Sunday, May 18, 1975
PENTECOST 1975
Acts 2:1-8,12-13

Introduction

We have just heard the story of Pentecost, as recorded in the book of Acts. What is Pentecost? What's it got to do with you and me living in this world of 1975?

1. The word "Pentecost" means in its simplest sense, "50th day" and for Christians it refers to the 50th day after Easter, when according to the Book of Acts, the disciples and followers of Jesus received a new impetus to go into the world and tell the good news of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So far as we can tell from Luke's account in Acts, the original disciples now reduced to eleven after the suicide of Judas, did very little to carry on the work of JESUS after the resurrection except to choose another person to take the place of Judas. It was as if they were waiting for some kind of signal to begin.

Then came the day of Pentecost, a Jewish holiday, and. from Luke's story, a whole group of believers had gathered together in one place, no doubt to celebrate the holiday. But in that gathering something unusual and unexpected happened. The way Luke describes it there was a strange sound and it seemed as if tongues of fire came to rest on all those who were gathered, and everyone spoke in different languages and dialects which could be understood by the many foreigners who were there.

Now here as in the case of other Biblical accounts, we could get all bogged down in the minute details of the story and miss the total impact of the experience. We could wonder about the tong.es of fire and. the sound which came like the mighty rush of a wind and the speaking in various languages. This is not to say that the details such as these do not have symbolic significance, but it's the overall impact that we're interested in. And in the case of the first Pentecost, we know that as a result of it the disciples now became bold and daring witnesses for Jesus Christ. Until the Pentecost experience, the disciples that Jesus had trained hadn't done very much. But the day of Pentecost changed all that. It was the turning point. On that day the church literally took fire and began to spread.

2. Secondly, among themselves in their own company, the followers of Jesus were changed in a unique way. They became aware of a presence and power which made it possible for them to be drawn together in a new kind of harmony. In temperament, nationality, language, culture and social class, each person present on that Pentecost occasion was different from the others. But now in spite of their dif-ferences, they experienced a new kind of relationship to each other. We might say the group of Christians had a new "spirit" in it — -that which we call the "holy spirit."

This does not mean they became a homogeneous classless or undifferentiated collection of people. They were in fact even more awa.re of their differences. What Pentecost did was to create out of this diverse gathering a new kind of harmony without destroying individual differences. People were freed to be themselves in all of their indivi-duality and yet were drawn into a harmonious fellowship with others and together they proclaimed the works of God in word and in deed.

3. Thirdly, the church became more than an in-group. It moved out. Its character changed. The disciples became Apostles. They now began to act on the knowledge that God was actively at work in the world and that all people everywhere were part of one family under God.

As part of the story of that first Pentecost, the Book of Acts gives us an example of the kind of preaching that began to take form in the early church. It gives us a condensation of the first major sermon that the Apostle Peter preached. So, for the rest of this sermon this morning, I want to try to put into today's words, the basic sermon which Peter preached. First, however, listen to the summary of the sermon as Luke has reported it in Acts chapter 2.

The Sermon

Peter, standing with the other eleven disciples, lifted up his voice and said --

"Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; rather the Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled.

Men of Israel then, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

King David, our patriarch, died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. But he was also a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne. Thus, David foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, and he knew that he was not abandoned to hades. This Jesus, God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

When the people heard this sermon, they asked, "What shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the promise of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

Well, that's a summary of Peter's sermon and it got a strong response. The Book of Acts reports that there were added that day to the church about 3000 persons. That's powerful preaching.

Here in brief is how Peter's sermon might be preached today.

Men and women in 1975, we Christians are not drunk or crazy as you might suppose. In the first place, it's much too early in the morning for us to be drunk. On the other hand, I can see why some of you might think we Christians are out of our minds.

To an outsider with a common-sense, practical, everyday way of looking at the world; what Jesus Christ preached and taught seems like foolishness. And the fact of his letting himself be

killed and then God's raising him from the dead seems like even more foolishness to people who believe that "might makes right," or the way to be a savior is by using force.

However, "God's way are not our ways!" Furthermore because of Jesus Christ, God's power and peace are now available to all people everywhere.

This is good news because all people on earth, all persons everywhere and throughout the ages deep down and more than anything else long to be at-one with God and to be at-one with other persons. In fact, we many times first experience God by coming into a deep relationship with other persons.

The Psalmist wrote long ago, "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." All people everywhere want God to become real to them. We want to know that we are in contact with the source of all life.

Now many of you persons here do not always put this longing, this desire into religious language. But the longing, the desire is there all the same. It is seen most clearly in the way in which all people seek to make some sense out of life. All persons seek meaning, something to hang onto, something to give focus and direction to their living. To use religious language, all people seek and have something to worship.

Particularly in today's world, people are seeking something to grab onto. The search for the sacred in life is everywhere. The scientist pursues a truth always beyond him or her. The artist lives for beauty. Others seek God in nature. But what do they really want? What do you want in life and after life? Even human love in and of itself cannot satisfy us. The point is though, in all of our searching we are seeking God. We want to know God. We want to find what is at the center of all life and creation.

Show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied. My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God!

Brothers and sisters in 1975, this longing has been satis-fied. What all people have sought from the beginning of time; what God has promised so long ago. has taken place. The prophecies have been fulfilled. God himself is with us.

God has uniquely revealed himself in a person, in Jesus of Nazareth — a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst. "In many and various ways God. spoke of old. to our fathers and mothers by the prophets, but in this last day she has spoken to us by a Son."

Here was God supremely focused in a human being. He hadn't come to call the righteous, but to call the sinners to repentance. "Follow me," said Jesus, and we followed. live found in our relationship with Jesus a new way of looking ·at life and a new way of seeing all persons and a new way of understanding God. And strangely enough as Jesus was among us, and particularly after his resurrection, we found in our lives a new power, a new dimension.

As you know, this man Jesus was not long alive among us in the flesh. Some people, especially the so-called righteous people could not stand him. They thought they knew better how to run God's world. So, Jesus Christ and what he lived and taught was a kind of judgment upon all of us and our pretensions and self-righteousness. He talked about a loving God. He ate with sinners. He showed us that there was much more to a true religion than just obeying

rules. He talked about a new morality of life. He upset some of the traditional ways of thinking and acting.

Thus, it wasn't long before the authorities decided that Jesus had to be gotten rid of. He was crucified. But he did not stay dead. This Jesus God raised up and of tha.t we are all witnesses. And through his resurrection a new power had been released in the world. God has established a new order in society.

You can be a part of this new age. When you become a part of his, you are changed for a self-centered, self-seeking human being into a net. kind of person with a new sense of freedom. It's like being born again. You are changed from one who is anxious and afraid into the kind of person who has courage and hope.

It means that the Christian religion and the Christian life are not to be seen as grim battles or as a lonely joyless pilgrimage, but rather as a life lived with the very vitality of God who is present in his world.

Now it is possible that some of you here have up to now been attempting to live your life without God. It is possible that you feel in your bones that there is a life of better quality. You may want to feel a part of a larger purpose; you may want to know that you are connected with the Almighty God.

This kind of life begins with accepting the claims of Jesus Christ to be God revealed uniquely in a human life. It means dropping our ridiculous habit of trying to justify ourselves and accepting the reconciliation which Christ has made. And then it means the knowledge within us that we are inseparably connected with the eternal life of God so that there is nothing that life can do and nothing which death can do to interfere with that relationship. Amen.