

Scriptures:

Acts 2:1-8, 12

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language the words of people from everywhere in the Middle East and Europe? In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean? What does this mean?'

Romans 8:24-25

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Sermon:

Pentecost Sunday is one of the most important Sundays of the year, right after Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. On Christmas Eve we wait, holding our breath for the miraculous birth of Jesus. After the warmth of Maundy Thursday, tragedy of Good Friday, and emptiness of Holy Saturday, we celebrate the astonishing resurrection of Jesus with overflowing joy. Both Christmas morning and Easter Sunday focus on the astounding love of God and Jesus.

Pentecost Sunday is different. Pentecost Sunday is a Sunday when we focus on and *celebrate* the Holy Spirit. In Christian churches we speak of three interdependent manifestations of the Divine: God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit takes center stage.

I think of the Holy Spirit as the *active* presence of God and Jesus in the world. A metaphor that is often used for the Holy Spirit is breath, from the Hebrew word *ruah* and the Greek word *pneuma*. From the word "pneuma" we get pneumatic tires or the illness, pneumonia. Breath, both the intake and the exhalation of breath, are essential to life. As a child, I remember seeing tiny swirls of wind, like a mini-tornado, on the playground, or moving across the baseball field. Sometimes these would pick up pieces of paper, that would be lifted high in the air. These swirls of wind would come out of nowhere. Sometimes they would quickly dissipate, sometimes they go for some distance and I would chase after them in delight. As a young man, I remember warm breezes wrapping themselves around me on Mt. Tam and sending me to explore new places and people. The Holy Spirit acts in the same way – it sends us out to connect to new places and new people.

As a person of faith and pastor, I remember times when the Holy Spirit would suddenly help me and others understand how seemingly unconnected people or ideas were, in fact, directly connected. The Holy Spirit inspired my coming to Sycamore and has been a creative force in many of our activities here, including yesterday's Rummage Sale and September's Bazaar, binding us together in faith and in love, with one another and with God.

In one of the UCC's statements of faith we read: "You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, *creating* and *renewing* the church of Jesus Christ, *binding* in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races."

On the day of Pentecost people from many parts of what we today call the Middle East and Europe could suddenly understand each other – men and women of different ages, that spoke *different* languages and dialects, from *many* races and ethnicities. Today we would take that even further, and include people of *all* physical and mental abilities, *all* gender identities and expressions, and *all* sexual orientations. In other words, everyone, absolutely everybody!

Why was the Day of Pentecost so important to the early church? Because people of all kinds could understand each other. And why was understanding each other so important? Because the first steps to loving each other are knowing and understanding each other. When we know, understand and love each other, great things are possible. The Holy Spirit gave birth to Sycamore in 1904, led the building of this church in El Cerrito in the '60s, was the mid-wife to the Preschool 22 years ago, and is swirling among us again, just like one of those little tornadoes I chased across a playground. We cannot see it but we can feel it, dancing in our hearts.

As Georgia described to you, the Holy Spirit may be calling us to create a new building in front of today's sanctuary. Why do we think this? Because the Holy Spirit doesn't believe in straight lines, it moves in zigs and zags, like the cloud during the day and fiery pillar at night that led the Hebrews through desert over 40 years. It works on communities of faith over time, touching each one of us at the right time and in the right way. It brings us together to talk – to share our hopes, dreams *and* concerns; and that's just what we have been doing for several months.

The Holy Spirit leads people of *faith* and when they follow, their faith *deepens*. The Holy Spirit teaches us to believe in God's promises through *experiences*, not just words or our intellectual understanding. We walk by faith *because* we believe; and we *believe* because we *walk together* in faith. We trust God with all our hearts and not just our own understandings. We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is *unseen*. Today the new building is unseen, *unless* you look with the eyes of faith.

When we look through the eyes of faith, we can see a building for future generations. I see a new building that acts as a new home base, to help us connect ever more deeply with our neighbors and community.

Prior to the Day of Pentecost, the followers of Jesus focused on their immediate community and those they could come in contact with easily; just like we focus on those that happen to find us today. But after Pentecost, the disciples began to spread the Good News throughout the known

world. The same will hold true for us. If we build a new building, which a number of people feel we *must*, we will be propelled *out* into the community. Some will come to use our newly expanded facilities, for reasons that are important to *them*. *We will only know their reasons they come, if we listen to them*. We will listen with Pentecostal ears and hearts, that will enable us to understand the real needs of the community, not just those to whom we have traditionally connected, but new people as well. Who are these new people? We don't know and that's okay.

The good news is that the Holy Spirit already *knows*. *She* will send us forth to *listen*, understand and love the whole people of God that we are *uniquely* called to serve. Equally important, we have and we will build new partnerships with other institutions and organizations who bring new experiences and skills, to complement our existing gifts. May the fires of Pentecost burn brightly within each of us and send us forth, to seek, listen, understand, and love!

Closing prayer (offered spontaneously)