

Children

1

We have discussed many times before the symbolism of light. Particularly at Christmas time we celebrate the fact that Jesus is the Light of the world. He taught us that we are to be lights too. You may have sung, 'This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.'

I brought this lantern with me. Use your imaginations just a moment. Pretend that it is a very dark night and we don't have any electric lights. Pretend that I am now holding this lantern but still the room is dark. Why is that? (let them answer.) The room is still dark because the lantern has not been lit. (Light the lantern.) Now we have light.

We are celebrating the special day of Pentecost. Pentecost is when the Holy Spirit came upon the first disciples. Little 'tongues of fire' appeared above the disciples' heads. I believe this is God's way of saying to us that the disciples were like lanterns that had not been lit. But the Holy Spirit came into their hearts and their 'little light started to shine.'

We can be like lanterns that have not been lit too. We can be all cold and unloving and even cruel. But then something can happen to us. We might call it the Holy Spirit or the love of God or the presence of Jesus--after all, they are all the same thing. But something happens on the inside of us and our lives start to glow with love for God and for all people. That is what happened on the first Pentecost, and it can happen to us today.

2

Good morning, boys and girls. Do you remember the name we used for last Sunday? Easter! What a wonderful Sunday it was with so many people here that we hardly had room, and the people sang with such beautiful voices and flowers were everywhere. It really was a special day. Did you know that every Sunday should be Easter, or like a little Easter? That's right, the first Christians called every Sunday the Lord's Day because they remembered that it was on Sunday that they saw Jesus alive again after he had died on the cross and was put in the grave. The disciples used to worship every Friday night and Saturday, but after the Easter experience they started having their big service of worship on Sunday, the little Easter. We still do it today just as they started it almost 2,000 years ago.

Sometimes people find it hard to understand why we love Jesus so much. They read the Bible and some even go to church, but they still wonder why Jesus means so much to us. Some say they wish they could love God as much as we do, but for some reason they just don't know him the way they should. Well, we feel bad for those people, but we say there is something they can do about it if they want to. Let me show you a little experiment that might help you understand how God works with us. I have to use my special glasses that are kind of dusty and dirty. [Have a volunteer examine the glasses and admit they they are hard to see through.] Now you must remember that when the disciples first saw Jesus after the resurrection they didn't know what to believe. They were sad that Jesus had died, and since they didn't understand the wonderful way God can work, they were very puzzled to see Jesus alive again. But Jesus came and breathed on them and told them they were about to receive a special gift called the Holy Spirit. Once they had the Holy Spirit they would believe.

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This is where the experiment comes in. Have you ever seen someone clean his glasses? How does he do it? That's right, he breathes hard on his glasses and when he wipes them off he has clean glasses. Though he couldn't see before, he can now see well. Just by breathing on the glasses and wiping them off, a person can see clearly whatever he wants to see. Now Jesus breathed on the disciples and when he did he breathed into them the Holy Spirit and they could not only see, they could see things they had never seen before.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to people and it helps them to believe what they could not believe without him. We need the Holy Spirit if we're going to believe like the disciples. Without him we are like people who look through dirty glasses. They see a little, and if they don't take off their glasses and check they might even think they can see pretty well. But people with dirty glasses are missing so much in life that they could have if they just cleaned them by breathing on them and shining them with a handkerchief. It's the same way with God. Here God has this wonderful gift to give us called the Holy Spirit, who is just like Jesus except that you cannot see him or touch him or hear him speak with a voice like your voice.

Don't you think it would be wonderful to have God come to you and help you believe all the wonderful things that he has to tell you? So do I. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will come to all of us today.

I Sorry I like this sermon so much I use it all the time because my congregation changes very often when you're a hospital chaplain or doing a military circuit

In New England in many towns there is a square. Usually at one end of the square is a Church. Well, in this one Connecticut town every Sunday morning a man that everyone called Uncle George because he was not family but like family would sit in the square and look at the Church. People would invite George to come in but he was never interested. One Sunday, the Church caught on fire and before the Fire Department arrived George got a fire brigade working and people carried buckets and George was at the front of the line throwing water on the fire. The people were so thankful that George's quick thinking had saved the Church but jokingly said that it was the first time they saw him in Church to which George responded, It's the first time I saw the Church on fire.

