

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**Lib McGregor Simmons**  
**“Pentecost Party”**  
**Acts 2: 1-47**  
**Day of Pentecost**  
**May 15, 2016**

It was Pentecost, and the roads leading to Jerusalem looked like I-85 on football Saturdays in the fall. People were streaming into city from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, for one of the biggest parties of the year. From every corner of the globe they converged upon Jerusalem, setting up their grills and their pop-up tents in the festive atmosphere. It was a first-century stewpot of Egyptian conversation and Pamphylian aromas and Arabic music and Libyan laughter.

Everybody was there, it seemed. Well, almost everybody. Everybody was there except a small band of people who were not out sampling the savory tastes and drinking in the colorful sights and happy sounds of the streets, but rather were closeted away in the claustrophobic stale air of an upstairs room of a house on a deserted side street. Bereft of their Savior who had died, who had risen from the dead to be with them, but who had then left them alone again with nothing but a promise that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (whatever that meant!), they had barricaded themselves behind closed doors to pray and wait things out, perhaps believing that for the time being anyway, their safety lay in sticking together and keeping everybody else out.

As it happened, however, there was an unexpected guest who arrived in that out of the way place without so much as even the courtesy of an RSVP. This guest, the Holy Spirit, simply swooped into the room, turning everybody there into human candles on a Pentecost birthday cake. And when they saw what was happening and opened their mouths to say to each other, “Hey! Watchout! Your head’s on fire!” what came out of their mouths instead were languages like nothing they had ever learned in school.

Pretty soon the word got out on the street about what was happening in that out of the way room in that out of the way house on that out of the way street. And the people came and Peter preached and lives were changed and the church of Jesus Christ was born and, because the Holy Spirit which blew into the room on that first-century Pentecost is the same Wind-Breath-Spirit that we breathe in every Sunday when we gather here for worship two millennia later, the party is still going on.

Now, sadly, there are many Christians who have forgotten if they ever knew it in the first place that the Christian faith is in very essence a party. Sadly for them and sadly for the world, there are lots of Christians who are living under the erroneous impression that the place for the faithful is in a barricaded claustrophobic church that is essentially a hideout for like-minded people to get together and agree about everything that is wrong outside on the streets. Sadly for them, being faithful is more about making good grades on some behavioral or theological final exam than it is about letting go so that the Spirit has free reign to set them on fire and through them, to fill the whole world with divine light and holy heat.

It breaks my heart to say this, but that there are actually some people who accuse Presbyterians of being like this, can you imagine? People will call us “God’s frozen chosen,” conjuring up images of stern, dour-faced, pursed-lipped descendants of our Calvinist ancestors.

I want to set people who think of Presbyterians this way straight right now.

Partying is actually at the heart of who we are as Presbyterians who make our theological home in the Reformed tradition. The very first question of the Westminster Catechisms, written during what some would judge to be the flintiest, most rigid period of our history, is this, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever.”

That is why we are here...to enjoy God. Or to put it another way, to have a party.

That is what it means to be the church: to be a guest at God’s Pentecost party, not just this Sunday, but every Sunday and every other day of the week. To be sure, there is a lot of sadness, a great deal of injustice in the world. But the Holy Spirit is loose in the world and this is what enables the church never to lose our party spirit.

Through the power of God's Wind-Breath-Spirit, what the Pentecost party continues. It continues when we're building a Habitat house and when students from DCPC kick a soccer ball with new friends in Nicaragua. It continues whenever someone assembles the ingredients for a casserole to take to a fellow church member who has just had a baby or who is undergoing chemotherapy. It continues at the cookie study break when Davidson College students chow down on chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin goodies home-baked by members of this congregation on the night before the start of exams and when children jump out of bed on a summer morning so excited they can hardly stand it to get to Vacation Bible School and when young adults who have grown up in this church get so caught up in the party spirit that they actually go to seminary and prepare to be ordained as ministers, or shall we say, Pentecost party planners which, if you ask me, sounds like a lot more fun than "teaching elder."

And so my dear brothers and sisters, whenever we are discouraged or anxious about the state of the world or the state of the church, let us remember that the Christian faith is, at its heart, a Pentecost party, and that our chief end in life, as our forebears well knew, is about glorifying God and enjoying God forever.

Note: I am indebted to Barbara Brown Taylor who sparked the central idea of the sermon by her reflections in *The Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual, Series 1-Year B*, compiled and edited by Jana L. Childers and Lucy A. Rose (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 116-120.