We’ve Got Spirit, Yes We Do!
Acts 2:1-21
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The Feast of Pentecost

It was right before a big state championship football game. I was sitting in the Mt. Lebanon High School gym. All the students, faculty and administrators were there. The juniors and seniors sat on one side of the gym, and the freshman and sophomores sat on the other side. On the floor of the gymnasium were members of the football team, the drum line, and the cheerleading squad. I mostly remember a lot of loud announcements and drums. But I also remember that the cheerleaders led the crowd in cheering back and forth across the gymnasium, “We’ve got spirit, yes we do, we’ve got spirit, how about you?”

That phrase would get volleyed back and forth between the underclassmen and the upperclassmen, “We’ve got spirit, yes we do, we’ve got spirit, how about you?” Finally, both groups would just yell, “We’ve got more, we’ve got more.”

I guess the idea was to whip us up into a frenzy of school spirit that would pump up the athletes and lead the team on to victory. The teams’ victory, in turn, would encourage us, and bring greater unity and strength to the school as a whole.

Perhaps the passage from Acts is the church’s answer to the pep rally of my youth. All of the believers were together – the upperclassmen who had been with Jesus through his public ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection, and those freshman who had come to follow Christ more recently. And down on the gymnasium floor was Peter, number one cheerleader for team Jesus.

It had not necessarily been the best season for team Jesus. They’d taken a few hits, what with losing their star player late in the season. And when Jesus had died, the rest of the team had fallen apart. They just could not keep their heads in the game. Thomas had walked off the field, only to be coaxed back after much persuasion, and Cleopas and the other disciple had tried to go back to their old team in Emmaus. It took a miracle to keep them on the team. Judas of course had turned free agent, but they had brought up the rookie Matthias who was a good substitute. As of late the team had rallied, buoyed by the locker room chats from the risen Christ, and now they were all together to celebrate Pentecost.

Still, you had the impression that just one bad call, one blown play could send the team into a tailspin, and the season would be lost. With the absence of Jesus, they needed something to bind them together, something to make them one with each other and one with God.

For us, it is a bit different. We have not suffered one single loss that threatens our community, although our society has seen its share of tough times lately. No, those things that would draw us away from team Jesus are much more subtle. In our workplaces, in our neighborhoods there is much to keep us from true community with God and each other. Let’s face it, there are better places to go to be amused than here. There are other commitments that pull us away – work, sports teams, even caring for family. The sheer busyness of life is enough to make us hang up our uniforms. Or, perhaps more accurately, forget to even put our jerseys on and come to the game. We may have more in common with those earlier disciples than it might first appear. For we, too, have much to keep us from true community with God and with each other.
But something had brought the disciples to the game that day, haggard and worn-out though they might have been. The scriptures recount, “They were all together in one place.” And upon that ragtag, scared, skittish group of disciples, God offered the gift of the Holy Spirit. The poetic language of the scriptures speaks of the sound of wind and divided tongues, as of fire, that fell upon the group. That poetic language indicates that something amazing, something unlike anything that happened before happened when the disciples came together for the feast of Pentecost. And although we can’t be sure of exactly what literally came to pass in that room, we do know what the result of that experience was. The people’s experience of the Spirit of God so united that group together that even the differences in languages, which had kept them from understanding one another melted away in their unity in Christ. And although team Jesus had gone into that game tired and worn, verging on the brink of collapse, after the experience of Pentecost which bound them together they were an unstoppable force that spread the good news of the gospel to the end of the earth. Hear these words from later in that chapter; Luke is writing of the group that had gathered on that day and he says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common: they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their numbers those who were being saved.” (2:42-47)

The coming of the Spirit had transformed Team Jesus. That group of disciples that perhaps was not all that different from us was gathered together in one place, a place that perhaps did not look so different from this place, where we are gathered this morning. We have come to this place, instead of all the other places we could be this morning. We have come to this place to be together, in spite of all the things about us that make us different. We have come looking for the wholeness that results from being a part of the body of Christ. And the same Spirit that made the ragtag team of disciples into the body of Christ on that first Pentecost is also here with us, today.

Laura Cunningham, who served as a parish associate here at FCPC several years ago, once described the Holy Spirit as being like the electricity in our homes. It is there all the time, but you have to plug in order to power up.

How do we plug in? That is no secret. Through the ages scripture has taught us and the church has born witness to God’s presence with us through the Spirit when we turn our lives to God, when we stop being distracted by the things of this world and pay attention to God. Through spiritual disciplines of prayer, study of scripture, acts of compassion, and community we nurture that part of ourselves that allows us to become aware of the Spirit’s activity and presence in the world.

Team Jesus was steeped in the spiritual discipline of prayer. From the earliest example of observing their savior who would “go away to a quiet place,” just when it seemed that there was too much for him to do to take the time to pray. Jesus’ witness caused his followers to pause and ask, “Lord teach us to pray.”

We, too, prepare for the coming of the Spirit when we stop and quiet our hearts in prayer, offering to God the decisions, the questions, the struggles of our lives, and listen for God’s response.

Team Jesus was steeped in the spiritual discipline of the study of scripture. The disciples had grown up knowing the story of God’s saving acts through Abraham and Sarah, through Moses and Aaron, through the house of David, through the judges and the prophets. And they continued to learn about how God had come to save in an entirely new and grace-filled way, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
We, too, prepare for the coming of the Spirit when we take the time to learn the stories of our scriptures. When we know how God has been present to God’s people in the past, we become more trained to see that same presence acting right now.

Team Jesus was steeped in acts of compassion, “they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” They knew that the Savior had come especially for those who were left on the edges of society, who had been neglected and cast off. Those people the savior brought into the very center of his new community, making lowly fishermen, despised tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners the core of his family of faith.

We, too, prepare for the coming of the Spirit when we place ourselves in the presence of those who are poor, those who are suffering, those who lack the voice and the power to speak and protect themselves. When we put ourselves in the presence and at the service of, “the least of these,” our hearts are softened to be ready for the coming of the Spirit.

Team Jesus was steeped in life in community, “all believers were together and had all things in common.” This is perhaps the hardest discipline for our individualistic society to practice. Oh sure, we can gather in a large group, and even enjoy being in each other’s company. But it is much more difficult to have “all things in common,” to share the truest part of who we are, our hopes, dreams, fears and worries. It makes us vulnerable to being rejected, or worse, hurt or even abused. But if it is true that in real community we are most vulnerable, it is even more true that in real community we are most supported and upheld to be who God has created us to be.

We, too, prepare ourselves for the coming of the Spirit when we risk being vulnerable in true community with brothers and sisters who will uphold us on our journey, and help us to recognize the Spirit’s actions in our lives.

It has sometimes been mistakenly believed that we practice the spiritual disciplines of prayer, study of scripture, acts of compassion and community so that we can perfect ourselves and bring ourselves into God’s presence. But anyone who has practiced these spiritual disciplines with integrity will tell you that is far from the case. When we pray, when we read the scriptures, when we act in compassion for those Christ loves, when we put ourselves into community, we do not find God. When we practice these spiritual disciplines we come to find that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit has already found us.

In fact, the cheer of the faithful is not, “We’ve got Spirit, yes we do.” What we know, what we can proclaim, what we can yell from the bleachers or the mountains or the pews is not that we have Spirit. But rather, by the grace and mercy of God, the Spirit has us. And when we know the Spirit has us, well then, my brothers and sisters in faith, there is no saying what we can do together.

Glory be to the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen. Amen.