense of unified purpose, a sense of mission, and not only a sense of mission, but the strength to carry through that mission. A second sign that the congregation has Pentecost power is that it is a church which is filled with fellowship and a sense of community. Acts 2:43-47 tells us that after Pentecost the Christian Community held many things in common – they shared their possessions with one another and there was mutual care and concern for those in need. It also says that those early Christians spent a lot of time together. They worshiped together, they prayed together, they ate and drank together. In fact, they just generally enjoyed each other’s company.

Certainly our personal relationship with God is important, but that is only half the story. The other half is that Christians must live in the community with others if they hope to love others and the world as Jesus did.

Finally the last sign of Pentecost Power in the local church is a sense of Christian joy in its members. I do not mean we all have to be grinning from ear to everyday; that would be foolish. Acts 2:46-47 tells us that the believers were in Community and mission together with, “glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all people”. In short, they enjoyed their work and they enjoyed each

other's company. Even in the midst of persecution, they were given the power to rejoice in the fact that Jesus had died for them. Life was not a chore, but a joy - a gift from God!

Where is our sense of mission here at Newport UCC? Do you feel a sense of community? Is our Christian life together a joyful one? I see signs of this Pentecost Power all around us. Do you? And remember, though the Spirit is the root of our power, we as individuals can cut off that root, if we want to. We can ignore mission and pull in from the outside world; we can also forget about community and pull away from each other. Then, what little our church does accomplish will be done with an attitude of drudgery instead of joy. That is why, as in the original Pentecost experience, we are challenged to respond. God needs our help – God needs your cooperation! We all have apart. We as a church, together, must help God release this Pentecost Power.

And together we say AMEN.