

Pentecost: A Coming Out Party

Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman

May 20, 2018

So, what do you think about today's sermon title? "Pentecost: A Coming Out Party." You may be surprised to learn that it wasn't my idea, but rather came out of a brainstorming session at a recent Worship & Music ministry team meeting. And no, 'coming out' is not directly meant in the familiar vernacular related to the LGBTQ community. Saying that, however, College Hill will be marching in the Tulsa Pride Parade on Saturday, June 2, as well as staffing an information booth about our congregation in the Equality Center that day. So, in a way, that does serve as a continuing 'coming out as a congregation' through our longtime support of the rights of all to love who they choose to love and to be treated with dignity and equality. But today's coming out party is even bigger than that.

The Day of Pentecost on the liturgical church calendar, falling 50 days after Easter Sunday, marks the celebration of what is commonly considered the birth of the Christian Church. Happy Birthday to the church! That's worthy of throwing a party. But why a 'coming out' party? Because, **this day marks the transformation of a small group of fearful disciples of Jesus into the courageous apostles who came out of hiding to share the good news of the gospel with the world.**

The biblical story of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, marks the moment of the emergence of the enduring foundation of the Christian church – a new religious tradition that was formed out of a scattered, disheartened, confused, and basically powerless collection of a few hesitant followers of Jesus. From huddling together in one place, often thought to be the Upper Room where Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples, they came out, so to speak, after being empowered and embolden by the Presence of the Holy Spirit with and within them.

The story reveals that the gift of the Spirit was basically the gift of communication.

The apostles spoke in other languages and the huge gathered crowd, Jews from a myriad of other countries, heard them speaking in their own native languages.

Pentecost, therefore, is often referred to as the miracle of the tongue and the miracle of the ear. True communication can only occur when people are empowered to speak (especially those with no power), and others empowered to listen (especially those with power). This can happen within individual relationships, or in a community of faith, or even between nations. **And perhaps the most important result of this gift of communication through the Presence of God's Holy Spirit is the formation of community.** Not only then, but now, as well. It is our belief that community today is still being built with the same divine breath, the same divine fire within, and the same divine love. If that's not a reason to throw a party I don't know what is.

Reflecting upon the mutual gifts of building community through speaking and listening, we set out on a new path during our **annual Session Retreat** this past January, which intentionally included the four ruling elders rotating off the session in addition to

the four incoming elders. I've mentioned this several times, including just last Sunday. I'd perhaps go as far as saying **our retreat this year was like having our own Pentecost moment.** Through a disciplined process, ably guided by consultant Anne McCoy, we shared our own ideas and carefully listened to each other. When we were finished, we had a list of specific goals, objectives, and strategies to help us further live into our Mission Statement. And that's where we began. **Our church Mission Statement serves as our overarching goals as a congregation. They are:**

- 1. Build an inclusive community of faith**
- 2. Receive and openly share the love of God**
- 3. Reach out with a compassionate voice for peace and justice**

Our task during that retreat was to discern how together as a congregation we can make progress achieving those three basic goals. After exploring the strengths of our congregation, and areas needing improvement, and a particular vision/hope for the church, we brainstormed thoughts and ideas, wrote them on post-it notes, and then after putting them all up on a large white board, categorized them based on similarity of topic. We came up with about a dozen major areas and then each of us voted on what we thought was an immediate or urgent need, an important but not urgent need, or a future need. **The results revealed the top four primary areas we, as a congregation, would like to focus on during the next 2 years.** Based on the number of votes received, here's a countdown from number 4 to number 1.

- 4. Engage with the needs of our community**
- 3. Technology-based outreach**
- 2. New member nurturing**
- 1. Ministry team and Session health / leadership**

From there, based on personal interest and energy, we broke into four groups to come up with **specific major objectives and measurable strategies to meet each objective.** We left that retreat feeling renewed, energized, and like we had participated in something big and important. Not a new beginning, per se, but perhaps not too unlike those disciples on the Day of Pentecost, a group of folks who were **reenergized, empowered, and emboldened by God's Spirit to courageously move ahead and reach out with greater passion for the mission and ministry to which we have been called as College Hill Presbyterian Church.** It was, so to speak, a coming out party for the Session, which we now want to share with you. For this is where we need your help.

I want to transition now from a sermon to a presentation by one of the participants in each of the four primary areas that will serve as our goals and objectives as a congregation over the next two years. It is my hope that you, too, with catch the fire of the Holy Spirit, and help us reach these goals by perhaps volunteering to work with one of our ministry teams.

First up, starting with our number 1 priority, Robert Babcock will share a few words about Ministry Team & Session Health/Leadership...

Next, Sue Haskins, moderator of our new Visitor and New Member Nurture ministry team will share...

Next up is Terry Gamel, moderator of our new Technology Based Outreach ministry team. As you know, we split the previous Evangelism & Communications ministry team to form these two new ministry teams...

And the fourth priority, Engage with the Needs of Our Community. None of the ruling elders that served in the group during the session retreat were able to be here today, so Tally Ferguson, former moderator of the Outreach & Mission ministry team, will speak...

I hope you feel a sense of the Spirit's fire burning within the Session and leadership of this church, and certainly within you. Because, we are very excited about being College Hill and what we're doing within this community and within this congregation. So, I think it's appropriate that we celebrate what's going on as our own coming out party.

Amen.