

The Spirit is in the House Acts 2:1-4

For most mainline churches Pentecost is the day when we dip our toes in the waters of the spirit. It is not a comfortable thing for us to do because in many ways we have relegated the acts of the spirit to those churches that claim the gifts of tongues and embrace the acts of healing. Some of that may be present in mainline churches, but it is not out front, and it is not a part of our regular practice.

And so when Pentecost rolls around we celebrate the birthday of the church, but we do it in a more reserved, more uptight, way. No dancing in the aisles, no hand waving (not much anyway), and no speaking in tongues. For most the only difference you will notice is that the liturgical colors are red for the day. In some movements this is a high holy day marked by burning incense and chimes (bells and smells for the outsiders). No such nonsense for us. All of that would be distracting! And we don't want our worship to be distracting...we want it predictable...we want it a consistent.

So, here we are. No nonsense, no distractions, reading the traditional story about Pentecost. Happy Birthday church! (blow on a noise maker)

Seems a little feeble doesn't it? After all, the story today is about the spirit of God descending upon the disciples. After all, the story today is about God choosing to use men and women, Jews and Greeks, slave and free, in proclamation of the Good News. Not only today is the story about the new church it is about an inclusive community called forth and honored for their variety of gifts. This is the day when the horse is let out of the barn, and there is no going back.

Notice that when this begins it is among the selected few. All were gathered together in one place and the spirit filled the whole house. Those in the inner circle were the first upon which the spirit descended. The spirit was literally in the house! But it didn't stay there. Others came to observe and comment, but it didn't end there. Peter and the others, filled with the spirit leave the house and begin to preach, and the spirit moves. No longer is the spirit exclusive to the inner circle, it is now moving among those in earshot and

thousands convert! This is even bigger than a Billy Graham crusade, for there is no set up, no pre-work, this is the spirit set free, out of the box and changing lives.

Now hold on, we say, that was for that moment in time, but the church doesn't act that way anymore, now it's about controlled space and institutional comfort. The spirit can enter the house but more like a mild breeze and no crazy speaking in tongues...that won't do! We can't risk setting the spirit free because it might change the way we do things...it may even change me.

Folks for over 30 years I have preached Pentecost sermons that risked little. I am just like most of you, *as long as the spirit stays in the box, then maybe I can continue to justify the way I live my life.* Once the spirit is out of the box and in the house, well, anything could happen! You're right...it could, and it does!

I want you to know that I love this church! You are some of the kindest and most generous people I know. When I look at our newsletter I continue to be amazed at what this church is willing to do to change the lives of others. From our own backdoor to the corners of the earth, Southport continues to reach out in love. From Haiti, to the Congo, to just around the corner, you give and give to make a difference. The spirit is in you!

But I have also come to discover about Southport that we like things, for the most part, as they are. I sense that if we could simply stay the way we are, healthy and vital, caring for each other in this place, we would do so forever. Why not, it is a known, there is no risk, it feels comfortable, why not just leave well enough alone? For years, well before I came, this church has talked about significant change...change in location...change in who we want to welcome in...change that brings rebirth. Before I came there were regional discussions about a new church in Johnson County but they were asked to stop because Southport was in a discernment process and may be moving that way. That was 7 years ago. For one reason or another, once the information is gathered, once a plan is discussed, once the ramifications are known, it stops. Past proposals have felt over-zealous, too expensive, too uncomfortable, or at not the right time. I have looked at those proposals. There was a lot of good work done and many of those changes would have headed us down a path that would have made this conversation today unnecessary. But

nothing of substance happened. Sure, Southport has survived and, for the most part, very well. But I am convinced, as are many of you that the future of our church, if we are to have one, needs to adjust to the needs of the world around us. *The spirit is moving among us and it is time to set it free!*

God has a plan for Southport. We are taking steps to determine what it is that God is calling us to do, and it is getting close to the point where we are going to need to make some decisions. I know that the mere mention of this causes anxiety, a little discomfort, but if we don't begin this discussion in earnest today, then it may not matter tomorrow.

Pentecost is about new birth, new life, empowered people, an on fire church. For us to honor God's presence in this place *we can no longer sit on our hands, look for our old seat and hunker down...* we need to flex our arms, stretch out our backs, and open our spirits to God's Holy Spirit.

Folks, your Board has authorized a process to begin which will give us the needed information to make some decisions about our future. Once that information is obtained, prayed over, and studied, you will be invited into conversations about the results. It has taken awhile to get this train moving again, but we are moving, and we are heading towards whatever destination God has in mind. This will be a difficult trip, it will require all of us to give a little in the process. This is not about winning or losing, this is about listening and responding.

In three weeks I will have been with you for four years. Our time together has been about preparing the soil for this discussion. When I came to Southport, many of your leaders were already ready to take this journey, but the majority of you were not yet informed. To some extent that is still the case. If you feel like you are out of the loop, you are not alone. Let me clarify...decisions have not yet been made...conversations are just now beginning to happen. But soon, very soon, things will begin to crystallize and the train will leave the station.

As we move into and through the summer you will be asked to attend meetings for conversation and feedback. If you want to be heard...if you want to make a difference...take these opportunities as they come to you. Anything we decide will not happen overnight, but just like the two paths converging in the woods, sooner or later you

need to choose one and move forward. We have been standing at the convergence for too long and we need to start our journey down the path that God is choosing for us.

On this Pentecost Sunday we can no longer worry about the cost of letting the spirit loose, we must worry more about what will happen if we don't. God is prepared to lead this ministry forward. God has had a hand in preparing the hearts of this congregation's leadership and the right people are in place to help us decide.

There is a part of me that wishes the spirit would enter this place like a raging storm. There is a part of me that wishes we would hear things and see things that stretch us way out of our comfort zones. There is a part of me that prays God will find a way to move us off center and kick us out of our well worn nests so that we have to learn to fly all over again.

Today is the day of the spirit. Today is either just another day, or it is THE day when we risk becoming what God wants us to become. Will we look back on this day as just one more time when we talked a good game...or will we see this day as the first day of a new chapter in the wonderful life of this church we love so much! It is not up to me...it is your call. What will today be?