To be honest, I would like to give a sermon like Peter did that first Pentecost. Three thousand people were converted. Guess I don't have the same fire that Peter did.

The key to bringing people to Christ is the fire of enthusiasm.

A man named Fred he met in the course of his research into sales methods. Back in the 1950s Fred had been a traveling salesman hawking washing machines. This job was on commission only, but included a valuable and unusual perk: the then almost unheard of luxury of a vehicle. At the beginning of each week Fred was sent off in his van with five washing machines; so long as all five were sold each week, Fred could keep the van.

This he succeeded in doing, week after week. It was a matter of honor, that if one of the washers was taken from the van for a demonstration, it was never put back.

Eventually a week came when Fred's magic seemed to have abandoned him, and to his horror he found on Thursday evening that he had three machines left in his van. He felt that the midlands area where he normally worked was played out, and so, although he had only twenty-four hours until his van turned into a pumpkin, he was determined to find new pastures. A moment's thought convinced him that the naval bases on the East Coast would be his best bet, and, despite savage winter weather, he turned the van east and set off that same evening, so he could be on the spot first thing in the morning. Disaster struck when the van hit a patch of black ice, spun out of control, left the road, and hit a tree. Fred was flung through the windscreen (these were the days before compulsory seatbelts), severing an artery in the process. He says that he remembers watching his life's blood fountaining into the cold night air and thinking his end had come. Fortunately for him, two farmers' wives heard the crash and ran across the field to his aid. Between them they called an ambulance and stemmed the flow of blood as Fred drifted in and out of consciousness. The ambulance arrived, Fred was loaded in and taken to the hospital; in the meantime each of the farmer's wives had signed up to become the proud owner of a shiny new washing machine!

"You see, I did it, and when I came out of the hospital, there was a new van waiting for me." "what about the third machine?" "Oh," said Fred, "that's still going strong. It belongs to an ambulance driver. I think he's retired now." (1)

Don't you appreciate a person who is enthusiastic about her work? Don't you appreciate someone who is enthusiastic about his family? Don't you appreciate someone who is enthusiastic about life? Maybe that is why our hearts beat a little faster as we read the story of the first Pentecost. These people were alive. These people were excited about their faith and about their lives. These people were on fire with something positive and earth-shaking. What a contrast to the lives of many people today! What a contrast to the lives of many of us! Let's review the facts.

When the day of Pentecost came, the disciples were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. Then the disciples saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Pentecost was a time of celebration for the Jews. Jerusalem was filled with devout men and women from every nation. When they heard this sound, a crowd of them came together in bewilderment, because each one heard the disciples speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?" It was a strange and moving day for all who were present. And it was a strange and moving day for humanity. The world has not been the same since, for a new community was born. That community born on the day of Pentecost was the church of Jesus Christ. Let's consider what that first Pentecost means in our lives today.

FIRST OF ALL, PENTECOST MEANS THAT SOMETHING POSITIVE HAS COME INTO OUR WORLD. It's easy to be pessimistic about our world, isn't it?

A young pregnant woman was ready to deliver her first baby. As the woman, Brenda, moaned and groaned and sweated her way through horrible labor pains, Brenda's

husband sat in the waiting room watching a horror movie. By the way because of the pandemic fathers are not being allowed in the delivery room. He was only a few feet away from his wife, and could clearly hear her distress, but he completely ignored her as he watched the film. Brenda's labor lasted for hours, during which time her husband never once acknowledged her presence. The first horror movie ended, and another extremely violent one began. Just at a particularly gruesome scene in the movie, Brenda's baby was born. All the doctor could think at that moment was, "Go back inside, little one. You really don't know what kind of world awaits you." (2)

This can be a cruel, uncaring world, but it is not a hopeless world. The Spirit of God has invaded our world. As Christ promised, into this world has come a counselor, a comforter, a guide. That same Spirit is alive and active in the lives of people who will open their lives to it today. We may not speak in strange tongues. We may not have tongues of fire dancing above our heads, but still God's Spirit dwells in our hearts. Something positive has entered our world. God's Spirit is available to each of us. We have to share that spirit. We have to burn the evil out of the world and ourselves and make the world a wonderful caring place.

