

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC
May 20, 2018
Pentecost

“An Amazing New Beginning”

“Amazed and astonished, they asked,
“Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”
Acts 2:7

Prelude:

Our worship this morning is full -
overflowing we might say -
a perfect storm - a convergence of
church rites and sacraments
all designed to amplify the
spirit and truth of Christian gospel.
I'll do my best to be efficient - indeed,
brief with our morning message.

First, a word about the significance of confirmation,
“Covenant Class” in the language of Plymouth Church.
Rev. Ruth has been much involved, devoted, in preparing
this year's class for this day. It has involved considerable
time and effort.

I recall, fifty years ago, my own confirmation. Pentecost
Sunday, 1968. It followed two years of instruction, Saturday
mornings, working with the Heidelberg Catechism. Formal
instruction was provided for understanding the law (ten
commandments, prayer(s) - in general and in particular,
the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostle's Creed - which was a
recitation of belief, in God, in Jesus, in the Holy Spirit.
Undergirding this instruction was one basic conviction:
those who are baptized, those confirmed in the church,
belong. The message was, and is, we are not alone,
but God loves us, and God is with us.

We are not alone, Jesus, affixed with various titles:
Lord, Savior, Friend – Jesus has come to us, to abide
and dwell with us, to accompany us on the journey of life.

We are not alone, the Holy Spirit, within us, is working
for our good, our health, our wholeness. And the Holy
Spirit working among us, is creating and renewing
the church of Jesus Christ, **“binding in covenant
faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races”**
(UCC Statement of Faith).

Mind you, before the ONA movement,
Before Just Peace,
Earthwise,
Global mission –
this was celebrated language
that articulated and proclaimed our church’s
understanding of faith: a confessional grasp
of the God who
 calls (creates) - seeks - judges
 come and shares -
 bestows and binds -
 and promises ... to be with us through thick and thin
 till time is exchanged for eternity,
 and the everlasting life.

No one day in the life of our church year quite
encapsulates all this like Pentecost – which is the
day that illustrates the church emerging from
its seclusion, with power and conviction to share
and impart gospel with the world.

Pentecost – this is a day that marks a beginning.
But not just a beginning; rather, a new beginning.
which is a reminder – regardless of our stage or season
in life – Christian gospel and the work of God’s spirit,
is often seen as fostering, as creating, new beginnings,
new markings of life, in the most surprising of ways.
It is a birthday – quite unlike any other.

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We find all sorts of surprises in the reading this morning:

- (1) The Holy Spirit was distributed to all of the assembly, to each as the Spirit gave them ability; no one was left out; neither male nor female, young or old.
- (2) **The people** at the center of attention - **the source** of the preaching and praise of God - the people giving witness of the glory of God - **the recipients** of Holy Spirit power and joy - were Galileans; all the devout people (Jews) of the day were “amazed and astonished.” Surprised. In the KJV - they “marveled.” They were “confounded.”

The point being? Galileans were not seen as being suitable recipients of such favor. If there were blessings to be had in this world, you wouldn't expect to find a fount in Galilee. It is a reminder - God covenants with the oppressed, the overlooked, the occupied. God raises them up and empowers them to preach and practice gospel.

- (3) Yet another surprise is the connections that are made - so many, divided by tongue and class and culture, find themselves actually connecting, finding common concerns that are shared, given all the differences, all the factors, that keep people separate.

Some were amazed at this - others not so impressed; Some “sneered.” They ridiculed the messengers, and mocked the message. They were seen to be under the influence of an intoxicant other than God - for God, they reason, would not behave in such a way with such a people.

Hold on to a faith that fosters amazement and marvel and wonder. Our God is full of surprise that cautions us to beware of false or transitory contentments.

Montaigne, 16th century philosopher:

“The conviction of wisdom is the plague of humanity.”

Montaigne was aware of conceit and its blinding power, especially the conceits spawned by religious orders, who presume coziness with God.

It is in our spiritual DNA – to not presume too much of God, only “more than we can ask or imagine.” The lesson of Pentecost? God is acting in ways that surprise and delight, to bring blessings into the world, for our good, in keeping with Jesus and his love.

There is always more. “More light,” in the words of John Robinson, pastor to our pilgrim ancestors. There is always more light, Pentecost surprise, in store for us.

May we work and pray to keep such fire alive in our lives, In our world.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,
for the demands of the day are many;
so be charitable as you read; and remember:
the contents of this sermon have not been edited
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*