

“Light the Fire”
Pentecost Sunday
June 8, 2014

Acts 2:1-21

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Par'thians and Medes and E'lamites and residents of Mesopota'mia, Judea and Cappado'cia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phryg'ia and Pamphyl'ia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyre'ne, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 'And in the last days it shall 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; 18 yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. 21 And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Happy Pentecost Sunday! Today marks the birthday of our church, we celebrate it liturgically by wearing red and hearing again the scripture from Acts 2 which recalls to us the beginning of our church and is the last big Sunday until Advent at least in the liturgical calendar. Each major holiday our Denomination focuses on another area of mission and most appropriately for Pentecost this year our denomination has focused on new church starts under the tagline “your church was new once!”

In each of our bulletins we have the Pentecost Offering insert that shares the beginning date of Hooker Memorial Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Our first service as a congregation was November 2, 1957 almost fifty seven years ago. Not many of us were around then. Not all of us were even born or thought of then myself included. Yet, the church began and has continued and has made its mark in the history of Greenville and with the people in this community.

“Every church was new once.” It is a great unifier and it can be a great way of looking at new church development and understanding but this slogan understanding stops and does not give us enough to go on in building the church because most churches are only “new” for a short time. If you know anything of new church development most new churches are given a 3-5 year window to be self sustainable and considered an actual viable congregation. In the end most new church starts ultimately fail and this flyer would have you believe in some ways that it is due to lack of funds that we are not growing or expanding as a church. You see what the flyer fails to mention is the number of “established” Disciples churches that close each year, the numbers of lost members either through transfer of membership or death. It asks us to recall that we were once in the same position and were also able to be a success or fail. To be quite honest when I first read this slogan it made me think Yeah, the church was new once upon a time...back in those good old days though those good old days are gone.

We have to admit it do we not that every church was at one point new and fresh and vital. Yet, why is it only new churches that get that distinction of being what is “new”. We get a little bit caught up in the new is better ideology and instead of breaking that mold it seems that we as Disciples have decided to embrace it? Every church was new once does not give us something to rally behind and stand on as a congregation today. I say instead of every church was new once we should be rallying behind “every church is new, now” Today we are a part of the new and vital understanding of

the church and if we do not consider our church new and vital then we might as well continue to bemoan the past and what can never be again.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, do you think that the Disciples were dwelling on what was or could be, no they were living in the reality of what is, what is in the Spirit of God at work in and through them. You see the significance of this Sunday is not that the Spirit of God came and was given to them but rather that they began actively engaging in Ministry together and sharing their love of Jesus with the world.

That would be the key is it not, actively engaging in ministry together is what marks the beginning of a church. While we might historically have a birthday to really live in the every church is new now movement we have to continually reengage ourselves in ministry. We have to view each moment as a new chance of the church. The old saying you are only as old as you feel or act is true in all ways particularly in the life of our congregation. If we want to be old we can be or we can be the new church on the block or at least be the one everyone is noticing and talking about and engaging in ministry with.

Remember that engaging in ministry together is the key to our congregation's newness. If we stop engaging in ministry then we start living in once upon a time way back when we used to do so and so. Let me put it to you another way, as today we are talking about the Spirit of God entering us and engaging us in ministry together the Spirit of God is depicted in two very profound images both shared here in Acts 2. The rushing of the wind and the tongues of flames. Contextually both images have different meanings but today let us focus on one particular understanding that of fire.

The song "Pass it On" begins with "it only takes a spark to get a fire going" and that is a profound image in the life of the church how one spark ignites movement and ministry it is often a single spark that creates new churches and new ministries.

Let me show you this (Light a match) It is a beautiful spark is it not but that spark soon goes out unless it is given something to burn. I can light match after match but one thing it needs to keep going is fuel, an unfed fire will not burn.

We can talk about our once upon a times our todays and our nows but if we do not add fuel to the fire we can not continue in ministry. It does not matter when our church was new if we do not tend the flame and feed the fire we will have nothing left to share and instead of the fire igniting new churches and new ministry we will be left with only the ashes of yesterday. Amen.