This brings us to a second thing Pentecost says to us: SOMETHING POSITIVE IS EXPECTED OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE. We are those for whom the Spirit of God is intended, but not for our own benefit, but for the world's.

Some people wonder why we do not see a dramatic outpouring of God's Spirit on people today as on that first Pentecost. Especially with the death of GEORGE floyd. But God didn't pour out His Spirit just to impress people. There were distinct differences between the believers in the upper room and believers today. For one thing the believers shared an amazing spirit of unity and harmony. And even more importantly, the believers were facing the huge task of evangelizing the world. God gave them power commensurate with their task. Great work requires great power. If we are not involved in any great work for God, then we shouldn't be surprised if God doesn't give us an outpouring of His Spirit. Maybe we are not plugged into to the source of our power through prayer.

In 1925, an epidemic of diphtheria hit the city of Nome, Alaska. In those days, diphtheria could be fatal if not treated right away. A medicine existed to treat the disease, but the closest available supply of the serum was in the city of Nenana, over 1,000 miles away. At that time, dogsleds were the only form of transportation that could carry people the many miles between towns. But even the best dogsled team would require at least two weeks to make the delivery. In two weeks, much of the town of Nome, Alaska, could be dead.

Wild Bill Shannon, a trapper from the city of Nenana, suggested a better way to get the medicine there. One dogsled team couldn't make the whole trip without having to stop and rest. But if each town between Nenana and Nome would prepare a fresh dogsled team and driver, they could act as a relay team. Wild Bill calculated that it would take only nine days for a relay team to deliver the medicine.

The relay idea worked well at first. Slowly but surely, the medicine made its way through the first four towns between Nenana and Nome. But for the fifth driver, Gunnar Kaasen, something went wrong. A blizzard threw Kaasen off his route so that he passed by the cabin of the sixth driver. Kaasen was utterly lost in the storm. To make matters worse, the blizzard temporarily blinded him. His only hope was that his lead dog, Balto, would

remember the way. For 53 miles, the blizzard pounded both the driver and the dogsled team. Balto should have needed to stop and rest, but he kept on going. And somehow, in spite of the blizzard, they made it. By the time they reached the city, Kaasen was only semiconscious and actually frozen to his sled. But Balto and the other dogs had gotten him safely to Nome. Amazingly, medicine had been delivered in only six days. All but two people in the city of Nome survived the epidemic. (3)

That story grips us because of the heroism involved. Did you know that our heritage as the body of Christ is filled with stories equally as dramatic? The church has not always been as listless as it is today. From our earliest days there have been countless saints who have risked everything including their very lives to carry the message to the world that we are a God-invaded planet--that something positive has entered our world--that wars and pestilence and suffering and death are not the will of our Creator-God, but that God's will is life and love and hope for all people. We are those entrusted to drive through the snow, as it were, whatever the cost, to bear the news to our generation. That is what God expects out of this group of people. Something positive has entered our world. Something positive is expected out of God's people. **THAT MEANS SOMETHING POSITIVE IS EXPECTED OUT OF YOU AND ME.**

Let's bring it down to our particular situation. What has all this to do with you and me? Pentecost says that you and I are to go from this chapel to make a difference in the lives of people we meet daily. That is how we will build the kind of world God desires--one person at a time.

A few years back, Matthew Woodley, a pastor in Minnesota, decided to leave the ministry. Over the years, a negative attitude had taken hold in his heart. He had lost any zeal for the ministry. He was tired of difficult people. He was tired of fielding everyone's complaints. He was tired of the church's constant money problems. He had lost his focus, and he wanted out.

