

## “All (not each) of Them Were Filled”

Date: June 8, 2014

Theme: Pentecost, inclusiveness

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Pentecost Sunday

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Bradley Schmeling wrote a blog in the Christian Century about Pentecost. He wrote: “I learned many of the Bible stories by watching movies in Sunday School. They were those old-fashioned movies shown on a reel-to reel projector.” (remember those?)

The movies tried to portray the Bibles stories as some Cecil B. DeMille “wannabe” imagined they took place. They were seldom much better than the local Christmas pageant; most of the disciples basically wore fancy bathrobes.” Does anybody remember those old Sunday School movies?

He writes, “The Pentecost movie was dramatic. They all had flames above their heads, and they closed their eyes as they mysteriously spoke in tongues. It was so exotic, and a little scary.

However, the movie managed to portray the Pentecost story as an individual, private experience.” And this is where Bradley begins to object – and I agree with him. “The Holy Spirit came upon them not for the sake of a private devotional experience, but for the sake of the world.” (I think he’s criticizing some Pentecostals here).

But here’s the point of his blog, and the point I want to make this morning: “*Together*, these disciples experienced the mighty wind, the shift in direction from fear to witness. *Together*, they understood the gospel in every language under the sun. *Together*, they became the church. Without any one of them, it wouldn’t have been Pentecost.” Pentecost is a gathering of God’s people into one people.

John Ortberg tells the story of a friend who made his first trip south of the Mason-Dixon Line, from Chicago to Georgia. On his first morning in the South he went into a restaurant to order breakfast, and it seemed that every dish included something called grits. For many Southerners, it isn't breakfast without your grits.

Not being familiar with this southern delicacy, John's friend asked the waitress, "Could you tell me, exactly what is a grit?" Looking down on him with a mixture of compassion and condescension, she said, "Sugar, you can't get just one grit. They always come together."

Pentecost is the movement of God's Holy Spirit, bringing God's people together again. It's the reverse of the Tower of Babel. John Wesley knew there was no personal holiness without social holiness. And Pulitzer Prize winner Annie Dillard says, "You can no more go to God alone than you can go to the North Pole alone."

My friends, we are just like grits.... "You can't get just one. They come together." God wants us to stop thinking in terms of "I, me, and my," and instead to start thinking in terms of "Us and our."

God's answer to the human predicament was to create a new community, to start a family. The Church is to embody this vision. It's called to create and to point towards the vision of God's people living together in a loving, forgiving, caring community.

Among all the miracles contained in the books of the New Testament, perhaps the most astounding is the transformation of a scattered, broken and confused group of men into the enduring foundation of the Church. What created this change? How did this happen?

What happened to this tattered remnant to weave itself into the “seamless robe of Christ?” Their secret was no secret. Beginning with the event of Pentecost, the early Christians devoted themselves, whole-heartedly, to building a distinctive community of faith.

At Pentecost the inclusive, rather than the exclusive nature of Christian community was demonstrated. Reversing the Tower of Babel narrative, the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost makes communication possible between people of all languages once again.

God had begun drawing all peoples together. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, there were Jews from all over the region gathered to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover, remembering the time when Moses gave the Law.

Pentecost usually occurred in June, the time when the traveling conditions would have been best. Therefore, there were many, many people in Jerusalem that day. Jews had been scattered all over the Roman Empire, but they returned to the capital city for festivals.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they all began to talk at once. But not in their native tongue, which for most of them would have been Aramaic. Instead they were speaking in languages they had never learned.

It was quite a sight and sound. A crowd soon gathered. And all of the people, from Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome, to name a few, all of them heard this strange group of people talking in their own language. They were talking about the same thing – the wonderful works of God.

Pentecost was God’s announcement to the human race that Heaven’s good news was for **all** humanity. It didn’t matter what your

tongue, your dialect, your accent, your grammatical knowledge. It didn't matter if you were a Jew, a Gentile, a Roman or a Greek, or whether you were educated or illiterate: You could hear and understand God's good news in your own language.

Which is to say - that for the first time the greatest barrier to a worldwide faith had been torn down: Language. Now mind you, it was a symbolic event. But the apostles, the Church, had gotten the message. They were not to be an exclusive body. They were destined to be a worldwide institution, inclusive of all people.

Bradley Schmeling finished his little essay with these thoughts: "Rather than imagining Pentecost as a dove descending like it did on Jesus at his baptism, maybe we should picture flocks of birds, swarming and ready to move, mysteriously drawn by winds and season, to travel to new places."

He says, "If I were directing the Pentecost movie, I would show the disciples with their eyes wide open, focused on the gathering crowds, their energy and their speech drawing them outward into the world.

I would try to portray the burning desire deep within them to find the explosive connection between Spirit, culture, language and community, a movement that gathers until it reaches the ends of the earth."

Pentecost was God's announcement to the entire human race, that the grace of Jesus Christ was available to *all* people. Let us work and strive to be an inclusive church, seeking to break down all the barriers that would keep people out, and labor for that blessed community that includes all of God's children. Amen? Amen!