

**Reading from the New Testament: Acts 2:1-21**

*Pentecost*

Sunday, June 12, 2011

The Rev. Tom Hagood

I totally disconnected from the world that I know this past week. When our little mission group left the parking lot last Sunday after church, I actually switched off the world. Except for a little bit of music on the radio the youth listened to on the way up to Asheville ...I didn't hear a single word about any news in the world all week long ... I didn't read a newspaper ... I didn't bring my iPod ... I left my computer behind ... I had no Internet access ... and there wasn't even a television in the church where we stayed.

For a regular news junkie ... I had absolutely no idea what was going on in the outside world. I will admit that I did have my cell phone in case of emergency back home or at the church ... but there was none.

To be honest ... I hadn't planned to disconnect like that. It wasn't intentional. As a matter of fact, I didn't even realize how "disconnected" I was until about Wednesday afternoon. What I did connect with however ... and what I'm pretty sure Wendy and Monica and Natalie and Jorges and Jack all connected with as well ... was a world much different from the one we left.

Sometimes you have to disconnect if you're going to connect with God. Last week we heard the story of Jesus ascending into heaven with the promise to his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to lead them. But in the meantime, the disciples would have to gather in their tiny upper room in Jerusalem and pray and wait for the Spirit to come to them.

In our reading this morning from the Book of Acts, chapter 2, verses 1-21 ... the Spirit does precisely that. Listen ... stop and listen ... let the clutter of the world out there cease ... disconnect with the world that you know ... and listen intently for the Word of God who is about to speak to you.

Out of respect for the Word, those who are able, please stand for the reading.

I will be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. It is found on page 119 in your pew Bible.

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

2 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.

3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 "In the last days it will 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 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

This is the Word of our Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Pentecost came early for me this year. Traditionally on the church calendar it shows up 50 days after Easter ... but this year the Holy Spirit pulled a fast one on me and decided to come a few days earlier ... actually showing up last Wednesday in a worn-out old brick Methodist Church on the edge of downtown Asheville.

We had just eaten lunch with 250 homeless men, women and children in the basement of that church ... and headed upstairs to the sanctuary. As far as sanctuaries go ... this one was quite typical ... most of you would have felt right at home.

There were stained glass windows ... an organ and a grand piano ... pews ... a communion table ... all the stuff we've come to expect in a church. But there was something very different about his church ... the Haywood Street Congregation Church.

There was electricity in the air ... there was a sense of excitement in the eyes of the people walking into that church ... Miss Mary, an older African-American woman with dreadlocks was humming a tune and moving her head from side to side ... the pastor ... he wore jeans and T-shirt and sandals ... stood over in the corner talking to a young man with a backpack ... there was the odor of people who had been standing in the hot sun all day long ... the communion table was covered with red candles and cookies and cake ... a schizophrenic with long black greasy hair sat on the front pew eyeing everyone very cautiously, but seemed to calm down when an elderly white-haired woman sat down at the piano and began to gently play some of the old hymns ... a tall man ... I think he was a local lawyer ... wore a tailored suit and a silk tie and sat in the middle of everyone with his young family beside him.

For all I knew, the place might have even had a few Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia. And then ... as that service began ... the Holy Spirit just exploded into that church and the Kingdom of God became suddenly very real ... colors were mixed ... social classes were shuffled ... the rich and the poor held hands ... the happy hugged the sad ... the homeless shared with the rich ... everyone sat together and became the body of Christ.

All of us ... all of us ... could feel the wind of the Spirit ... the power of the flames of tongues as we listened ... and sang ... and prayed together. We were one in the Spirit ... one in the Lord. You see ... someone had left the front door of the church open ... and the Spirit blew right into that old building ... turning it upside down by our world's standards ... making the impossible now possible ... showing those with eyes to see and ears to hear ... that what was once old ... was now new ... and right there on a hot afternoon in downtown Asheville, N.C. ... the Kingdom of God became very real to all of us.

I truly don't believe I would have ever experienced that moment had I still been connected to the world I left behind last Sunday. Because like I found out ... sometimes you have to disconnect if you're going to connect with God.

The stuff of the world that I left behind last Sunday ... the things that demanded all of my attention ... the things that worried me and caused me anxiety and fear ... my debts and the price of gasoline and food ... the mountains of paperwork ... the meetings on the calendar ... even the preparation for today's worship service that would have to be squeezed into a single Saturday ... weren't there as the Holy Spirit blew them all away and connected me with what God wanted me to see at that moment ... what God wanted me to feel deeply in my soul ... that Pentecost happens a whole lot more than we realize ...

