

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
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June 4, 2017  
*Day of Pentecost*  
Acts 2:1-21

### Pentecost Power

Today we are celebrating 2 birthdays–2 church birthdays as a matter of fact.

Two days ago, Friday, June 2, was the 145<sup>th</sup> birthday of First Presbyterian Church in Bozeman. What started kitty-corner from here in 1872 by a group of faith-filled Christians with hope for the future of this town, has continued here through 14 decades of change and development, leading up to today. Even before Montana became the 41<sup>st</sup> state in the union in 1889, First Presbyterian Church had been firmly established for 17 years, carrying out the ministry of Christ in this growing community. We stand on the shoulders of hundreds and hundreds of Christians before us who had accepted the call to be disciples of Jesus who carried on the ministry that had begun 2000 years ago. And those among us who are life-long members here, owe their calling directly to the line of First Presbyterian members stretching back to 1872. Others who have come into this church from elsewhere stand on the shoulders of other Christian communities who have stood the test of time and passed on the faith.

The other church birthday that we celebrate today is one that has a moveable date due to the variability of the date of Easter. Today is the Day of Pentecost which is 50 days after Easter. This is the day in the tradition of the church that we celebrate the founding of the Christian church when the Holy Spirit swept among and through the group of disciples with such ferocity that their lives were once more changed in order to boldly go forth to expand the circle of those wanting to follow Jesus. Because the disciples were given the boldness and ability to speak in ways that everyone present could hear, this Day of Pentecost is known as the birthday of the Christian church.

One of the things we often do on birthdays and anniversaries is to recall and reminisce. It's not just fun to do this, it is a vitally important way to be reminded of our foundations and origins so that we can keep that foundation strong and so that we can renew our call to carry on for another year and on into the longer term future.

So in this account of the founding of the Christian church that we've read in Acts chapter 2, it's good for us to be reminded of how this story fits in with the rest of the story of Jesus. Over most of the past 7 weeks since Easter we have been focusing our attention on the events recorded in the Bible of what happened *after* Jesus had been raised from the dead.

At first, one might be inclined to think that Jesus' resurrection on Easter, his being raised from the dead, would be the opportunity for Jesus to resume his teaching and preaching ministry around the region in an effort to reach even more people than he did prior to his crucifixion. Of course the disciples and other followers of Jesus were thrilled and awe-struck when he returned from the dead. They had witnessed his brutal death on the cross and found themselves completely flummoxed as to what to do without their very special leader. So why not, after a glorious celebration of this good news, get back to the business of following Jesus to learn even more from him and to keep on keeping on?

Well as we've focused on the few events of encounters of Jesus after the resurrection in the Bible, it is clear that that is not what was going to happen. Most of what is recorded about Jesus after the resurrection has to do with his getting the disciples ready to carry on with this ministry in new and even bigger ways *without* Jesus out in front at the head of line. Part of this preparation for the disciples was the promise that they would be empowered in a new and special way for all that was to face them from here on out.

The fulfillment of that promise is what Pentecost was all about then and what its all about today. And there are 2 aspects of this Pentecost story that are particularly notable in our day.

The first is that arrival of the Holy Spirit is dramatic and even overwhelming. The sound of a ferocious wind came up and out of nowhere and began swirling among the gathered disciples. Not only could they *feel* the wind sweeping around them, they could *hear* the roar of it, and they could *see* the results as it blew and blustered among them. The visual aspect of this encounter with the Holy was even made even more dramatic as divided tongues of fire appeared with dazzling brightness. It truly was a sight, sound and tactile experience that most assuredly got their full attention. To the disciples who had been promised by Jesus that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, there would have been no doubt at all that this event was the fulfillment of that promise of Jesus.

But as surprising and dramatic as this scene was, there was even more depth to the drama about to come—the second notable aspect of Pentecost flows right out of the first. The time of this event coincided with there being dozens and dozens of different groups of people in town from all over the ancient near east. This was the perfect time for the Holy Spirit to show up and empower the disciples to begin speaking in a way that every person within shouting distance was able to hear the proclamation of the disciples in their own language.

Any of you science fiction fans will appreciate this in that far in the future there is what's known as a universal translator that enables the spoken languages of species across the known universe to speak and be understood by one another without the awkwardness and delay involved in simultaneous translation which is in use today. This is why when we watch Star Wars and Star Trek movies there is rarely any issue in the beings from very different backgrounds communicating with each other easily, and for us the movie viewer to understand. While there are new and improved smartphone apps being developed toward a speedy and efficient language translator, the various languages spoken around the world continue to be a barrier to full and unbiased communication.

In that Pentecost of 2000 years ago, this language barrier was overcome in an instant. All who were in town took notice of the rushing wind and the tongues of flame, and hearing the speech of the disciples in one's own mother tongue.

That so many from near and far saw and heard and experienced this event is what is most significant of all. No longer was this band of Christians going to be growing incrementally as small groups hear and respond, step by step, person by person. No, from here on out, this message of God's love in Jesus is a big and bold message that is for the entire world here and now. That day of Pentecost was the day that Christianity was transformed, almost instantly, from a small group of committed followers of Jesus, to the beginning of what would become a major world religion.

You and I are here today because of what happened on that first Pentecost. While we come from many different cultural backgrounds with many different foundational languages, we find ourselves here together in this place today united by our common faith in Jesus.

This message of the full inclusive human community loved by God has always been critically important. It is as important today as it ever has been. In our day when the tendency by some to divide and separate and distinguish and demarcate and declare who's in and who's out is growing louder, the Christian message emanating even louder and even clearer from that first Pentecost to this very day is a resounding dismissal of such divisive talk. God did not send his son Jesus to divide and conquer. Jesus was sent to reconcile and unite.

We in the Christian church today, have received the same calling as the calling of those first disciples, that it is God's clear and shining intention that we live together, bound by our common humanity.

So it's appropriate on this birthday weekend for our church family to be celebrating the addition of new members to our ranks. While we always want to emphasize the broad and inclusive love of God expressed in our welcoming all to varying levels of participation, it is nevertheless a joyful occasion when there are those who take the step of uniting with this church in a formal way. Their step of faith into our shared faith community is surely a visible demonstration of God's Spirit of Pentecost in action.

Additionally, one of the ways that we mark celebrations both within the church and outside it is by including a special meal. Perhaps it's a coincidence, although more likely providence, that on this birthday weekend we are including a celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus shared countless meals with his disciples over the course of his ministry. Each of those meals were special moments of sharing. So important were these community events that Jesus ensured they would continue on into the future. Our eating of bread together and drinking of the fruit of the vine today are expressions of solidarity with our savior Jesus, as well as expressions of solidarity with the rest of God's created order.

So let the celebration continue today as we welcome one another and as we share a sacramental and celebratory meal together.

Happy birthday Christian church! Happy birthday First Presbyterian Church.