

Summit

June 8, 2014

Happy Birthday, Church! This is the birthday of the eglise- the coming together of believers in Christ- the forming of a corporate body, in which Peter was the first leader-Kurios in Greek meant those who were “of the Lord”. Today, two thousand some years later, we believers still celebrate the tongues of fire that were visible above the heads of the disciples AND all who believed. It was nine in the morning and there was a great congregation of believers from all over the world present in Jerusalem.

Others there who were not believers started hearing about the mighty acts of God in their own native dialects. They looked at the speakers and realized by their outer attire that these people were from Galilee, but yet were not speaking Galilean. And then there was the physical manifestation of flames of fire above their heads. What a convention!

Pentecost. Shabaot. Greek *pentēkostē*, literally, fiftieth day, from . **The word pente- means 5 or in this case fifty days after Easter, the seventh Sunday. Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and also the book of Acts, tells us that when the followers were all together in Jerusalem, the city of many peoples, this supernatural event took place. It was like the**

opposite of the Tower of Babel, in Genesis 11, New International Version

(NIV):

11 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As people moved eastward,^[a] they found a plain in Shinar^[b] and settled there.

³ They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶ The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will seem impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel^[c]—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world.

So now, here was God, reversing the Babel effect, desiring through Jesus, and now the Spirit of Jesus and the Father in the form of the Holy Spirit, coming down in the form of tongues of fire- to fill these men and women with a miraculous way of communication- the original Instant Messaging, but so much more powerful .

Now fast forward from Genesis and the Tower of Babel- confusion- to Jerusalem Pentecost morning- where the Spirit brought clarity and unity to many tribes and peoples, an equally frightening event, where many were awestruck and where some couldn’t handle this supernatural stuff. They rather credited to drinking too much.

And now, in the interim several thousand years and in the year of our Lord, 2014, it seems as if humanity has again decided to go to the moon and everyon has gone,, it seems, to his own way. Unity seems to be something that is impossible to attain, and it is , without the Holy Spirit. 2014, Bowling alone. The time is ripe for repentance, for turning our hearts corporately to the One who wants us at his table, who invited but doe not force, who knocks on the door of our hearts and waits for us to answer.

Why Pentecost? Because Jesus promised his followers that He would send His Spirit to them, to encourage, to teach, to comfort, and to convict when he was no longer physically with them. John 20:19-23 says that Jesus breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit”. That Spirit enabled Peter to bring someone back from death in the next few years. That Spirit, “Ruach” in the Greek enabled Peter to also walk out of prison the night before his execution and that same Spirit later allowed Peter to be executed. We cannot even begin to know the mind of God or why things happened the way they did, but we do know that He is faithful and when he promised something , He always delivers. Always. That Spirit is here today. It is the Spirit of Love and Unity. It is not a Spirit of division and of schisms. Wait, you may be thinking, then why, through the centuries, has God allowed his followers to go their own ways and split off from each other, creating more and more denominations until today there are something like 34,000? The Spirit is powerful, and can still do supernatural, wild and wonderful things...in the hearts of those who are surrendered to God’s will, of those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME AT PENTECOST TO UNIFY, NOT TO DIVIDE.

And Peter, if you read ahead in Acts from the passage that Phil read this morning, Peter began to preach and people listened...and repented...and were baptized...and received the Holy Spirit. There is the formula, the way by which we, too, become one with the saints of that Pentecost. Those of you who have been baptized have a depth of Spirit that is unmistakable. You were “cut to the heart”, verse, 37. You repented, you believed, and you received the Holy Spirit.

And Peter went on to say that Jesus’ promise to breathe out the Holy Spirit is “for you , for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” I invite you to remember your baptism this morning. Remember your openness to receive the power of God in your life! Being a Christian is a daily event, not a one-time thing! Believing , repenting and receiving the Holy Spirit happens again and again, as we turn our wills, our hearts, our very lives over to this Loving Third Part of the Trinity who quickens us, who draws and guides, and unifies! But it starts with repentance, the conviction that I cannot do life on my own and do it my way, expecting to be God’s best friend. Confession of sins precedes the Spirit.

We live in a culture that has largely chosen to not believe in this event we're celebrating today. The world centers, then, around the individual and around personal enjoyment. Individualism and Narcissism are the two idols the world follows and worships. You don't need God! You are God! Confession, guilt? No, it's all about me, my rights, my wants. This message is driven home again and again by the Prince of this World! He comes to us at our weakest moments and plants doubt and then the opposite of love—fear in us and from there he suggests all kinds of things that are opposites of God's plan for us.

But we are followers of Jesus. We believe in His power and are changed by His presence. "Oh, come, let us adore him." The adoration of the presence of God will change every one of us. Anyone coming into contact with the Presence of God immediately realizes his or her own smallness. Reactions like falling to the ground are common. Bending the knee. To what do we bend our knees?

