

McCabe United Methodist Church

Memorial Sunday, May 27, 2012

“The Spirit of God in Those We Love”

Pastor Ray Baker

Today we are here to remember the day of Pentecost and to remember our family and friends who have died in the past eighteen months. The story of Pentecost is told in the book of Acts. It's the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the people of the early church like a mighty rush of wind and with tongues of fire that danced on their heads.

I would like everyone to join me in imagining what it may have been like on the day of Pentecost. Let's raise our hands above our heads and wave our arms to represent the “tongues of fire” that danced upon their heads. Come on, everyone join in. I know it may be out of your comfort zone, but raise your arms. (Pause) Now look at that...even a bunch of United Methodists can be Pentecostal.

In the history of the early church the first miracle that happened was that Jesus, the son of God, walked the earth. He walked along side Peter, James, and John. He walked beside all of his disciples and followers.

We also know the miracle of Saul becoming Paul through his experience on the road to Damascus. Saul saw a light and heard a voice from heaven that challenged him and his persecution of the Christian Church. He was struck blind and his friends helped him travel to the next town. After three days of blindness a man named Ananias spoke God's blessing upon Saul and scales fell from his eyes. This is when he began to be known as Paul.

These were fantastic events, but something else was brewing. I imagine it being like the day of a summer storm in North Dakota, one of those days when we know we should already be hiding in the basement. The clouds were black and gray. There was a swirling movement in the clouds and:

“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongues rested on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2:2-4 NRSV)

The people of the early church experienced the Holy Spirit in a tangible way and it ‘set the Church on fire.’

The disciples, like Peter, James, and John ‘set the world on fire.’

The Apostles like Paul, Timothy, and Steven ‘set the world on fire.’

There were also an untold number of average people who ‘set the world on fire.’ Among this group of people were folks like Salome, Aquila and Pricilla, Phoebe, and Tabitha. They felt the Holy Spirit move in their time and in their lives. They are among the people who supported the disciples and apostles by offering financial support, hosting house Churches, and by sharing the ‘Good News’ with their family, friends, and neighbors.

I believe Christ set the foundation of the Christian Church on the shoulders of Peter and Paul. But I also believe the church thrived because of the people who carried on their work. The average people we the unsung Saints of the early Church. The inspiration came from people like Peter and Paul, but the heavy lifting, the day to day ministry, came from the average people of their time. The work of the early Christian church was done by average people...just like you.

Salome, wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John, was among the women who traveled with Jesus and the disciples and provided for their basic needs. She was also among the women who gathered at the foot of the cross.

Aquila and Priscilla were friends of Paul. They supported his ministry through their tent making business. The hosted a house church in Corinth. They also traveled with Paul on one of his missionary journeys.

Phoebe was a deaconess in the church in Cenchreae. She was obviously well thought of because of her position as a leader in the Church. We know her as the person who delivered Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul said they should "...welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints...." (Romans 16:2 NRSV) This is truly high praise.

Tabitha, or Dorcas in Greek, lived a life that was well known for good works and acts of charity. She was beloved by all when she died unexpectedly. Acts chapter 9 tells the story of how people gathered the clothing she had made and carried it into the streets as they mourned her death. This was a sign of grief and a sign of respect and praise from her peers. When people learned that Peter was nearby he was called to her side where he knelt in prayer to God, giving praise for her life and expressing his grief. Then he turned to her and asked that she open her eyes. She did, she opened her eyes and stood up and walked.

The story of Tabitha's "near death experience" is similar to the story of Jairus's daughter in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. These are stories of resuscitation NOT stories of resurrection. Both Jairus's daughter and Tabitha eventually died in this life and received the gift of eternal life.

I believe it's important to remember the saints of the past because their ministry helped create the Christian Church which we enjoy today. Now in our time and in this place we are here to remember the saints of our day. The Holy Spirit of God has walked with us and with our loved ones who have died in the last eighteen (18) months. Today we will read the names of thirty-three (33) people who have received the gift of eternal life. We celebrate their lives. We remember our love for them. We celebrate their ability to be with our God in Heaven.

Baker, Don

Berry, Tonya

Bibelheimer, Jane

Bibelheimer, Paul

Brunsomman, Marian

Eisenbeis, Wes

Fine, James

Mitchell, Louise

Neff, Roy Jr.

Ness, Marion

Nuetzman, Edwin

O'Connor, William

Olson, Grayce

Parsons, Mathilda

Gagnon, George (Woody)
Graves, Lorraine
Heaton, Lucile
Hipple, Carol
Holly, Emma
Irwin, Dale
Job, Carol
Johnson, Wilma
Miller, Grace
Mindt, Hazel

Scarff, Janet
Scharnowske, Ray
Schilling, Marvin
Seibel, Johanna
Simons, Lillian
Solberg, Bernard
Sprenger, Shar
Wheeler, Ralph
Wulf, Delton