

# It All Points To Pentecost

## Pentecost Sunday – the Balloon Analogy

Acts 2:1-21      Genesis 11:109  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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**Christmas** is a really important Christian holiday – celebrating the birth of the one who would usher in the kin-dom of God. And, through his teachings, reveal what we consider to be a deeper and fuller understanding of the nature and character of God.

**Easter** is a really important Christian holiday – celebrating the experience of Christ's continuing Presence with us, and that death does not have the final word. **There would be no faith tradition known as Christianity without the events to which Christmas and Easter point. However, they are just the beginning. For ultimately, they point to Pentecost, without which there would be no Christian Church.**

On Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit – God's gracious, empowering, and guiding Presence *among* us and *within* us. We celebrate the beginnings of the life of the Christian Church. And we celebrate the blessings of being part of this particular community of faith known as College Hill.

Most of you are somewhat familiar with the story of Pentecost as recorded in the book of Acts, which by the way, was written by the gospel writer Luke. It's a remarkably bizarre story filled with special effects of colorful sights and sounds, most reference of which can be traced back to the Old Testament. The account in Acts includes a loud rushing wind, divided tongues of fire, speaking in foreign languages, and being able to hear and understand in one's own native language. These elements of the story, whether taken literally or metaphorically, primarily represent the crucial **gifts of courage to speak out and to actively listen.**

This story, written at least 40-50 years after Jesus' death, answers the following crucial questions about the ongoing development of the kin-dom of God: **When, where, why, and how did the Christian Church begin?** Jesus, their prophet, teacher, and spiritual leader, had been executed by an occupying foreign empire. Under normal circumstances, any movement would have simply faded away after losing such a leader. The miracle of Easter reveals, in part, that this group of Jesus' followers was able to experience his ongoing presence with them. However, **since Jesus' resurrection they were still basically just a powerless, fearful handful of followers – until the day of Pentecost.** This story also reveals that the Spirit of the God of love, the Spirit of the living Christ functions, in essence, to **create and empower a new and dynamic community.** That was the case 2000 years ago, that is still the case today!

A biblical understanding of the role of the church instructs us that any particular community of faith, including ours, does not exist solely for its own personal and communal well-being. The coming of the Holy Spirit on that first Day of Pentecost, and ever since, is for the empowerment of the community to be *sent out* into the world, so that *all* people can hear and share in the Good News of God's grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, and the power to transform lives – as it is transforming *our* lives. **We are**

**being called and empowered to seek unity in the midst of our diversity.** You've may have heard that phrase many times before, but **this is what it means, in part, to be filled with the Holy Spirit.**

To help make this point about how the church is filled with the Holy Spirit, I'd like to share an illustration. This **analogy compares the work of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith with a balloon.** [Hold up balloon.] This balloon, at this point, is not full of air. It is a lifeless balloon. It continues to just lie wherever you put it. [Drop it.] It doesn't move. It has no power. **The balloon is not doing what it was created to do.** But take that balloon and do what the Holy Spirit did to those disciples and the crowd at Pentecost – fill it with power. [Blow up balloon and tell the congregation to do the same.] What has happened? It's now **filled with of air. It is still basically lifeless, however.** It goes nowhere until that power is released. The point is this: **God did not fill those first disciples with the power of the Holy Spirit so that they could just stay behind locked doors cowering in fear. They, and the church today, are given the power of God's Spirit to move out into the world in order to make a difference. Let us now** release that power in our balloons by letting them go on the count of 3. [Balloons fly around the sanctuary with a funny noise.]

With the release of the air's power, the balloon is free to move. It goes out. When the wind power within the balloon is released, however, **we don't know exactly where the balloon is going to go, but we know it's going somewhere. When the power of the Holy Spirit is released in our lives and in this community of faith – allowing the Presence of God within us to focus and direct our lives internally and externally – we may not always know where we're going to go at first either. We just need to trust that it's wherever the Spirit wants us to go and wants us to do.** The question is:

- Do we have the courage to go where we discern the Holy Spirit is leading us?
- Do we have the courage to *do* what we discern the Holy Spirit is calling us to do?

In a current example, the answer is an enthusiastic YES! Collectively, we have discerned to courageously move forward in filling the newly-created position of Director of Children and Family Ministry here at College Hill. To use a phrase I used to use more often: That's a God thing!

But what has happened to the balloon, now? It is depleted of air, its wind power. It is again lifeless until it is filled anew with air and re-released. **Just as a balloon needs to go back to its source of energy and power to recharge, so do we – and that means connecting with what you perceive to be the Divine.** That is the purpose of any meaningful spirituality – connecting you with the Sacred Presence of God in your life, and our life together as a community of faith.

Even though the Spirit of God is *always* among us and within us (that's the promise of our Baptism), do we not need to experience a sense of being re-filled, re-energized and renewed by God's Spirit from time to time? Hopefully, that is what happens every time we worship, share communion, study, fellowship, pray together, and serve others. And for many of us, connecting with the Divine can also happen through music, or a bonding with the beauty of nature, or even at ordinary times in our common daily routines. For many, gardening and yard work is often a spiritual experience of being renewed and re-filled.

There's one final analogy I'd like to make. What happens to an air-filled balloon after several days? Over time, the air slowly leaks out – the power leaves. The balloon, without doing anything, will go flat. The same is true with muscles. Muscles that aren't used lose their strength through atrophy and inactivity. I wonder, can the same thing happen with our faith, or our sense of being connected to God? **The power that God gives you and me and the church** (especially working through how we spend our time, develop and share our talents, and use the blessings of our many resources) **is expected to be shared and used for the common good of all.** God calls us to be good stewards, and to use wisely all that God has blessed us with – in other words, to **disperse that never-ending source of energy and power, only to repeat the cycle again and again: refill-disperse; refill-disperse ...**

For at its heart, the church is a mission – God's mission – and the call, the challenge, the opportunity, the adventure continues. Let's discern and go where the Spirit leads.

Amen.