Pentecost isn't just a celebration of remembrance when the Holy Spirit descended upon those gathered disciples and people in Jerusalem long ago ... Pentecost is an ongoing event ... from that first moment when God's ruach ... God's breath ... blew across those waters of chaos in the beginning ... all the way to that outpouring of the Spirit upon Peter and the other disciples on that special day that gave birth to the church ... even to that old worn-out church in Asheville ...

Pentecost is all about those thin places in the world where heaven and earth touch in a holy kiss and in a holy embrace ... where divided people become one ... where cultural barriers and national barriers and color barriers and sexual barriers all fall down ... where the stigmas of mental illness and homelessness disappear in a gust of a hallowed wind ... where both the young and old are embraced in love ... where all of God's people sit together and share the grace and blessings of God Almighty poured out by the Holy Spirit ... lifting voices together ... praying for each other ... some sharing out of their great wealth ... other sharing the loose change in their pockets ... some smelling of sweat and urine while others smell of Channel ... knowing in our hearts that we are all children of one God ... we are all valued and loved and forgiven by a God who claims us unconditionally ... no matter where we've been ... no matter what we've done ... no matter how broken we might feel ... no matter how lonely the road may seem to be ... in that Pentecost moment the Kingdom of God became real ... on earth as it is in heaven!

I caught up on the news last night. Not much had changed in the world. I read through my emails ... most of them I really didn't need to read. And then ... something came over me and I disconnected from the earthly world for just a bit last night and reconnected with the world I had smelled and tasted and seen during this past week.

I thought about the hugs people shared with me ... I thought about the kind words of greeting that a tired woman in a wheelchair extended to me ... I thought about the schizophrenic man who paused long enough to show me some crumpled pictures of the Biltmore House he carried in a dirty Ziplock bag ... and I thought about the closing moments of that wonderful Pentecost Wednesday service when everyone found someone else in the church they didn't know ... and talked to them briefly ... and then, in what the ancient church used to call an agape meal ... a meal of love ... each person prepared a celebration plate of cake and cookies and candy and even some ice cream that had been processed up the aisle ... and we served each other from that table of goodness and mercy ... we fed each other the cake of salvation and the grace just overflowed ... soaking us in God's hope.

All over that sanctuary ... the crumbs of mercy fell off the table and scattered across the floor feeding all of God's children ... there was grace for everyone ... as we celebrated God and God's love. And then ... we sang out of our hearts the closing hymn ... no, that hymn didn't come out of any hymnbook ... it came out of our hearts ... as we joined Al Green in singing his soulful hit to God ... "Let's Stay Together" ...

"I'm so in love with you ... Whatever you want to do is alright with me.  
"Cause you make me feel, so brand new. And I want to spend my life with you."

And Miss Mary and our own Wendy danced with the Spirit up that church aisle.

Here in this church ... on this Pentecost Sunday ...we, too, are celebrating our oneness with God ... we have all kinds of people who come to Columbia to worship ... people of different races ... people of different nations and cultures ... people who speak different languages ... some of you are poor and some of you are rich ... but we are becoming a place ... where we are learning to worship together ... and the barriers that once separated us are slowly beginning to come down as we begin to see more of what unites us as children of God instead of seeing our differences.

We're beginning to learn how to disconnect with the earthly ways of this world ... the stuff that divides us ... and to connect with the Holy Spirit as we experience our own thin place ... here at the corner of Columbia and Kirk ... where we pray together ... on earth ... as it is in heaven.

So here's what I'm going to ask you to do right now ... we're going to disconnect so we can connect with God. I want you to get up right now out of your pew and find someone in this church that you don't know ... and I want you to go and sit together with that person for the rest of this service ... that includes you, too, choir ... get up out of the place where you are ... disconnect with what is familiar and connect with someone else in this church as we finish worshipping the Lord today on this Pentecost Sunday.

And then ... after we've sung the Response to the Blessing at the very end of the service, I want you to walk together ... arm in arm ... hand in hand ... I don't care how you do it ... but walk together with your new friend to a Pentecost party outside in front of the church ... and there I want you to serve each other from the agape table that has been prepared for you ... the table of God's grace ... and there ... you will experience the Kingdom of God this day!

Let us pray:

Holy God ...

I'm, I'm so in love with you

Whatever you want to do

Is alright with me

'Cause you make me feel, so brand new

And I want to spend my life with you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**