Not long after this, he went on vacation to Montana. Matthew spent a day in a local park praying and trying to discern his future. He was searching for some sign from God that would take away all the negativity in his heart. As he prayed, three dirty, ragged little children entered the park and sat down nearby. The oldest child took it upon herself to make introductions. Her name was Deanna, and she was twelve years old. The other two children were her half-sister, Kristy, 10 years old, and her half-brother, Mikey, six years old. Deanna proceeded to explain that they were each sired by different fathers, and that Mikey's father was so abusive that the children's mother was filing for a divorce from him. The mother had dropped the kids at the park so that she could go gambling at the local casino. With a touch of sadness, Deanna reported that ever since their mother had lost her job, the family had been living in a tent on the outskirts of town. Then Deanna asked Matthew if he had a job. He replied that he was a pastor. Deanna thought about this answer for a while, then she asked, "Mister Pastor, can you tell me something? I've heard stories about Jesus walking around healing people and loving people. Why doesn't he do that anymore?"

Matthew tried his best to answer her question. He talked about the Incarnation, and salvation, and everything else he could remember from his seminary training. But he knew it didn't make sense to the kids. It didn't even make sense to him. These three poor, abused, neglected children needed to know the real story. So he stopped in mid-sentence, and, fighting back tears, said, "Deanna, Kristy, Mikey, let me start over. Do

you have any idea how much Jesus loves you right now?" And Matthew Woodley shared the story of Jesus' love with those three children in the park. As you might have guessed, Matthew Woodley never left the ministry. That day in the park brought him face-to-face with the loving, compassionate God that he had forgotten about. It reminded him that ministry wasn't about pleasing people, or having a big church, or preaching the perfect sermon. It was about sharing the message of God with hurting people who desperately need to know that they are loved. (4) And that is what Pentecost means to you and me. It is a call to offer the world the Spirit of the living God--that positive force that has come into our world. It is a call to take the love of Jesus to everyone we meet. It is a simple message, this message of Pentecost, but it is the means by which God is transforming this world. Something positive has come into our world. Something positive is expected out of God's people. Something positive is expected from you and me.

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|| Eugene Barron, Littleton, Colorado tells of driving down a two-lane highway where someone had thrown garbage onto the road. Most of it had been scattered off the road except one plastic cup. This cup was positioned right in the middle of road. In fact, it was in the center of the two yellow lines. The road was straight enough that Barron noticed the cup long before he got to it.

| Every time a car passed by the cup, it would simply roll to the opposite side without moving from the center. When another car from the other direction came by, the force of the wind would blow the cup to the other side. When two cars passed at the same time the cup went wild. It did not know which way to go. (1)

| Many of us are like that paper cup--we are blown by each prevailing wind. Wouldn't it be great to be so focused, so determined, that you made each moment of every day focused, meaningful, powerful? I want to show you from the story of the first Pentecost, the church's birthday, how you can have Pentecostal power in your work and in your family, and how we can have that same power in our church.

| Most of you know the story well. But here is what is even more important. Jerusalem was filled with devout people from many nations, Pentecost celebrates 50 days after Passover [Verification of Passover crucifixion] and when they heard the followers of Jesus sharing their testimony, each of the foreigners heard them tell about the great acts of God in their own language. And they were amazed, for they knew that those who were doing the testifying were uneducated, unsophisticated Galileans. And they asked, 'How can this be?'

| Something spectacular, life-changing, world-shaking happened on the day of Pentecost. Wouldn't it be nice if we could tap into that? Wouldn't it be nice if we could

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appropriate that burst of power for our own lives?

FIRST OF ALL, WE SEE IN THIS STORY A MIRACLE OF COMMUNICATION. People from different nations heard the followers of Jesus in their own tongue. We need to make one thing perfectly clear. Jesus' followers were not speaking in unknown tongues at Pentecost. Just the opposite. They were speaking in the exact tongues of the people who were listening. The communication was not restricted to a few. It was opened up to as many people as possible.

