

May 11, 2008  
Pentecost Sunday

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## MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### **Catching the Spirit**

Luke 24:36-49 and Acts 2:1-8,11b-13

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appeared to the disciples in that time after the crucifixion and before his actual ascension. We are told that Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into the disciples and then asked them to stay together until the power of the spirit became present in their midst.

It is on the Day of Pentecost that we find both the chaos and the power of the birth of the church. It is a moment that has been recorded in the second chapter of the book of Acts. The account shares the chaos of the wind and fire with a cacophony of sound. The streets of Jerusalem are filled with the faithful who have come to the city to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. In the Jewish tradition this celebration comes fifty days after Passover.

With mystery, wonder and power the church of Jesus Christ comes into being. Hear these words from Acts 2:1-8, 11b-13.

In the Christian Church, Pentecost is the celebration of the day when the followers of Jesus become bound together as the Body of Christ. What issued forth was a holy fire that burned through the land bringing people to the love of God. It is by the power of the Spirit of God that those disciples who were scared after the crucifixion, were now out in the open professing their devotion to Jesus. With the power of the Holy Spirit, this ancient community finds their identity, their purpose, and their passion. The presence and power of the spirit of God has been with the church ever since.

In human history there was a period of about six hundred years or so called the Dark Ages. This was a horrible time in history when famine and hunger were common, when living conditions were so deplorable and medical treatment so primitive that even mild illnesses would ravage communities bringing death to many. People were starving, violence was commonplace and it is said that humanity hung by a thread. What actually pulled Europe through this miserable span of human history was the building of the mighty cathedrals. The construction employed thousands of people offering them access to income, food and shelter.

The cathedrals became places of worship as Christianity continued to grow as well as centers for the community gatherings. Over and over again, the presence of God's spirit in our midst has changed the course of history.

Pentecost was a moment in time in the city of Jerusalem, but it impacted all time. The power of the Holy Spirit is not contained to that day on the streets of Pentecost. The power of the Holy Spirit is not contained to the beloved disciples who had walked with Jesus and who began to build the church after the Resurrection. The power of the Holy Spirit is not contained in the

walls of this church or any church. The power of the Holy Spirit transcends all time. The power of the Holy Spirit can be found within the Body of Christ whether that is two who are gathered in the dark under threat and oppression or thousands gathered in a mighty cathedral in the light of day. The power of the Holy Spirit was the igniting factor in the growth of the early church in Jerusalem and beyond. The power of the Holy Spirit continues to be the wind and fire in our midst this very day in this very church.

Tomorrow night, the Church Council will receive the long range plan that has been developed over the last year. Imagine Meridian was a part of the process and included weeks of responses from you the congregation, interviews with persons in the community, interviews with a random selection of people are active members, inactive members, members who have moved to another church, and members who are active, but do not pledge. All the information compiled was studied and the information became the foundation for condition statements about the church and the areas for our focus. After tomorrow night, we will refine the work that has been done so far and then begin the far more difficult work of developing mission and ministry that will shape our future.

The presence and power of God's Holy Spirit has not gone to sleep. It is that very spirit from the ancient birth of the church that is still with us as the Body of Christ today. We are the recipients of God's blessing. We are the recipients of God's grace. We are the recipients of God's everlasting presence and power.

The Spirit continues to move in our midst, to bind us together and to inspire our living. The Holy Spirit came to believers that day in the streets of Jerusalem and is with us this day. This is our time to lean into the spirit and to live our passion in ministry. This is our time to live in Christian community with each other and offer compassion to our neighbors near and far. As we journey forward, we will have opportunity after opportunity to invite others to join us. As we begin to live into the ministries of the long range plan we will find ourselves shaped anew by God's grace.

We are all ministers in the name of Jesus Christ. We are all called to serve the Lord of Love.

I close with a tale of two churches. One church is located in upstate New York. It is an old church built before the American Revolution. It is colonial in architecture and is similar to this beautiful sanctuary except it is smaller and the pews are enclosed. It is a church with a remarkable history. During the American Revolution, the church served as a hospital. Over time, however, instead of being an active Body of Christ, it became an historic site. People go to this church now not to celebrate worship and offer praise, not to live out their lives in mission and ministry, but rather to tour and remark on its beauty and history.

The second is a small church in Kansas. Well, it is not exactly a church building; it is a community of faith. Just a little more than a year ago, a violent tornado ripped through the little town of Greensburg, Kansas. The United Methodist Church of Greensburg was almost completely destroyed as was the rest of the town. As the tornado moved past, the majority of the town of Greensburg was obliterated.

A small congregation of Methodists remains in Greensburg. Many have moved away, but some have stayed and they are rebuilding the community and the Methodist Church. As they continue to build their community, they also have a passion to be in ministry with others. They have placed their trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to see them through this tragedy and continue to honor opportunities to be in ministry. They have found many ways to stay connected in mission and ministry in their community and beyond. They are not what they once were, but they continue to be strong and faithful as they face their future together. One of the many volunteers who have come to assist this community of faith said of her experience, “I went to help at the United Methodist Food trailer after the tornado and saw the devastation. What this church has done is truly a miracle. They have put their trust and faith in the Lord.”

Meridian Street, this Body of Christ has a rich and faithful history. Will we move ahead empowered by the Holy Spirit as we embrace our future? Will we honor the rich heritage left by those who have gone before us, but also continue our partnership with the Divine as we continue to build the Kingdom of God? Will we be willing to offer our gratitude for our past, but focus on our future and take the risks and offer the commitment to bring that future to reality? The answer will depend upon our willingness to claim our identity and live into the power of the Holy Spirit. The decisions we make today will determine how we forge our future as the people of God.

One of my favorite teachers within the faith tradition is Walter Brueggemann. In his book entitled, *“Mandate to Difference,”* Brueggemann writes these words, “There is an old ad for Lipton iced tea. It presented a young person on a hot day falling backward, joyously, into a cool swimming pool. Be like that today and all your days....You will be held, emancipated, and embraced. Your power will stir in your life, and you will notice. And when you notice, give thanks...and dance! You will notice your true self dancing away from denial and singing away from despair. You will dance. Others will notice. You will notice, and you will dance!” p. 47

On the day of Pentecost, the church was born and dancing in the Spirit began. The dance is not over. The Spirit continues to hold us, emancipate us and embrace us. By the grace and spirit of God, we will dance into our future with courage and confidence. We will always be known for the beauty of our facility, but more importantly, we will be known as a community of joy, compassion and hope. The spirit of God, evident in our midst, will continue to define us and with the presence of God and partnership with one another we will see a new world and with God’s grace – build it! This is a day of celebration, this is the birth day of the Christian Church and a new day in the history of Meridian Street United Methodist Church.