



“Are You Pentecostal?”

Text: Acts 2:1-21

a sermon by the Rev. Anna von Winckler

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

The well-known author and preacher, Fred Craddock told a rather funny story about a lecture he gave when he was on the West Coast speaking at a seminary. Just before the first lecture, one of the students stood up and said, “Before you speak, I need to know if you are Pentecostal.” The room went silent. Craddock said he looked around for the dean of the seminary. He was nowhere to be found. The Student continued with this quiz right in front of everybody and asked again, “Are you pentecostal?” Craddock was taken aback and so he said, “Do you mean, do I belong to the Pentecostal church?” He said “No, I mean are you pentecostal?” Craddock said, “Are you asking me if I am charismatic?” The student said, “I am asking you if you’re pentecostal.” Craddock said, “Do you want to know if I speak in tongues?” He said, “I want to know if you’re pentecostal.” Craddock said “I don’t know what your question is.” The student said, “Obviously, you are not pentecostal.” He left.

Last week, Jerusha spoke about this new era we are in: this post-Christian era. I hope you all heard her sermon and were as blown away by it as I was. If you haven’t heard it or weren’t challenged by what she said, then I hope you will go back and listen to it. Jerusha said so much more succinctly and eloquently what I have been trying to say since I arrived. The Church of today has new challenges in this post-Christian time. It has to reimagine the role of the church, in regard to how it does ministry in all aspects of the life of the church: in its welcome, worship, spiritual nurture, ministry outreach in the community

and beyond, and how it is called to use its resources. I don't know what the next 500 years of the church will look like, but I know that, as it was in the beginning of the church, we will need to be reliant on the Holy Spirit for guidance, inspiration, and a courage to step outside of our comfort zone in order for this new life in the church to come about; and that is a tall ask of people.

When I think of what the church needs to do to once again become relevant and useful to God is the following:

One: Do not fear. I have touched upon the fact, in past sermons, that initially the disciples were overwhelmed by the death of Jesus. He had tried to prepare them for when he would be crucified and leave them, but the reality of that act left them untethered, confused, and unsure of what to do next. And so, what is one to do when one is unsure of the next move? The first thing they did was to not be afraid. In order to not be afraid they needed to remember that they were not alone. While Jesus had left them, God had not. So, while we are told to fear not, we need to remember that part of not fearing is to find strength and encouragement through God and one another. We are called into community, as well as prayer, which leads us to:

Two: Prayer and community. Because the disciples didn't know what to do next, they gathered together and they prayed. This is what they did before the day of Pentecost, these two go together. The passage from scripture that highlights this time after Jesus' death gives us a roadmap of what we are to do when we don't know what to do next - and that is to gather together and pray, to discern as a group what God is doing and how God wants us to proceed. The disciples didn't abandon their mission after Jesus died, nor did they rush out and do things without the guidance that they needed. They took the time needed to prepare through prayer and fellowship. However, we don't foster either enough. We should be gathering together in prayer more than just on Sunday morning. And, we need to nurture those relationships as we dream and plan and vision the future because it is something we are called to do together. So, we need to devote ourselves to gathering together and praying. And, we need to nurture those relationships as we dream and plan and vision the future because it is something we are called to do together. This interim time at this church may seem long to some, but this is the necessary step that needs to be taken in order for this church to discern not just what it's going to do in

the next year, but to discern where God is leading that is different than anything you've had in the past. This is the discernment that needs to happen. This is the visioning that needs to happen. The church needs to change from a religious organization to a spiritual entity that is transformative within society, truly transformative in each life, more than it ever has before. This may sound overwhelming, but it's doable through prayer and the unity of community.

Three: Hope. While the disciples were gathered together in prayer, and unsure of what the next move was to be, they did not lose hope in the GOD that they worshiped AND BELIEVED IN. While these are unsettling times, both in society and in the life of the Church, as we see the Church shrink in size and influence within society, we need to hold onto the hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, that he is creating something new. We need to be excited for the new things that God will do and is already doing. The problem is that change is hard and fear holds us back. But if we can believe what the Scriptures tell us, like Jeremiah 29:11: I know the plans I have for you, to give you a future and a hope. Then we can go forward, knowing that whatever happens, God's got us and it's going to be OK. Our hope lies not in this world, but in heaven, with the eternal God we worship.

Four: Vision. I have touched on this earlier, but it can't be said enough. We need to have vision to think "outside the box". The disciples did things they never expected to do. Imagine, speaking in new languages to share the gospel. God provided the gifts and talents that the disciples needed at that time to achieve the goals that God had, which was to spread the good news of God's love.

The need for God's love is just as important today as it was at the time of Pentecost. However, there is no blueprint for how to proceed in the best way to share God's love. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to give us vision, to give us a new ways of sharing the good news, new ways to engage with those who are the least of these. We also need vision and direction in countering the political leadership that keeps groups oppressed, just as Jesus countered the political leaders of his time.

As Jerusha said, it's not that people aren't spiritually hungry, they are. It's just they too often see the church as hypocritical, like dry bones, unable or unwilling to offer living water to those who thirst. It is a new day, and there needs to be a new way to live out Church.

Finally, it is Pentecost. It isn't just a day in the Bible, but an action that God does, for each of us every day, filling us with the breath of God. Filling us with the very essence of who God is. The Pentecostal church is known as the holy rollers, but do you know the Presbyterians are known as the "frozen chosen"? Intellectualism is lifted up to a fault in this denomination and there's little room or tolerance for the emotional form of worship that is found in the Pentecostal church. However, there needs to be a balance between the two, because only when there is an openness to both, to be in touch emotionally, spiritually, as well as intellectually, with God that the movement of the spirit that's beyond words or understanding can begin to move in and within us. And it is through this movement of the spirit that we will find our purpose as the body of Christ.

Isn't that what we see in the Bible on Pentecost? It was not just emotion or miracles that were taking place in a void without purpose. There was purpose in the excitement and miracles that were happening. The disciples were not just unafraid of miracles occurring outside the realm of understanding, they wholly embraced it. We, also, need to be open to the Holy Spirit to act in and through us; not just through normal channels, intellectually understandable channels; for the Holy Spirit is to transform us so that we can transform the world. And we need to be open to whatever that might look like. It's a tall order from God, but totally doable. We just need to listen and learn, then go forward without fear, filled with the Spirit of God, giver of Hope, vision, and courage. And we need to remember that God has and will give us the gifts needed.

We can do this. You can do this. This is what you are called to do at this time of Pentecost, and at this new time in the church. You are called to start laying out the path for the new direction this church is to go in, laying out the paving stones, lighting the path, gathering the people, feeding them, preparing them, and encouraging them down that new path to the kingdom of God. This is what we will be delving into more in September as we go through our book study as a congregation. Because this is what we are called to do on this day and in this new year. We are Pentecostal people: filled with the Spirit of God. We need to live as Pentecostal people as we move forward in this exciting, but uncharted times. Amen.