Falling on our knees in the presence of God takes me back to the story of the Ascension. Like the three disciples who were with Jesus on the mountain when he disappeared into the clouds, our knees buckle when we are in the presence of YHWH. Peter, James, and John all fell on their faces in amazement and awe. Now that same supernatural

manifestation of our Miracle YHWH entered the very souls of believers, in Jerusalem, multiplied, with flames of fire appearing over the heads of the believers of all tribes and nations. When was the last time you literally bowed before God? When has Summit, as a body, corporately bowed before the Living God and humbled ourselves to His will?

After Jesus' ascension, the power of God was felt when the followers were together – in community. This was also true of the Pentecost event. THE HOLY SPIRIT UNIFIES, NOT DIVIDES.

When hearts and souls are attuned to God corporately, His power is multiplied and his Love, therefore, His Presence is multiplied. That is how we grow in our passion to meet and to worship as a Body, a sensitive Body that misses the members that are absent!

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SO MANY SPLINTERS AND DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH? God always gives us a choice and I believe the Spirit is alive in many of the denominations. Even in the Catholic Church today, there are many different orders. Much division has happened, but God does not leave us there. The Holy Spirit unifies us, the Spirit brings us together like a family, with Christ at the Head!

This week I had the pleasure of meeting with three of our Summit young people. One of them shared an idea that I think bears repeating. He said, “What if the different denominations are really God’s different body parts? What if the Mennonites are His hands, if Anglicans are His arms, and the Catholics are the feet and the Presbyterians are the minds, etc.? We all have a different emphases, but we ALL believe in Jesus Christ is our Head , our Savior and Lord. What if...” I think those words bear repeating because I am amazed at the energy we take in articulating **our differences**. I am deeply encouraged when I hear our young ones speaking about unity and when I hear and experience the power of presence of our Divine Comforter

Community is one of the Mennonite Church’s central beliefs. To serve others in Christ through the body of believers, to be as servants in nonviolent ways is to articulate what it means to be Mennonite Anabaptist in 2014.

Differences are diminished when we are physically together. A family, a community. The Holy Spirit can work when we take risks and cultivate an openness to reconciliation. An example is the recent meeting of Matt Hamsher, Naomi Engle, and Bill Seymour, taking the time to fast and pray

and then leave their gifts on the altar and meet with people who had a very different way of interpreting scriptures than they. God chose to bless that meeting in Denver with the Holy Spirit. How deeply encouraging!

The Holy Spirit was sent to UNIFY believers, not to divide them! The charisma of the Spirit cannot be used to exclude, it cannot be used to puff oneself up. That is arrogance. The Holy Spirit comes to unify, to reconcile, not to divide.

Jesus used to like to compare the Kingdom of God to bread and the people of God to yeast in that bread. The Spirit, like yeast, binds us together and dissolves our differences in the warm, living water!

So what are examples we see today of the Holy Spirit working? When we are not sure if something is of God or not, ask, “Does it encourage, does it unite or does it divide the community?”

God is calling the universal church to be unified through his Spirit! This spirit of unity is what has endeared the world to the new pope Francis, a Jesuit who took the vow of chastity and poverty, who astounds the powerful of this world with his humble, but wise words that are uniting the world-

wide church. God is saying, “Enough!” Unite! I am your Head and YOU- all who believer- are my Body!.

Your assignment this week is to find a believer who comes from a different tradition than you and have fellowship with her! There is a whole group of Christians with major theological differences who are determined to enjoy the love of Jesus with each other. Be bridges! Build bridges!

Bridgefolk is an ecumenical consortium of peace-minded Catholics and liturgically-minded Mennonites, gifting one another with presence in worship and dialogue. Our being present to one another as each other’s bread and wine (as we sang earlier) and our washing each other’s feet was healing and deeply sown with the Spirit’s hope. Two primary ways of healing centuries of hurt and differences: being present to one another in joint worship and sharing the sacrament we both agree upon in our interpretation of scriptures: the washing of each other’s feet, as Jesus washed those of his disciples. As I washed the feet of a Catholic brother, and then he washed mine, I felt the rush of holy wings. We followed this service with another: eating together- a fellowship meal which began by sharing wine and bread!

This is a small way we can be counter-cultural and tell the world that Christ is indeed our center, our example, our Way, because Forgiveness is the precedent for Community. Make bread wherever there is yeast!

Be creative in your faith this week. As you depend on the Holy Spirit to guide you, not the events or the feelings of the moment, you will experience the same joy and amazement of that first Pentecost. It won't be easy, but it will be amazing!

And when we Choose love, not fear, we can't wait to get here to share how God has moved us! Surrender, repent, be baptized, receive the Spirit and then revel in being each other's bread and wine.