

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg
May 27, 2012/Pentecost

“Got Spirit?”
(Ezekiel 37:1-14; , Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15)

Today is one of those days in the church year where everyone knows what the sermon will be about. We come dressed in red because this is the celebration of the Holy Spirit. It seems as if the predictability of Pentecost may have caused us to forget the significance of this day. Yet, I think these are the days where we must focus on the Holy Spirit...where we must see focus on the Pentecost story.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, everyone has come from different locations to a common place. This is very similar to us today. We have come from different places, some had to travel a little more than others, but we all came to the same place. What happened that day is pretty amazing. There was a sound like the rush of a violent wind and the gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon them. Just imagine what that experience. The people began to talk in their own languages. What would that sound like? These devout Jews were amazed and astonished at this experience. These people that came from different locations were now united by one thing....the gift of the Holy Spirit!

The mystery of how the Holy Spirit brings forth unity in the midst of diversity reminds me of a story about a town that is about the size of Fredericksburg. It is a small community with just a few churches that tend to compete with one another. One night a family's home burned to the ground. As the community witnessed the children crying and the despair of the parents, they decided to organize a fundraiser for this family. It was at this moment where they put aside their doctrinal differences...their need to

compete with one another and allowed the Spirit to guide them in their efforts to provide new life for the family. This is exactly the message that Jesus is giving to his disciples as he prepares to depart. The Spirit of truth will guide them and will declare to them the things that are yet to come. I remember those words from the pastor who confirmed me. These were appropriate words as we began a new part of our faith journey!

After the believers felt the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit descend upon them, the next thing that occurs is a sermon by Peter. In this sermon, Peter provides an adaptation of words from the prophet Joel, which signifies a rebirth of the prophetic witness. As the Spirit has come upon each person, they are guided by that Spirit to boldly proclaim the Good News! This is what Pentecost is all about! God's truth is not to be hidden!

This is where we seem to fall short in the church these days. Church life is consumed with so many little things that take us away from boldly proclaiming the Good News! As we watch churches declining, we recognize the fact that they are not open to where the Spirit will take us so that we can be a witness to God's love through Christ. It seems that a lot of our churches are a valley of dry bones, which Ezekiel speaks about. God breathed new life into these bones and placed the Spirit within them. What a powerful image! God will bring new life to a community that seems dead. Is there any life here? Ezekiel tells us that God is the sustainer of all life and is not ready to give us a death certificate. However, we must be open to receive the Holy Spirit and let the spirit of truth guide us. Just imagine the possibilities if we are open to the Spirit!

While I was in seminary, I had lunch with one of the older women from the church where I grew up. Her husband had just died and she invited me to lunch because I

visited him several times, especially in his final weeks. In the midst of our conversation, this woman lamented that there were several widows in the congregation. She thought it would be good to get together with them for some fellowship and support. I immediately said, “Martha, that is a great idea. Why don’t you get it started?” I am sure this is not the response she expected from me. However, Martha was open to the Spirit and she later formed this group. I am delighted that this group is still meeting almost a decade later. As a witness to Martha’s willingness to let the Spirit guide her, this group is still strong even after her death.

As people of God we must celebrate the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we must receive the Spirit and let the Spirit guide us in all that we do. As we face the challenges that every other congregation is facing, we must always look to the Spirit and to discern where the Spirit is guiding us. Jesus is encouraging the disciples that the Spirit will be with them and there is no reason for them to be afraid. In these anxious times in the church, we must have the assurance that the Spirit will be with us.

Every year on Pentecost, I am reminded of a chant that I learned in high school when I was in the marching band. We would say the following chant to the other band: **“We’ve got spirit, yes we do! We’ve got spirit, how ‘bout you?”** It is a good question for us. Do you have the Spirit? Where do you think the Spirit is guiding you? Is there life here? Will these bones live? They will because God’s Spirit is upon them. We as the church will only live if we’ve got the Spirit in us! Where is God calling us to proclaim the spirit of truth? As we go forth this day, let us be Pentecost people! Let’s boldly proclaim the Good News! God’s Spirit has fallen on us and hopefully we will let that Spirit guide us in our ministry! Amen.