

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
June 12, 2011
Rev. Bob Garrard

Pentecost Worship Theme: The Holy Spirit Arrives,
Acts 2:1–21, 1 Corinthians 12:1–13, John 7:37–39

“The arrival of the Holy Spirit was phenomenal. Many strange and wonderful things occurred. There was a mighty wind, tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the apostles, many languages were spoken, yet everyone understood what was being said.” The sudden rush of a mighty wind is something we often experience in Wyoming. It is a sound that has been recorded and reproduced. A Rev. Ken Lentz writes, “I once sat in the large field house of a college at commencement. The college choir was to perform before the huge commencement audience. As the choir members took their places on the platform, a recording began to play softly a sound like the wind. At first, people in the audience wondered what was happening? Then the sound became louder and louder, filling the large auditorium with a terrific sound as if a wind were bringing a tornado. Abruptly the sound stopped, and in the stillness the choir began its hymn of praise to the Holy Spirit. It was a thrilling experience for those who were present, for it made them feel they had experienced the same wonder which the apostles had felt on the first Pentecost. The experience of the first Pentecost needs to grip the hearts of all believers today.” “Emphasis”

There was quite a bit involved on that day the promised Holy Spirit arrived in the midst of the disciples of Jesus Christ and gripped their hearts. It arrived on the morning of Pentecost, the 50th day after Passover. Many consider the Pentecost experience to be the birthday of the Christian Church. Let us reflect on some the hallmarks of the birth of the church when the fire and wind of the Holy Spirit came upon it. May our hearts also be gripped by the power of the Holy Spirit.

First, the church was born in a context of obedience. Before his ascension, Jesus “ordered the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father”—the promise of the Holy Spirit. The disciples had just watched Jesus ascend to heaven which may have left them feeling alone. “It’s hard to guess what their impulse—as individuals or as a group—would have been apart from that instruction from Jesus.” Was there the urge to bolt out of fear and doubt? Fortunately for the future of the whole Christian church, “those disciples obediently stayed together in Jerusalem on Pentecost because Jesus had told them to stay and had promised the Spirit would come to them.”

What do we do today when we have to wait for the promised presence of God and Jesus in the Holy Spirit to become manifest in our lives? Waiting for God’s promises to be fulfilled in God’s time may involve our whole lifetime. Will we stay faithful and obedient to the Lord as he works out the plans for our lives? I have seen many of you obediently wait for the Holy Spirit to work in your lives and in the life of this church. Out of such obedience and patience I have seen the Day of Giving, MOPS and soon the small group ministry come to fruition. Fortunately, for the future of this church, you Jesus’ modern disciples, have obediently stayed together in Cheyenne— Sunday after

Sunday because promised the Spirit has come upon you. The church was born and still thrives in a context of obedience to Jesus Christ.

“Second, the church was born in an environment of unity that developed because the disciples were obedient to Jesus. ‘When the day of Pentecost had come,’ Luke reports, ‘they were all together in one place.’” When people listen to the Lord and obediently wait together for his promises to be fulfilled, the Holy Spirit comes upon that body to unite them. When a church has a common vision, as we do in “Bringing People Together in Christ’s Love,” and the Holy Spirit is with us, unity is a result.

This same unity of the church was seen in 1934 when some German ministers wrote the “The Theological Declaration of Barmen” that is in our “Book of Confessions.” It is symbolized by the banner hung in the front of the sanctuary. The ministers met, prayed and stood together in opposition to Adolf Hitler who claimed to be the lord of German lives. They lifted up Jesus Christ as the true living Lord of all. They wrote: “The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.”

Also, in protest to Hitler’s false claim they wrote: “We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords--areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.” They strived to stay united at the risk of their lives for seven more years until World War II ended in Hitler’s defeat and death. Their words still ring true for us today to encourage us to stay united in faith.

And so it was God’s purpose and will that while the first disciples were together as one body; and just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit came dramatically upon them. The church was born in an environment of unity that developed because the disciples were obedient to Jesus.

“Third, the church’s birth was in accordance with scripture. When Peter explained to the crowds what was taking place before their eyes, he turned immediately to Old Testament prophecy. Citing Joel 2:28-32, Peter understood the Pentecost event as the fulfillment of what the prophet said would mark ‘the last days.’” ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” It is because of scripture we have an understanding of what the Holy Spirit is and what it brings to us. In John 14, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples as he prepared them for his death. “25 I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

This same Holy Spirit continues to teach us through the scriptures today. Our “Confession of 1967” also from the ‘Book of Confessions’ summarizes this: “The one

sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.” “The church's birth was in accordance with scripture,” and its life today is still to be lived in accordance with scripture as taught to us by the Holy Spirit.