This is important. So often Christians speak in code. If you are not part of the group, you have difficulty understanding what's being said. You hear the words, but they are not words with which you can relate. Pastors particularly can be guilty of this. Perhaps you have heard a pastor speak for thirty minutes on sin and never define what sin is. Or what particular sin he or she is talking about. That is why we use examples, anecdotes, analogies. Some people may wonder why I use so many stories. I want everyone in this room to understand exactly what I am talking about. I want the message to be understood by the youngest member of our congregation and the oldest. And so I use lots of stories. Because everyone can understand a story. The miracle of Pentecost is a miracle of communication. Tower of Babel is reversed

Pastor Bob Malcomb was on a mission trip in Belarus, where his team was building churches. His translator and guide was named Eger. Eger told Pastor Malcomb that the Russian words, 'Dos-Vee-Don-Ya' were old-hat. He needed to get with the times and say good-bye the modern way.

They were designing seven churches and at the end of meeting with the pastor of each church, Pastor Malcomb used the new phrase he had learned, 'Val- EE-Et-Suda.' He could tell by the look on their faces they were quite impressed with his Russian. However the last pastor took him aside and said, 'Robert why do you keep telling each pastor to 'Get lost' at the end of the meeting?' (2)

When you are communicating in another language, you must be very precise. But even in our own language, the better we communicate, the more effective we will be. Mis-communication can cause embarrassing situations. You may remember the story about the couple who were going out for the evening. They called a taxi and put the cat out for the evening.

The taxi arrived, and as the couple walked out the front door, the cat shot back in. They didn't want the cat shut in the house, so the wife went out to the taxi while the husband went upstairs to chase the cat out. The wife, not wanting it known that the house would be empty explained to the taxi driver, 'My husband's just going upstairs to say goodbye to my mother.' few minutes later, the husband climbed into the cab. 'Sorry I took so long,' he said, 'Stupid old thing was hiding under the bed and I had to poke her with a coat hanger to get her to come out!' Mis-communication can be embarrassing.

' You never know who might be listening to your words, or how your listeners might interpret what you say. The miracle of Pentecost was, first of all, a miracle of communication.

EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, IT WAS A MIRACLE OF CONNECTION. The followers of Jesus connected with their audience. Have you ever heard a speaker speaking, and his language is eloquent, and he has good stories to tell, but somehow his words zing right by you? Communication experts say that is a problem of 'connection.' They tell us that this is the most important part of the communication

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process: Does the speaker connect with the audience?

Sometimes we communicate the best when we say nothing at all. Pastor Ed Young, in his book *Romancing the Home*, suggests that husbands learn two techniques for listening to their wives: the 'hold the bucket' technique and 'the mirror stance.' Men are fixers, so when women talk about their problems men usually want to offer solutions. But women often talk about their problems in order to sort through their feelings and look at the problem from all angles. They don't want a solution as much as they want understanding and empathy. The best thing for a husband to do when his wife has a problem is to 'hold the bucket': just let her express her emotions without offering any advice or judgement. Or, a husband could use 'the mirror stance': just reflect his wife's feelings back to her. Re-state whatever she says in his own words. This allows her to clarify her emotions and to know that she is understood. Both of these forms of listening will make a woman feel loved and respected. (4)

Can you see how powerful this concept of connection is? If you want to be more powerful in your communication, first of all, you need to stop talking. You need to listen to the other person. You need to walk in his or her shoes. That way when you speak you are not simply mouthing words. You are connecting at a profound level with another human being. As writer Stephen Covey puts it: 'We seek first to understand, then to be understood.' This is what God did in Jesus Christ. God put on our shoes. God walked where we walk. God built a connection.

It doesn't always work, of course. There were some who heard the disciples testifying on the Day of Pentecost and thought they were drunk. They didn't hear anything at all that was meaningful. And they were probably people who had no difficulty understanding the disciples' words. They simply weren't connected. The miracle of Pentecost was as much about listening as it was about speaking.

'Not everybody who listened to the apostles on that first Pentecost understood what they were saying. Only those who were connected. Pentecost is about communication. And it is about connection, listening as well as speaking.

FINALLY THE MIRACLE OF PENTECOST IS ABOUT COOPERATION. You know what happened following the gift of the spirit at Pentecost. They were wildly successful in reaching their objectives. Daily new people were added to the church. They grew closer to one another. They shared all things in common. They ate together, and they prayed together, and they sang together and they witnessed together. They were a team in every sense of the word.

