

“Life and Soul of the (Birthday) Party”

Acts 2: 1-21; Romans 8: 22-27;
John 15:26-27, 16: 4b-15

As I said earlier, today is Pentecost, the birthday of the church. On this day, 40 some days after Jesus' Resurrection, and an unknown number of days after he went to heaven, the Holy Spirit came to Jesus' disciples, just as Jesus had said.

Now this day, this day of birth was very dramatic and impressive. Funny how that is. Almost all days of birth are very exciting; there's fear and confusion and joy. While the birthday parties which come later, on the anniversary of the birth are never as eventful (or painful or exciting.) How could they be? Birth is the theme, the miracle, of the actual day of birth. And life, continued life, is the theme of a birthday party (nice but less dramatic).

Still, a birthday party celebrates both, I guess. We celebrate that someone, or in this case, something, the Church, was born and continues to live. That's what we're doing today.

We've decorated with all this red. I wish you could see it from here, it looks great! We've got all these red ribbons. We've got our kids involved, and kids are great hands at birthday parties. We've got company, our visitors and our District Superintendent.

And we've got a meal to look forward to enjoying together, our Red Ribbon Barbecue. Nothing like food for a good party! We're celebrating to beat the band, and doing our best at it.

There's a lot to celebrate. For one thing, just the story itself of Pentecost, which was read in the book of Acts, is worth celebrating. This spring when some of the confirmation class members and I attended a service at a Jewish synagogue, the lady there said, “Well, every holiday needs a miracle.”

Pentecost has one, I should say it does! No, there were several miracles, take your pick—wind, flames, languages from 16 different places. All manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Interesting thing about the Holy Spirit, that third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit always seems to come in last. We say, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If we cross ourselves as we say it, the Holy Spirit only gets the side to side motion.

Yet, the Holy Spirit came with a bang and a boom at this time. Before long a crowd gathered, and 3000 people became Christians on that day! Peter preached up a storm, explaining that the prophecies of Joes were coming true.

It must have been very exciting—a very exciting beginning to Jesus' Church.

According to Michael Williams, this story shows us that “the church is not simply a group of disciples but the body of those incorporated and empowered by the Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit had come—Jesus had promised, and it had happened.

Jesus had set out what the functions and the ministry of the Holy Spirit were to be—

- to testify about Jesus
- to prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment
- to guide believers to the truth
- to glorify Christ
- to declare the things of Christ to believers. (Michael Williams)

And over time, we've learned more and more about the Holy Spirit. St. Paul wrote in the letter to the Romans this description:

“Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God’s Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don’t know how or what to pray, it doesn’t matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our [waiting] condition, and keeps us present before God. That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.”
(The Message, Romans 8: 26-28)

Christians have tried hard to describe the Holy Spirit. We say “The Advocate,” as Jesus did. We also say the Comforter.

Our various creeds and affirmations of faith try to describe the Holy Spirit.

Nicene—“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”

Korean—“We believe in the Holy Spirit, God present with us for guidance, for comfort, and for strength.”

I like that one a lot, because those are what I need,

Modern—“We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need.”

Somehow, most of these sound like more quiet, nurturing aspects of the Holy Spirit, and we all need those aspects, throughout our lives.

But the Holy Spirit was also the life and soul of the party—the party to end all parties—the birthday party of the Church.

Maybe that’s why we are still using wind and flame to celebrate at our own human birthday parties. They add so much!

Just think of a balloon which is limp and empty. What would you think of a party with decorations of limp, empty balloons? BORING. DUMB. We need air, wind, to make balloons fun, and joyous, and like balloons are supposed to look.

Birthday candles are the same way. Unlit birthday candles—boring. After you count them, big deal. But add a little flame, turn out the lights, sing the song and there you go! Excitement and hope and good wishes!

We need the Holy Spirit to enliven us, with the drama of wind and flame. We need the life and soul of this party called the Christian faith, and we have it. Jesus sent it, just as he promised.

So Happy Pentecost, and Happy Birthday!

Amen.

(By Rev. Sally J. DeMasters)