“Fourth, the events of that day were misunderstood by bystanders. It is crucial for the church not to be overly dismayed by the skeptical world around it. John the Baptist’s critics thought he had a demon (Matthew 11:18), Jesus’ adversaries thought him a lawbreaker (John 5:16-18), and the Pentecost bystanders figured the disciples were drunk.” Today, we face a similar world that tells us our faith in God in Jesus Christ is foolishness or much less important than the drugs, alcohol, fashions, sports events, consumer goods or whatever money can buy. “Again, we must continue to reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords.” (Declaration of Barmen) We must ask the Holy Spirit to continue to help us be obedient to Jesus Christ as Lord, to be united in faith in him, and to teach us how to live and love according to the scriptures in a world that misunderstands us.

“Finally, the church's birth was itself reproductive. From the very beginning of the world, we see that reproduction was God's design in creation, as well as the implicit nature of the great commission –namely, that the disciples should go and make disciples. So it was that, on Pentecost, the church of Jesus Christ, which had been able to fit into a single room that morning, was, by the power of the Holy Spirit an international group by that afternoon.” The Spirit has given us a never ending reproductive-ness because as Jesus said in John, the Holy Spirit is the river of living water that flows from him into our hearts. The Holy Spirit will constantly nurture and give new life to us like an ever flowing river. “The church's birth was itself reproductive.”

“Emphasis” 6/12/11, Kalas

This reproductive River of Living Water, the Holy Spirit, as we heard in I Corinthians poured out talents and gifts upon those disciples as it does unto us today: Gifts that range from preaching to healing, to miracles and tongues and more: Gifts that are to be used for the common good and unite us as one body in Christ: Gifts that are to be used for the glory of God and the reproduction of the church. It is the Holy Spirit that will be leading our nominating committee to seek our elders and deacons who have been gifted by the Spirit to lead our church. It is the Holy Spirit that gifts us with faith to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It the Holy Spirit that gifts us with the opportunities and courage to share this faith with others so they too might be led by the Spirit to make the same confession of faith we have done. It is the River of Living Water, the Holy Spirit that gives us the spirit or enthusiasm to live for Jesus Christ in word and deed.

Such spirit and enthusiasm flowing from the Holy Spirit is seen in this story involving the Rev. Don McClure. Don was a leading Presbyterian fraternal worker to Ethiopia years ago who inspired me to go into the ministry. Don was the maternal

grandfather to Jonathan Partee who spoke here in March. Don also died for his faith in a cross-fire in Ethiopia. Don told the story of a seven-year-old named Orop in the book, Adventure in Africa: The Story of Don McClure written by Jonathan's dad, the Rev. Dr. Charles Partee, a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. "One day Orop became a Christian after having heard Don's preaching and wanted to help tell the Jesus story. Don told Orop that he could help by carrying his briefcase into the jungle. He did so with radiance and love. One day Orop did not appear. A few weeks later, his mother came and said that Orop had died. He had unfortunately been eaten by a crocodile. And then she added, "May I carry your briefcase; may I help to tell the Jesus story, too?" Orop's mother demonstrated an amazing spirit of enthusiasm, courage, faith and obedience from the Holy Spirit to do what she did. "Emphasis."

Ironically, the Holy Spirit spoke to Holly's and my life in this story. In 1969, Holly, our newly born baby daughter, Heidi, and I attended a mission rally at my home church and Don McClure was the speaker. As Holly and I listened to Don, we were feeling inspired by him and the Holy Spirit to go do mission work in Africa—until he told this story about what happened to Orop. At that point Holly, while holding our precious baby Heidi, looked at me and emphatically stated "We are not going to Africa." So the Spirit instead sent us to Pennsylvania, Michigan, South Dakota, the Chicago area and here. I have been up to my neck in alligators in a couple of churches, but we have been so blessed by the Holy Spirit to be able to share in teaching and preaching the gospel alongside you for ten and a half years and pray for a few more.

On this Pentecost Sunday may our hearts be gripped by the Holy Spirit: So that we might join the early disciples, Rev. Don McClure, Orop and his mother to be as obedient, united, inspired by scripture and productive as they were: So that we might, so to speak, "carry the brief case of Jesus," tell his the story and that of the arrival of the Holy Spirit to the world.