

Sermon by Pastor Hanberry for Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020 at Trinity UCC, Manchester, MD. "The Power of the Wind; The Power of a Paradigm Shift," based on Acts 2:1-21 Ser20-22

I have to be honest, really honest. I love the Pentecost story in Acts 2: the drama of chaotic-spirited-speaking voices in many different languages; the challenge the lay-reader faces in reading names of places no one can pronounce; Peter's powerful sermon with the amazing results—3,000 new converts. What preacher wouldn't love to preach a sermon with those outcomes. I love the image of the wind and the flames; of course, two phenomena that don't go together for a good outcome.

But wait a minute. I said I have to be honest. Really, if I tell the whole truth, I have to say I am having a horrible time offering up a sermon for this Pentecost that is any different from the Pentecost sermons of the past 31 years. Maybe it's the isolation of coronavirus stay at home orders. Perhaps, I am a little more stir-crazy than I realized (not sure about that but it does get hard to concentrate sometimes and I am sure about the "crazy" part—don't tell my wife that I used an inappropriate mental health word). Or maybe it's because the story in Acts 2:1-21 has lost its luster for me. No, I don't think that's it.

Given all this, I've spent some time, more time than necessary, really, reading some of my previous sermons for this Sunday. Some of them were not so good; I'm glad I don't have to hear those again. I have to admit some of the titles seem trite and silly; the sermon didn't live out the message intended by the title. That happens sometimes with my sermon titles. I have pastor colleagues who never put a title to their sermons. I ALWAYS create a title, often much before I've really studied the scripture texts to any extent or even before I have any sense of the message of good news I hope to offer in the sermon. For instance—I am still trying to be completely honest—four weeks ago I had to put a title in the bulletin for the coming weeks and so I sort of dashed off: **"The Power of the Wind; The Power of a Paradigm Shift."**

The model presented to us by the church gathered over 2000 years ago at its birth – the Pentecost church (now you know in part where the name of the Pentecostal Church comes from) is not the model of the church of the 21st Cen. Indeed, there has been a paradigm shift...or should we say there had been a mission drift --- we had drifted away from the mission of the church as presented to us in the second chapter of Acts... Indeed, we have drifted away

from the paradigm of the church as presented to us in the second chapter of Acts. What was the model set forth by Pentecost? My best answer to that question is from one of my previous Pentecost sermons:

- ▶ **Acts of Wonder and awe** -- excitement, enthusiasm, joy, astonishment, surprise, eagerness, passion, zest, gusto, delight, etc. etc.
- ▶ **New believers** -- overjoyed, excited about their new found faith, their new spirit...they're the ones who can't wait to share the experience with a friend or neighbor or even the very next person they meet on the way.
- ▶ **With things in common,** they pooled their resources according to the need of the whole community. Can you imagine?
- ▶ **Day by Day, they Pray, worship,** spend time with each other for spiritual growth and support...they invented the marks of discipleship. Oh to get back to the church paradigm of 2,000 years ago.
- ▶ **and then day by day, the Lord added to their number....**they were a growing community..a growing church. They believed in adding to their numbers. None of this, OK, our little family of believers is big enough now...let's don't add anymore else...let's not dream dreams or see any vision other than just keeping what we have right now...

Again, let me be honest: we lost some these elements of the church over the years. But, I think it's quite possible that the Coronavirus pandemic has brought us back to some of what the Pentecost church demands of us. Of course, the place and setting of our worship is different in these days, but look out in the parking lot between Trinity Church and the Lutheran church next door on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and what do you see. People from four or five churches, Trinity UCC as one of them, giving out food bags to anyone who shows up and says they have a need. ▶ "**With things in common,** they pooled their resources according to the need of the whole community. Can you imagine?" Well, yes we can imagine.

Let me interrupt myself for a moment and say that with all the controversial, disunity about when to open businesses, spas, and gyms and yes, churches, I have to be honest: WE NEVER CLOSED BEING THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST. We closed the doors to the building for worship and meetings but we are still—MORE THAN EVER, MAYBE—being the church. We are still working daily to be the church that is represented by the banner on the outside of our building.



That, my friends, is the modern 21st Century version of the church of Pentecost. It really is, honest to goodness, the church we are seeking to be in these days.

My friends, the church of Pentecost, the church of 2,000 years ago was not fascinated with the status quo. No, they were **obsessed** with sharing their ministries, with sharing their lives, their resources, their spirit, their faith, their space, their dreams, their hopes, their hurts. And finally, it seems to me they were energetically open to the power and work of the Holy Spirit...thus, **the power of the wind.**

Three months ago, we had probably come to the place in the life of the church where we seem to prefer a more orderly, controlled, structured spiritual life together, which almost works to prevent the breaking in of the Holy Spirit?

In these days, we cannot be complacent. We cannot seek to maintain the status-quo version of what the church looks like in our lives. Yes, I know you're reading this sermon at home (hopefully) or you will hear a version of it on Sunday via Zoom but we have to explore how to live into a new future, into a new version of the church blow by the wind of the Holy Spirit.

Well, let me ask you the question *Tom McGrath asks in a book about raising faith-filled, spirit-filled youth: **"What happens when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives?"** He says "we received gifts we never dreamed of..." and then suggests these gifts. ►WISDON: Knowing intuitively how to handle a tough situation at church, work or home (without bickering and whining); ►UNDERSTANDING: We might stop our normal angry response toward another long enough to think what it's like to walk in his or her shoes; ►LIVING IN COMMUNITY: We might see the growing diversity of the population of our area (diverse in language, racial, cultural, & economics, and generational diversity) as a rich cultural gift rather than as a burden and intrusion into life as we used to know it; ►COUNSEL: We might find the words of hope that get to the heart of another's dilemma; ►KNOWLEDGE: Instead of seeing every problem in the world as having a simple answer (that's usually wrong anyway) we might with the Spirit's power, dig deeper for a more thoughtful resolution.

The list could go on. These are the gifts of the Spirit – gifts that are waiting to come sailing into our lives --- even waiting to find a place in our sheltered, stay at home lives and community.

God sends the spirit. Let our prayer be: "God helps us all to re-create the church of Pentecost. Amen.