

**COME, HOLY SPIRIT, COME**  
**Acts 2:1-8; 12-21**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, May 27, 2012**

Today churches all around the world are celebrating Pentecost, the third major feast day on the Christian calendar. Unlike Christmas and Easter, Pentecost is completely under the radar, ignored by the world culture, probably because Pentecost spotlights the elusive and mysterious Holy Spirit of God who defies any cheap and easy attempts at commercialization let alone explanation.

When I was a kid in Sunday School learning about Pentecost for the first time, I thought I had the Holy Spirit all figured out. I reasoned if God was Jesus' father then the Holy Spirit had to be Jesus' uncle. When I presented my brilliant thesis to Sister Mary Augustine, I remember her just glaring at me while slowly shaking her head.

Anyway, because the Holy Spirit defies explanation, someone some years ago had the bright idea of shifting the spotlight away from the Holy Spirit by reinterpreting Pentecost as being the birthday of the Church, thinking it would make Pentecost more accessible to the man in the pew. So Luke's story about what happened that day was toned down by making it primarily about the disciples being transformed into apostles called to carry on what Jesus started.

Yes, that's exactly what happened, but the revisioning of Pentecost came at the expense of us grappling with the personality of the Holy Spirit, identified in the Nicene Creed as the "Lord and Giver of Life."

So let's take some time to explore, as much as humanly possible, who we're really celebrating this day by asking the seminal question, "Who is the Holy Spirit?" The short answer: the Holy Spirit is God, not a "what" or an "it" but a "who." Next week we celebrate Trinity Sunday and once again we'll unsuccessfully unravel the mystery of three persons in one God. But for now, let's just say the Holy Spirit, like Jesus, is God's revelation of Himself, this time as God's holy and eternal presence permeating the universe and beyond, bringing order out of chaos by sustaining everything and everyone through the power of love.

Here's a good metaphor to picture the Holy Spirit: the earth is a planet surrounded by an ocean of air. The air we breathe gives us life. (Remember in the creation story in Genesis how God breathed the breath of life, or his spirit, into Adam's nostrils.) If this ocean of air suddenly dried up everything and everyone would suddenly die. Likewise if God withdrew his presence, the creation would cease to be.

Jesus came into the world to reintroduce us to God and through Jesus we are invited to enter into God's presence as never before. But Jesus knew that someone in particular also had to be reintroduced to the world before this could happen. That's why in the Upper Room, after Jesus told the disciples that his time with them on earth was

coming to an end, he promised, “I will not leave you orphaned...In a little while the world will no longer see me; but because I live, you also will live...I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate (or Helper) whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” (John 14:18-19; 25-26)

Then in the opening verses of the Book of Acts, just before his ascension into heaven, Jesus also said to them, “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

With that the disciples returned to the Upper Room where they “were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.” (Acts 1:14)

Luke doesn't record the content of these prayers but it's probable at least some of their prayers reflected their grief and confusion during this messy time of transition while waiting for God to make the next move. At least one of the disciples had to be wondering, “How can we carry on without him?” and “Will this void in my heart Jesus left behind ever be filled. How I miss him so!”

And then it happened. Everyone gathered in the Upper Room was given an astounding mystical experience as the Holy Spirit rushed in like a mighty wind. At that moment their confusion and grieving evaporated they suddenly knew Jesus as never before, more intimately and passionately than when they could see, hear, and touch him. What's more, through the Holy Spirit's coming suddenly they realized people who never met Jesus in the flesh, as they did, could now know and love him as much as they did when he walked with them through the hills and valleys of the Promised Land.

And then this, before Pentecost Peter, James, John and the rest knew Jesus to be larger than life, but now through the Holy Spirit, Jesus transcended life, causing the once vapid and bumbling disciples to become Spirit led Apostles, confident and bold to bring Christ and his Gospel, first to Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth.

In one sense at Pentecost these newly minted Apostles met Jesus again for the first time. Through the Holy Spirit they received new insights into the mind and vision of Jesus. His teachings and instructions took on new depth and urgency.

Well, as they say, that was then and this is now, begging the question, can what happened then, happen again? I sometimes wonder what's keeping the Holy Spirit from rushing through our front door on Sunday mornings with the same intensity and excitement as He did on that first Pentecost. But then again, maybe He has multiple times, only we're not as open to receive Him as those gathered in the Upper Room. Remember, they were intentionally waiting and constantly praying. You might even say they were desperately waiting and praying for the Spirit's revealing of Himself because they realized, their future lives depended on His coming. And when I say “their lives,” I mean more than the quality of their individual lives, but especially their life together as

members of the mystical Body of Christ, whose mission was and still is to make disciples through Jesus' servant-hood lifestyle.

Pentecost really wasn't the birth of the Church that can be traced back to when Abraham answered the call to be the Father of a great nation, whose descendants would out number the stars in the heavens and become a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Even so, Pentecost is certainly one of those important hinge moments in the story of God's people as the Holy Spirit fulfilled Christ's promise to empower, nurture and guide the saints and apostles to be the Church, not a manmade institution, but a living organism, a movement of God's gathered people bringing Christ to the world.

Now before you think this vision for ministry is unattainable for us, let's remind each other the Holy Spirit gives us all the resources we need, at any given moment, to accomplish the Church's mission. What are those resources? Look within yourself, until you see your own spiritual gifts and natural talents, time and energy God gives you and most of all your inherent potential for obedience and commitment. You and I put together have what it takes to be a Christ-centered, Spirit-led church of ardent believers and doers. Otherwise God will have to find someone else to do our job.

Two women were standing at a bus stop in front of a church. One said to the other, "I just joined this church." The other replied, "Why, I never see anything happening there."

Ouch! What an indictment. We need to be aware of our neighbors' perceptions of our church because if they figure nothing of substance ever happens, God will have to find someone else to do our job.

I'm glad we can honestly say with integrity good things are happening here that weren't happening a few years ago. The monthly Coffee House, our Community Garden, Youth for Christ meetings, our A+ Before and After School Care Program are all making an impact on children, youth and families in the surrounding communities. And yet as grateful as we are for these outreach ministries I'm not convinced Babcock is running on all six cylinders. This isn't a criticism, simply an observation. God knows some of you give more than many hours to the ministry of this church on top of your ongoing "outside" ministries to people in need.

But Pentecost shows us if we pray hard and if we wait expectantly the Holy Spirit will rush into our lives with the force of a mighty wind. We can become equally energized and focused. We won't just set goals, we'll work hard to meet them. Good intentions will become bold acts. We can make time to have meaningful conversations with friends and neighbors that may lead to opportunities for faith sharing. We can find ourselves making time to spend time with the lonely widow down the street or the troubled teenager next door needing friendship and direction. We can pray for people whose lives have been altered by job loss or insidious diseases, we can find ways to get involved in other people's messes, helping them shoulder their burdens, reaffirm their humanity and remind them they're not alone.

Karl Barth the great pastor and scholar of the last century wrote, “A Christianity that doesn’t reach out and serve in the world isn’t Christianity.” The first members of the Church instinctively knew this. How else do you explain the hyperactivity of those first Christians as they banded together to change the world?

You can’t explain it, not without acknowledging the powerful impact the Holy Spirit had on them.

After the benediction, we’ll go down to the Fellowship Hall and enjoy good food and good company. While we’re together I want you to make a pledge, that in the week ahead you will pray for the people sitting at your table, praying they too will be praying, for themselves and each other, that they will in some form or another have a sudden awareness of the Holy Spirit rushing over and through them. Pray that you, your brothers and sisters in Christ catch the Holy Spirit as easily as you can catch a cold.

And then wait for God to make the next move.