

The First Baptist Church, Midland
May 23, 2010
Acts 2:1-13

The Spirit's Weaving
A Sermon by the Rev. John P. Dick
Theme: Pentecost

Last week provided one of those unexpected gifts. Bill and Tooty Yue were in town for a couple days and we had a couple delightful hours together. Of course, they wanted to be remembered to you. They are now members of a Southern Baptist church in California and Tooty is doing her best to help them see through American Baptist eyes. Knowing Tooty, they will never be the same again 😊

Seriously, it sounds like they are having a wonderful experience. It's a Chinese church that has three services each Sunday morning... one in the Mandarin language, a second that is bi-lingual, and a third which is in English. And though it's very different from what they experienced here in Midland, the truth is God is everywhere and the ministry of their new congregation is a blessing to many. It is a wonderful community of faith demonstrating the power of God's Holy Spirit. And that brings me to the point of this morning's theme.

Today is Pentecost or as some refer to it, *the birthday of the church*. This is the day that represents the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of all believers. And I have to tell you a great story Bill shared with me during our time together last week.

On Wednesday mornings, Bill often attends a Bible study led by the pastor of the Laguna Niguel Presbyterian Church. His name is Randy Steele and early in his ministry while serving as a youth pastor in Spokane, Washington, he confessed to watching a series of John Wayne movies. Evidently one followed the other all through the night and he got very engaged. The problem is he was supposed to be preparing for a youth conference the next morning.

Well, the last movie he remembers watching was called "Two Jima". Evidently he fell asleep at some point during the movie but not before watching a scene where the U.S. Marines were rushing the shores in their landing crafts. John Wayne was, of course, leading the charge and at one point he radioed back to the command ship these words: *The marines have landed... The situation is under control... The island is ours!*

Well, Randy Steele awoke on the couch the next morning and soon found himself rushing to the youth gathering for which he was completely unprepared. He worried and he prayed. What was he going to do or say? But then he remembered the three statements by John Wayne... *The Marines have landed... The situation is under control... The island is ours!* And that's when the idea began to take shape. He referred to it as an *Island Analogy*.

Using the image of the John Wayne movie, he began speaking about a person's faith journey and as his thinking unfolded this is what emerged. "When God comes into your life," he said:

- The Holy Spirit lands
- The situation is under control
- You belong to God!

It's a great analogy, don't you think. Of course, Bill Yue took it one step further. When he heard this story, Bill raised his hand and said: "Pastor Randy, the next time my wife tells me I shouldn't be watching John Wayne movies late in the evening, I will say, *Pastor Randy has taught me that there is theology in John Wayne movies!*"

Sounds just like Bill, doesn't it. Yet what a great lesson. ***When God comes into your life, the Holy Spirit lands, the situation is under control and you belong to God!*** So on this Pentecost Sunday, let's take a closer look at this analogy.

Upon first blush, I have to say that the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the suggestion that things are under control is a bit of a stretch when initially considering the story in Acts. We read together a few minutes ago this classic story describing the day of Pentecost. How did it strike you?

We know that in our Lord's day, Pentecost was an ancient festival celebrating the harvest. The Jews used it to mark the time 50 days after Passover when they would gather in Jerusalem to appear before the Lord with their gifts and offerings. It was a time of rejoicing and giving thanks to God... a time for consecrating the fruits of one's labor... and it was a time for a person to rededicate himself to the Lord. People came from all over the known world to experience this gala festival. And that's when it happened. There was what I like to call *a divine disturbance!* I'll ask you again... As you hear these words, do you sense a situation under control?

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." (Acts 2:1-4)

It never ceases to amaze me how God's spirit can join our lives with others in ways that are beyond our ability to comprehend. This event described by Luke was nothing short of a miracle. People... strangers really... suddenly had the wherewithal to connect with each other in ways that would have been impossible before this Spirit arrived.

I can't help but wonder... could this be another way of saying their differences were melted away? We read that these were people from every nation under heaven and they heard their own unique, distinct languages being spoken by people of other lands and cultures. Boundaries immediately began to fall and there was a new sense of unity emerging. The Bible says people were *amazed and astonished* wondering what it meant. But we know today, don't we, that this was an expression of a new language called love. The Spirit was weaving a new connection... a new way for people to be drawn to each other. We know this because we read on

beyond our lesson for this morning and discover that Peter would soon address this same crowd of people to help them understand that God was doing a new thing in their lives. The Holy Spirit had landed and though at first it seemed confusing, the situation was under control and people now belonged to God. Yes, their Creator, their Sustainer and their Savior was drawing them together under the banner of faith and the point was clear. It didn't matter from where a person had come or what language a person was speaking. In the eyes of God they were all loved with an equal love and all had equal access to the throne of grace for ***everyone who called on the name of the Lord would be saved!*** And everyone who chose to repent and to turn to Jesus would receive ***the gift of the Holy Spirit.*** This was the essence of Peter's message as it unfolded at the end of this second chapter.

Now here we are 2,000 years later and as people of faith we still believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to do extraordinary things. And I would suggest to you, dear friends, that there are millions of ways God's spirit moves within us weaving the threads and fabrics of our lives together to form new connections... new patterns... new mosaics of life and faith. The Spirit draws us to Himself and ultimately to each other. It is a divine mystery but it is the power of God at work.

Over the past year, our Sunday School class has talked about this reality on many different occasions. And I have a conviction that I shared repeatedly. I am convinced of this reality.

God is always and forever present. Every waking moment... every sleeping moment... every conscious moment... every unconscious moment... every experience in this life finds us in the company of God. We are never left to ourselves. The *Divine Companion*, as I like to refer to the Spirit, is always with us.

However, the truth is we are not always aware of this presence. The clutter and commotion of everyday living gets in the way. Our attention is diverted, our concentration is interrupted, our awareness loses its focus, and our attentiveness is sidetracked. If we could stay centered without disruption we would be consciously aware of this spiritual reality. That is to say, we would knowingly experience the presence and power of God's Spirit every moment of every day.

Have you ever had one of those moments of intimacy with God when there has been no doubt in your mind and in your heart that you are standing upon holy ground? This happens because for some reason we are tuned in to the greater reality at that moment. It didn't happen because all of a sudden God chose to visit us for an instant. No, we are always surrounded by those possibilities. It's just that sometimes we are much more sensitive to the movement of God's Spirit and we are aware of this holy presence. The *Divine Companion* takes life and is in control.

When I received my call to pastoral ministry, I felt this presence as I was standing alone on that small finger of land reaching out into Green Lake in the dark of night while looking up at cross that seemed to be suspended in the sky. All distractions and encumbrances were gone and in that moment I sensed God's leading. When I held our granddaughter for the first time in that

busy hospital room everything faded away as I looked into Julia's face and felt the presence of God.

These moments are unforgettable and sometimes life changing. They provide the proof of God's Holy Presence, don't they? This gift of the Holy Spirit is not an ancient tale with spiritual implications. It is a divine reality that is real and present in our world this very day and this very moment. That's why Pentecost is such an important time in the life of the church. And that's why we can say with Bill Yue's friend, Randy Steele, that when God comes into your life the Holy Spirit has landed, your life situation is under control and you belong to God.

Amen and AMEN!