

A Mother's Day, no Pentecost, yes, Mother's Day Sermon  
Acts 2:1-13

You and I will never have this problem again, having Pentecost falling on Mother's Day. You see, Pentecost Sunday falls seven weeks after Easter, which means Easter has to be really early for Pentecost to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of May. So, what's the sermon to be? Mother's Day or Pentecost?

We don't make much over Pentecost any more. It's one of those churchy holidays that the world at large has long since learned to ignore. But I really should preach about Pentecost, because for most of our church history, Pentecost was even more important than Christmas.

But it's also Mother's Day, which is not a Christian holiday, but many folks have come today expecting to hear a word, not about Pentecost, but about mothers or family. So what am I supposed to do? No, I won't do what some of you are hoping, which is not forget the sermon, sing the final hymn so we can beat the Baptists, Catholics, and Episcopalians to the Golden Corral Brunch.

At first glance, the two subjects, Mother's Day and Pentecost don't seem to have much in common, although our trusty Music Director Joe McCreary had an idea. Thinking about the Holy Spirit, coming like tongues of fire upon the disciples, mentioned, "Well, my mother used to give me plenty of tongue-lashings."

Well, let's look at Pentecost. It's from a Greek word meaning "fifty" in honor of a Jewish harvest festival that took place fifty days after Passover, which for us makes it fifty days after Easter. It is then, at some level, the beginning of the harvest of the seeds that Jesus had planted with his ministry, death on the cross, and Resurrection from the dead.

So what happens. Jesus has gone into heaven. The disciples are told not to gaze endlessly into heaven, waiting to see if and when he might return, but rather to return to Jerusalem, and wait. Wait for God to intervene again, wait for God to act boldly and decisively.

Wait for the holy spirit to come rushing upon them, and so it does. Like tongues of fire, it touches this little band of believers, all of them, and suddenly the church is born. The church is born because the disciples now take their experience of God in Jesus Christ out into public. They no longer hide behind closed doors for fear of their adversaries, but boldly step out and proclaim the truth of Christ.

The church is born because now for the first time folks who had never walked with Jesus, eaten with Jesus, come to believe in him, because of what they have been told.

It's an unpredictable day of power and excitement and surprise. Some folks think the disciples are drunk, but Peter says, no, it's far too early in the day for that. Not an overly creative defense, but it seems to work.

Others are shocked by these words, God's words, words of transformation, words of truth, because they are coming from, well-country Bumpkins from Galilee, which was as far as you could get from the cultural and educational centers both of Empire and religion.

But here they are, common, ordinary folks, drawing others, not to them, but to Christ, and creating a new community, a community of believers, what we call the church.

And what is so extraordinary is that this message of salvation is spoken to folks from all over who have gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. Folks from different cultures and different backgrounds and different languages, and through God's power, all understand what is being said.

The disciples spoke presumably in Greek or more probably Aramaic, the common language of that day, Hebrew was reserved for worship usually, but Medes heard the truth in their own language, and the folks from Rome in theirs and folks from Crete in theirs.

It's ironic that folks who speak in unknown tongues are today called Pentecostals, precisely because of what happens today, because today we find not unknown languages, the language of angels Paul will call it, but rather, the gift of hearing God's truth in one's own language, even though the speakers were speaking in another language.

So, Pentecost, the birthday of the church, begins to define what the church is: the community that

makes Jesus Christ real today, to speak to folks in their own situation about the truth we know about the one we call Lord. Pentecost does not allow us to rest behind these walls. Pentecost reminds us that today the Spirit will surprise us, lead us, transform us, and through us, transform the world. Pentecost is a big deal.

But how in the world does it connect with Mother's Day, this important, sometimes sweet, sometimes bittersweet, sometimes saccharine secular holiday that has a hold on Christian folk and secular folk alike?

Maybe it has to do with this notion of birth, and setting limits, and setting free. A good mother supplies love, nurture, instruction, and limits. As has been said many times, the job of a mother (and father of course) is to set limits, and the job of children is to test them. That's why if a teenager fusses at an 11 PM curfew, the answer is not to move it to 1 AM. Because you'll just have the fuss at 1:01 AM, instead of the 11:01 PM.

When God gives birth to the church, God frees the church to be alive in the church today. The church has its instruction and its limits, Scripture and tradition, the wisdom of the church through the ages, but the church also has the spirit: What is God calling the church to do, to be here, now. Beaufort, 2008.

And so a wise mother offers love and limits, but also the freedom for the child to become the new creation God has created the child to be. When God gives the church the Holy Spirit in a

sense God is giving the church the gift of freedom, to act, to react, to be. And so parents seek to instill values, but not to dictate the child's future.

Whenever I hear of a mother who demands her grown children be home for a certain holiday, I groan inwardly. Of course, that's what she wants, but what she should want more is for her children to live their own lives.

Another point of contact between Mother's Day and Pentecost might be this: assembly lines are wonderful for making cars and computers, but not for creating churches and families. As different churches offer different gifts to the world, express God differently, understand God differently, so it is with moms.

My mother was not great in offering affection and unconditional love. But she excelled in showing us the value of working hard, of living honestly, of reaching out and helping folks who did not look like us or live near us. The two summers after 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade when I volunteered at Fulton School in the heart of the Springfield, Ohio Black Ghetto was not because of a calling I felt in my heart, but because of values my mother had put there. Or to put it in less theological terms. . . she insisted.

As a church or as an individual, to be encountered by the Holy Spirit is to hear God speak within our reality, within what is possible given our talents, given our deficiencies. The older I get the more I realize that my mother did the best she could, considering who she was, considering her

life experiences. She taught me valuable lessons. And with every new Mother's Day that comes by since her death in 2001, I find myself appreciating more what she was able to give her children and to regret less what she could not.

Today we who are imperfect children do well to give thanks for our imperfect mothers. To rejoice in the good, to forgive what might need to be forgiven, to laugh at what we need to laugh at, to accept what we must accept, to change what the spirit of love might allow us to change.

And, as I begin to wander to the end of the sermon, I want to offer just a few more reflections on this Mother's Day/Pentecost Day combination which we won't have to worry about again.

As a church, as the body of Christ, created by the Spirit of Christ, and led by the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, may we bold in affirming what are called traditional family values, that all things being equal, and if there is not abuse, and if mothers and fathers can live in peace and harmony, without tension that children feel even more than we know, that it is best for children to be raised in a home in which there is both a father and mother living there.

At the same time, may we affirm again with what it meant on the Day of Pentecost for each person, for every person, to receive the power of Christ in his or her own language. As a Church may we always offer the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to all whose experiences and backgrounds are not our own. As folks from Crete and Rome and all over each heard a word for them on their

journey, so may we as a church speak a word that all people can hear.

May single mothers hear again the affirming word of Christ today. May mothers who have lost children and children who have lost their mothers here the consoling power of Christ today. May mothers who have children who have lost their way, who are in prison or are shackled by drug abuse hear the renewing word of Jesus Christ today. May the Spirit of Christ speak today to women who have never been and cannot be mothers, that they too are beloved and welcomed and important.

On Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ was unleashed upon the world, as God set himself free to touch hearts and lives with the grace and love of Jesus himself. As a church, may we live in this spirit, and on this Mother's Day, may parents and children alike find comfort and renewal in this spirit.

And this afternoon, I'll thank God again that our son wants to take his mother, my wife, to the Kinston Indians ballgame. I'll tag along, eat a hot dog with them, and thank God again for the gifts of Jesus' love that abound in community, church, and family on this Mother's Day. This Day of Pentecost. Amen.