

# Living into Discipleship

## Pentecost Sunday

Text: Acts 2:1- 21 & John 20:19–23

June 12, 2011      Apostles at Pentecost: Then and Now

It was a wild and wooly day in Jerusalem.

Jews had come to the Temple from all over the country  
to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost.

While Pentecost wasn't as big a deal as Passover  
and Yom Kippur, *the Day of Atonement*,  
it was important.

It was a time Jews gave thanks to God for the harvest—  
somewhat akin to our Thanksgiving  
here in the United States.

Things were bound to be noisy as the people moved about the streets  
wending their way to and from the Temple.

But on this Pentecost, there is added noise and confusion.

It's not just the milling crowds;

it's the unleashing of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles  
giving birth to the church.

We don't know exactly *what* happened or *how* it happened,  
but the violent wind of the Holy Spirit blowing over the apostles,  
and the gibberish of their ecstatic proclamation of the risen Christ,  
made so much noise it got the attention of the people  
over the din of everything else that was happening.  
It was indeed a wild and wooly day in Jerusalem!

Today as we celebrate the Festival of Pentecost,  
hearing the accounts of what happened in Jerusalem 2000 years ago  
probably scares the bejeebers out of us Lutherans—or at least it should.

I thought about bringing in several large attic fans to stir up a lot of wind  
to simulate what the apostles experienced in that room

when the Holy Spirit came upon them,

but I decided that would be a bit *over the top* for us.

After all, we are Lutherans

who have mastered the modest, quiescent faith.

When it comes to telling others about Jesus and what he has done for us,  
the only command we take literally is the one Jesus gave  
to the leper he healed after the Sermon on the Mount.

After healing him,

Jesus tells him,

*See that you say nothing to anyone.*<sup>1</sup>

We take that command seriously.

Presiding Bp. Mark Hanson tells us we Lutherans are so bold in our witness  
that we will invite someone to church on average once every 17 years.

Given our heritage of being God's *frozen chosen*,  
 how do we modest, quiescent Lutherans  
 deal with all the noise  
 the Holy Spirit stirs up at Pentecost?

Beyond the obvious answer—*not very well*—  
 we might be surprised to find out that we have a lot in common  
 with the apostles on that first Pentecost in Jerusalem 2000 years ago.

Like them, we are just sitting around here  
 kind of enjoying each other  
 but not knowing what to do  
 with this risen Jesus.

Like us, the apostles were just sitting around  
 kind of enjoying each other  
 as they scratched their heads trying to figure out  
 what they were supposed to do with this Jesus.

I have always been fascinated by the lull in the gospel narratives  
 during those 50 days  
 between Easter and Pentecost.

After the resurrection,  
 the apostles have several encounters with the risen Christ:

- twice in Jerusalem while they are sequestered behind the locked doors
- once on the road to Emmaus when he appears to two disciples
- once by the Sea of Galilee when he shares breakfast with 7 of them
- and his appearance to them before his Ascension.

But they are not doing anything with the message!

There is no written account, no oral tradition, no existing evidence  
 that any of the disciples shared the story of the resurrection  
 with anyone beyond their tight knit little group.

There is no evidence of any kind that any of them told anyone  
 about the mighty act of God *they had personally experienced*  
 in the resurrection of Jesus.

Tell me, if you experienced something as fantastic as the resurrection of Jesus,  
 would you have been able to keep quiet about it—  
 would you have been able to keep it a secret?

Well...yes...  
 we are Lutherans.  
 We probably could!

Of course, there is the issue of their fear.

Every time the apostles gather after Good Friday, it is behind locked doors.  
 While Acts doesn't say, they were probably behind locked doors on Pentecost.

But wouldn't you think Jesus' victory over the grave  
 would give them the idea  
 that maybe—just maybe—  
 death wasn't *the end of the line*?

What were the apostles thinking and doing during those 50 days!  
 How can you suppress something as wild and wooly as the resurrection of Jesus!  
 How can you go on with life as though nothing has happened!

We have a lot in common with them,  
 don't we!  
 I suppose it is appropriate that our church  
 is called Apostles.

But then came the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.  
 A violent wind—it must have been at least gale force—  
 blew through the room,  
 and the wind blew straight through their hearts.  
 And flames of fire  
 burned above their heads  
 setting their hearts on fire for Jesus.

In that moment, that skittish bunch of *scaredy-cats*  
 who may have been afraid of their own shadows  
 were transformed.  
 This motley crew of rag-tag disciples became a bold band of witnesses  
 proclaiming Christ to the world  
 without fear, without question, without hesitation.

What made the difference—what transformed their lives—was the Holy Spirit  
 —the *power* of God—  
 —the *fire* of God!

In the Holy Spirit,  
 God came to them not with a plan,  
 but with power,  
 power that moves them to step out from behind locked doors  
 to go into the world to proclaim in word and deed  
 the good news of God's love in the resurrected Christ.

Some of us apostles here today at Apostles  
 are concerned that our congregation  
 has not experienced growth.

Some have said that we need a plan  
 —a strategy—  
 to grow and build the church.  
 But at Pentecost, we see that  
 the apostles did OK,  
*and they didn't have a plan.*

Peter preached that day  
 —he was probably out there yelling in the street—  
 and Acts tells us 3000 people welcomed his message  
 and were baptized.<sup>2</sup>

Peter didn't have a plan;  
 what he had was power—what he had was fire—  
 what he had was the Holy Spirit,  
 and that was more than enough to grow the kingdom.

This Pentecost at Apostles, we have many fine and wonderful ministries  
 that are blessing the lives of many people  
 —and they could bless the lives of many more.

No we don't have *a plan*—  
 and we don't have committees.  
 We don't have a grand strategy for building a bigger church.  
 And we don't need them!

We don't need committees and strategies  
 to build the kingdom here at Apostles.  
 What we need is  
 to trust the Holy Spirit!

What we need is to let the Spirit's wind blow through us  
 and the Spirit's fire burn in us!  
 What we need at Apostles  
 are apostles who are on fire for Jesus.

That will be more than enough for us to  
 step out from behind the locked doors of our modest, quiescent faith  
 and live into our calling *to be and make disciples for Christ*.

Scarey?  
 Perhaps a little for us shy and modest Lutherans.  
 But hey—doesn't a risen Jesus mean something!  
 Wouldn't we think Jesus' victory over the grave would give us the idea  
 that just maybe death isn't *the end of the line*,  
 and, therefore, we have nothing to fear!

The same Holy Spirit  
 that fired up the apostles 2000 years ago and energized them,  
 will fire up and energize Apostles today.

Do we have the faith to trust that the Holy Spirit  
 will set our hearts on fire for Jesus!  
 Do we have the courage to trust the Holy Spirit enough to unlock the doors  
 and step out in faith to go and tell others about the risen Christ!



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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 8:1-4

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2: 41