In the summer of 1995, a movie, *Apollo 13*, commemorated the 25th anniversary of the famous space flight. Starring Tom Hanks, the movie captured the imagination of Americans as it played in sold-out theaters across the country. More than simply a retelling of history, the movie inspired viewers with its sense of the exhilaration and pride that comes from working together toward a goal worth achieving.

The flight of *Apollo 13* was beset by obstacles. An explosion on board forced a change of plans to land on the moon and shifted the mission into a frenzied endeavor to return the astronauts home safely. On the ground, mission control teams worked frantically to come up with alternatives that could replace damaged equipment. In the spacecraft, the three astronauts pooled talents, experience and energy to create a focused cohesive unit with one mission in mind. Only with the cooperation of everyone involved were the astronauts able to navigate their crippled capsule back to earth. (5)

In short, they cooperated with one another. It has been shown time and time again. When people work as a team, they can achieve amazing things. Want to know how to build a end war or have a great family or a great church? Learn the meaning of these three words: communication, connection, cooperation. In fact, these are three of the signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church. Listen to them again: communication, connection, cooperation.

III

A woman named Alice tells about her nephew's 10-year-old son who came for a visit one hot, July weekend. "Look, Alice," he said as he ran over to where she was sitting. "I found a kite. Could we go outside and fly it?"

Glancing out a nearby window, Alice noticed there was not a breeze stirring. "I'm sorry, Tripper," she said, "The wind is not blowing today. The kite won't fly."

The determined 10-year-old replied. "I think it's windy enough. I can get it to fly," he answered, as he hurried out the back door.

She peeked through the slats in the Venetian blinds to watch determination in action. Up and down the yard he ran, pulling the kite attached to a small length of string. The plastic kite, proudly displaying a picture of Batman, remained about shoulder level. He ran back and forth, as hard as his ten-year-old legs would carry him, looking back hopefully at the kite trailing behind.

After about ten minutes of unsuccessful determination, he came back in. Alice asked, "How did it go?"

"Fine," he said, not wanting to admit defeat. "I got it to fly some."

As he walked past her to return the kite to the closet shelf, she heard him say under his breath, "I guess I'll have to wait for the wind."

At that moment, she says, she heard another Voice speak to her heart. "Alice," the voice said, "sometimes you are just like that. You want to do it your way instead of waiting for the 'Wind'—the 'Wind of God.'" (1)

In Acts 1:4-8, before his ascension into heaven Jesus instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. The biblical word for Spirit, as you know, is the same word for wind. The disciples were waiting for the wind—the wind of God. In Acts 2 we read, "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

They waited on the wind . . . they waited on the Spirit . . . and a mighty wind it was . . . it blew so hard that the world has never again been the same.

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After Christmas and Easter, Pentecost ought to be the most hallowed day in the Christian year. To be sure, we would not be here today if it were not for the manger in Bethlehem. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Who can doubt that this is the most important statement in all of literature? And of course, the cross and the empty tomb must forever remain at the center of our faith. Without the Easter event we have no salvation and no hope. But how would we know about the manger and how would we know about the cross and the empty tomb if it were not for Pentecost when the wind of God blew and the church was born? Who would have protected the Holy Scriptures with its very life if not the Church of Jesus Christ? Who would have sent out evangelists and teachers and missionaries to tell the Good News if not the church? Who would have carried on Christ's ministry of healing bodies, minds, and souls if not the church?

I am aware that it has been fashionable among some Christians since the 1960s to say "Jesus, Yes" – "the church, no" but what short-sighted thinking that is. How will future generations know about Jesus if the church is not around to give a living witness to his resurrected presence? Certainly the church has its faults. Certainly there is much in the church that needs to be corrected and cleansed, but this is still Christ's body. This is still his beloved bride. Pentecost is the church's birthday. What a day of celebration it should be!

Now there are some things about that first Pentecost that we need to see. **In the first place, we notice that the disciples were all together in one place.** The old joke asks, what car is mentioned in the Bible? The answer is, of course, a Honda. The King James Version of this verse reads like this: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

That doesn't mean all 12 disciples would fit in one mid-size car. What it does mean is that there was a unity of spirit among the followers of Jesus. There was an openness toward one another and a concern for each person's well-being. Christ's disciples, when they received that great outpouring of spiritual joy and grace were not split up into various contending factions, each seeking to protect his own position and power. They still had keen remembrance of our Lord's earnest supplication when he prayed, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).

There was visible unity among the followers of Christ; there was extraordinary love and charity. They cared about one another and they cared about the work that Christ had given them to do. No wonder the Spirit could work with such power. Think what the Spirit could do through us if we were more loving, more harmonious, more committed to the same cause. One of the great scandals of our faith is that Christians have spent almost as much time fighting each other as they have fighting the forces of evil and injustice.

Dr. Eugene Brice tells a disturbing but somewhat humorous story about a minister who returned to visit a church he had once served. He ran into Bill, who had been an elder and leader in the church, but who wasn't around anymore. The pastor asked, "Bill, what happened? You used to be there every time the doors opened."

"Well, Pastor," said Bill, "a difference of opinion arose in the church. Some of us couldn't accept the final decision and we established a church of our own."

"Is that where you worship now?" asked the pastor.

"No," answered Bill, "we found that there, too, the people were not faithful and a small group of us began meeting in a rented hall at night."

"Has that proven satisfactory?" asked the minister.

"No, I can't say that it has," Bill responded. "Satan was active even in that fellowship, so my wife and I withdrew and began to worship on Sunday at home by ourselves."

"Then at last you've found inner peace?" asked the pastor.

"No, I'm afraid we haven't," said Bill. "Even my wife began to develop ideas I was not comfortable with, so now she worships in the northeast corner of the living room and I am in the southwest . . ." (2)

That'll either make you laugh or make you cry. One of the strengths of the early church was their love for one another. If we who are the church—Christ's body—the light, the leaven, the salt of the earth—Christ's own bride—if we can't love one another and work together for His glory, then God have mercy on the world. Christ's disciples were gathered together "with one accord."

They said about those early followers, "See how they love one another." There's power in such mutual concern. It is a power that we need in the church today.

There is something else to be said at this point, however, and that concerns the celebration of diversity within Christ's body as well as our essential unity. The sign of the Holy Spirit's presence was a tongue of fire. It was a most suitable emblem. The human tongue is always God's most effective instrument, but unaided by His Spirit the tongue's utterance often deteriorates to "babble." The human voice needs to be quickened and supported by that divine fire, that super-human energy and power, which the Holy Spirit alone can confer.

But notice, distinct tongues of fire appeared over each individual gathered there in that room. We are one in the Spirit. Unity must be maintained. Nevertheless, it is critical that we note that each of us will have our own experience of God's Spirit, and because we differ so much, your experience will not be exactly the same as my experience. We get into trouble every time we try to pour all the followers of Christ into one mold. It has been God's plan from the beginning that we should have differing personalities and differing needs and differing gifts. We come from diverse cultural backgrounds, from

diverse age groups, from diverse occupations. Some of us are extroverts, some introverts. Some of us have dominant personalities, some are quite submissive. The experience of a Christian in New York City will not be the same as a Christian from a rural part of the South. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but his followers have always been and will always be a radically heterogeneous collection of individuals. We celebrate that diversity today. It means that Christ is the Savior of the entire world. He is not the Savior of a small homogeneous group alone. I may be cold and stiff with little ability to express my emotions, but he is my Savior just as surely as he is the Savior of the warm-hearted believer who jumps three pews to express his conviction. He is the Lord and Father of us all.

This brings us to the final thing to be said, and that is concerning the missionary nature of Pentecost. The Christian movement was never intended to be an exclusive club directed only toward a small segment of humanity. It was not for the church that Christ died. It was not for the Jewish nation that Christ died. It was for the world that he died.

Now you say, "That's obvious pastor. We don't need to be reminded that we are to be a missionary church." You think not? Win Arn, a church consultant, did a study that showed that 89% of church attendees believe that the church's primary purpose is to take care of the member's needs. Only 11% believe that the church's purpose is to reach out to the world. To me, that's scary.

So let me repeat: It was not for the church that Christ died. It was for the world that he died. No clearer message can be found in the Pentecost event. The disciples began speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance, and each person present—from a wide array of nationalities—heard the Gospel in their own language. What an exciting thought this is!

Christ gave a universal commission to twelve men, chiefly Galilean peasants, to go forth and found the church. How could they have been fitted for this work unless God had bestowed upon them some such gift of language? Think what a barrier the diversity of languages is in the world today. How else can you explain the rapid spread of the Christian faith throughout the known world including some parts considered by the Romans still barbarous? God gave them a special gift of languages, for it has always been God's will that all people in all places should receive the Gospel. That is the primary reason for the existence of the Christian church. We are still called to be a missionary church. The Gospel still overcomes barriers of race, language and culture. It was never intended that we should keep the gospel to ourselves.

One statistician reports that 90 percent of all Protestant preaching today is preached to English speaking people, who comprise 9 percent of the world's people. Ninety-four percent of every Christian dollar is spent to witness to this 9 percent. When 90 percent of the Protestant preachers spend 94 percent of every Christian dollar to witness to 9 percent of the world's people, it should strike us that something is wrong.

Samuel Moffett tells of worshipping behind the bamboo curtain, that is, in China several years ago. In the congregation were a few Communist military men. The very few

faithful present sang an old Isaac Watts hymn written in 1718, “Jesus shall reign wher’re the sun does his successive journey run; His kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moon shall wax and wane no more . . .”

When these words were written there were only two missionaries for the whole Christian faith (both were Moravians). Seventy years later William Carey went forth and started a new movement based on Psalm 72, “May he have dominion from sea to sea . . .” We must not let that movement die. On this Pentecost day as we celebrate our unity as the church of Jesus Christ, as we celebrate the remarkable diversity within his family, may we also remember our responsibility to those outside this fellowship—whether they live next door or around the world.

On Pentecost a missionary movement was born. God’s spirit entered into the hearts of those who believed. They in turn shared what they had received with everyone who would listen. May we also have that Spirit within us and may the world know by our love and by our witness that we are His.

People magazine did a most encouraging article on Tom Monaghan sometime back, the man who invented Domino’s Pizza. He’s a multimillionaire, worth about 400 million dollars. Here is what that *People* magazine article said:

Each day in his briefcase Tom Monaghan keeps two spiral notebooks, the kind that school children use. One is red like the devil . . . for material things. The other is blue . . . like heaven for spiritual things. Until recently entries that would have belonged in the red book played the larger role in Monaghan’s life. After all, he ran the second largest pizza chain in the nation next to Pizza Hut. These days the only notation scribbled in the red cover notebook has to do with a dream house he’s building near Ann Arbor, Michigan. He spends most of his time in the Blue Book. He’s had a midlife change of heart. The article talks about how he’s now investing his whole life serving God. It said he spent time this summer overseeing construction of a church in Honduras. “We have 5000 pizza outlets,” he explains. “My goal now is 5000 churches.” He said, “I’ve always felt the most important thing for me is getting to heaven. When I die I don’t think St. Peter is going to ask me how many pizzas I sold.” (3)

What do you think God is going to ask you and me? Today is a very special day. Today is the day we celebrate the birth of the church. And as we do may we ask ourselves: do we have the kind of unity, diversity and missionary spirit to do the things God has called us to do? If not, let’s pray that a wind will blow into our lives and give us the Spirit that we need to be that kind of church.

1. Author Unknown. Adapted from Daily Encourager, http://injesus.com/message-archives/inspiration/The_Daily_Encourager/waiting-for-the-wind.

2. *Books that Bring Life* (Lubbock, Texas: Net Press), 1984).

3. Darryl Dash, <http://www.dashhouse.com/sermons/2001/AM/010318.htm>.

