

## SERMON – Pentecost Sunday – “Expect The Unexpected” - Acts 2:1-21

Today we celebrate Pentecost. Not as big a Sunday as Easter or Christmas, but one that can be filled with surprise, since we usually don't have a lot of Pentecost traditions. Were you surprised with the way we started worship today, gathering with the reading of scripture with sound of wind and with the red candles seemingly floating up front of the sanctuary? Were you surprised with the red ribbons? Were you surprised with many people wearing red today? Before you become apologetic about not reading the email or bulletin, relax because surprise is the exact mood of that first Pentecost Sunday.

The company of disciples, around 120 in all, had no comprehension of what their lives would be like after Jesus rose and ascended. In the first chapter of Acts they still hadn't given up on the idea of a political Messiah who would restore the kingdom of Israel. When Jesus gave them instructions and then departed through the clouds, they stood staring at the sky as though there had been some mistake. Angels had to come and shoo them away. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come upon them- but exactly how or when this would occur no one knew. Face it, no sensible group would sit in a house if they anticipated tongues of fire would rest on them. May be that's why the fire extinguisher is here in the pulpit!

Surprise! The Holy Spirit came unexpectedly upon those disciples who gathered for worship and prayer. The birth of a new identity, the church, was not expected. We may ask, why should they have been surprised when Jesus told what would happen to them after he would leave? He told them on the night that

he was betrayed that he was going to prepared a place for them, and that he would send them the Holy Spirit to be their counselor and teacher. The redeemer, Jesus, promised that they would do great works in his name because of the Spirit's abiding presence. But it is clear in the scripture that they didn't understand what he was saying. They truly didn't expect the Spirit to be manifested in that way. Thomas said, "We don't know where you are going. How can we know the way? Philip asked to be shown the Father. Another of the twelve asked, "How will you manifest yourself to us, and to the world? Indeed they were all confused, uneasy, even afraid of what might happen next. Surprise was the main emotion and experience on that first Pentecost. Surprise being they could not see or plan the spirit coming on them, only God could. And because of that when it happened it was so unexpected.

As instructed by Jesus they stayed in Jerusalem and waited for something to happen, the Holy Spirit to come upon them. They didn't know how or when this was to occur but they gathered for worship and prayer waiting. Now Pentecost was a feast that occurred 50 days after Passover. It was to help the Jewish people give thanks to God for the spring harvest but also it helped them remember another event in their Jewish history. They were to commemorate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. They remembered the story of Moses going to the top of the Mount and were giving the Law, the Ten Commandments. In this scene there was fire (lightning) Holy fire, and there was wind. The feast of Pentecost was giving thanks to God for the gifts of crops and the law.

So they gathered expecting the same festival traditions and liturgy, and worship service. But things unexpectedly happened. To those who knew Jesus Christ, they knew what was happening, though they were surprised, Acts puts it “bewildered and amazed”, about the wind, and the tongues and fire and how they could understand each other although they spoke different languages. But to those who were devote Jews, knew the traditions and the prophets like Joel, but did not know Jesus, the events of that worship service were deeply disturbing, they accused the disciples being drunk.

If we were there, some of us, would have pulled out our cell phones and called 911 for assistance. But Peter, filled with Christ’s spirit, doesn’t run and hide like he did before, he boldly preaches and tells the crowds of the one “called Jesus” who was crucified, and was buried, and rose from the grave, for their salvation. After his preaching many came forward for baptism and the birth of the church began and still continues today.

What I think is so hopeful in this story is that it is not humans that is in charge of the church, it is God through the Spirit. Michael Green in his book, “I Believe in the Holy Spirit,” puts it eloquently in saying, “ the Church is not the possessor and dispenser of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who energizes the evangelism of the Church and drives it’s often unwilling members into the task for which God laid his hand on them; mission. “ Yes the Spirit cannot be controlled and still works in surprising ways, and yet, in spite of us.

The hope and our confidence is this: The future of the church is not dependent on only about what we do or do not do. Whatever errors we make in judgment, however feeble our efforts at evangelism, no matter how polarized our congregations are about what constitutes “good worship”, God’s work in the world will not be stopped. The power manifested belongs to God, not to a select group – and the Lord is free to show that power in whatever way that serves the divine purposes of reconciling the world through Christ.

At the same time, the good news of sovereignty invites us to participate in announcing it. On that first Pentecost some got it and recognized it from God and opened themselves to it’s working in their lives, were baptized, and became witnesses to Christ themselves. But not everyone had the same experience. They heard the same words, saw the same events but came to different conclusions. They turned away and left not being apart of the wonderful surprising adventure of Christ’s church.

Being part of a church community is both comforting, because it is about something that is permanent, God’s love. But at the same time it can be very frustrating, because involved in the church is being part of a mystery that can’t always be explain, and it can’t be controlled, it has a life of its own.

Yesterday about 20 of us gathered to review our journey with the four vision statements that were created about four years ago. Elder Diane Lee, myself, and Scot Lumdsen, presbyter executive, planned the day. But the day did not turn out to be what was expected and it turned out to be more that what was expected. The surprise was what we thought the end of the day would be

celebration of what occurred that past few years and then forward with another focus, ended differently. We learned what was successful during the 40- 60 but what doesn't work now. Adaptive planning for a changing society is what works now, not the technical approach. I compare this to be like floating in a kayak the church has to be flexible to handle the rapids and the changing stream of society. For us to do this with out loosing ourselves we must ask deeper questions.

There was a time when everyone could assume that everyone was on the same page about what the church was what it's purpose was, what is meaningful worship, and who is our neighbor that we serve. That has all changed and for us to be on sturdy foundation we need to examine these questions. The spirit moved and we in the room went with the spirit even though we didn't understand all that was happened. You could say we were like those disciples form the first Pentecost, bewildered and amazed. But we went and we are moving forward.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us and to all people. We gather to say thanks to God for this gift. And then we are open to follow where God unexpectantly may lead us. A church has this quote on their reader board. "The sure sign that we are following Christ is that he leads where we did not expect to go." Yes this may feel unsure, like we may be on shaky ground, even afraid, but God is in charge through the Spirit, we can't go wrong. Let us be surprised, and filled with awe as we faithfully go to witness with our lives to the live, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus.