

“Let’s Do This”
Last in Faith Promise Sermon Series
Pentecost Weekend
I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people...Acts 2

Prayer

Dear God, set our hearts on fire and guide us with the power of your Holy Spirit to live as the people you want us to be.

Message

Why is that you can hear the words someone says and yet have no idea what they are telling you? There are times I feel as if I need a vocabulary lesson from our youth director, Jake, to understand what my teenage boys are saying. Other times it is as if I am the one talking but nothing is computing. Does that happen in anyone else's house? Have you had that experience? Every week when you hear a sermon? Someone shared from last night's service that is what he calls, “Do as I mean not as I say.” Communication is tough. Even when you know the words it can be difficult to understand. But what if you don't speak the same language?

An American couple and their two boys traveling in Greece sat down to order some food in a small village plaza. A kindly old gentleman appeared from the dilapidated restaurant on the edge of the square. His face was round and his full mustache was draped over his mouth like a walrus. He wore a dark, food-stained vest over a white shirt. He had a little pad in his hand and a pencil poised to take their order.

The menu was in Greek and the couple didn't have a guidebook or cheat sheet to explain anything. They decided on a salad but only wanted two, figuring their boys could share. They didn't want four plates of something they didn't like.

The old man, beamed and nodded his head. “Yes, yes,” and off he went.

A few minutes later he reappeared with two plates, on them were tasty little hamburgers with fries. Perhaps he thought this is all that Americans eat. In any case, the family was delighted and appreciated the fact they had not been given minnows on a skewer or something with the eyes still in it.

So they asked him to bring us two more such plates. And that is where the trouble began.

The poor man, who moments ago had been beaming, now was frowning and concerned. They held up two fingers. Then four fingers, pointing to themselves and the boys.

Then the husband said: “WE WANT TWO PLATES -- HAMBURGERS.” The old man just stared at him.

“Honey, why are you shouting?” his wife said. “You are shouting. He can hear you.”

The husband tried again, “we lika da food. Two more theeese,” and he pointed to the plates.

“Honey.”

“Whaaaat?”

“Now you’re talking in a stupid accent. I don’t even understand you.”

“I’m just trying to keep it simple. We like. Two plates. Yum-yum. More.”

“You can’t expect him to understand English that’s not even English.” She turned to the old man and said, “Thank you for the food. We would like two more of the same.”

To which the husband said, “like he understood that.” Five minutes later, the chef delivered two more plates of hamburgers and fries to our table.

Communication is difficult. Communication has come a long way since the day of two cans and a string. Perhaps this family would have benefited from a project Google is currently working on - earbuds that offer real time translation between speakers of two languages. A company called Waverly Labs is developing an ear piece called Pilot, which when worn translates your conversation. So far it is limited to English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

Long before any gadget or device was available, what happened with the small gathering of believers as recorded in Acts 2:1-21. How did those gathered understand what was being said? What did they have in their ears?

TEXT = Acts 2:1-21

It wasn't so much what was in their ears, as it was what was in their hearts and infused throughout their souls. It was the apostles filled with the Holy Spirit who on that day launched what was to become known as the birthday of the church and it would turn the world upside down. Happy Birthday church!

I think it fitting that we bring our Faith Promise series to an end and bring our commitment cards forward on this day. We have after all spent the last several weeks talking about how we see and experience God's Spirit moving in the life of the church. Faith promise is about trusting God as those early believers did. They did not know for certain what was going to happen. They did not fully comprehend the impact they were to have on the people around them. They did not know exactly what life was going to be now that Jesus was no longer with them physically. They simply knew Jesus had told them to share his life and teaching and bring a message of good news, a message of God's love, mercy and hope as well as God's power and strength - all in the name of and modeled by the life of Jesus.

Faith Promise then, I believe, is a current expression of Pentecost. It is another outpouring of God's Holy Spirit among God's people.

Did you notice the word church isn't used in this passage that becomes the mark for the beginning of the church? The word used is ekklesia. In the Greek the word for church is ekklesia but at the time it had no religious connotation. It only meant an assembly of people. The word did not refer to an institution. It did not denote an organization. It was not descriptive of a building dedicated to religious ceremonies. An ekklesia was simply a gathering of people. The church then is simply that, people.

Our text says that they were "gathered together." This was the first meeting of the ekklesia, the church. No pastor, no elder board, no trustees or finance committee, no board of ordained ministry, no building, no pew, no book of discipline, no hymnals. Just 120 (if you go back and read chapter one of Accts) people filled with the Spirit.

This is where it gets good! Ordinary people gathered together. The founding members of this ekklesia - this gathering - this church - were not the best and the brightest. They were not high-powered tech wizards or tenured professors at leading universities, or big time power players at roundtable discussions in conference rooms of multinational, multi-billion dollar corporations.

I don't say this to belittle those first followers or to say that they were ignorant, unintelligent or gullible, or that such qualities are in any way prerequisites for being spiritually powerful. Not at all!

I say it because I want us all to remember the church is people. I know we know this and you are all looking at me like, "ok Pastor, tell us something we don't know." We know it, we pray it, we sing about it, and every week we gather as it, AND YET, so often when we get outside these walls we forget we are still the church! We are still a gathering of people following the teachings of Jesus. So I say again, the church is people - It is not liturgy or sacraments or great sermons. It is not doctrine of sanctification or theology of holy atonement. It is not institutions of higher education or even mainline denominations. That all has its place, and it all helps us define who we are, what we do, and what we believe. Those are all ways we practice, grow, remember, organize, keep track of and celebrate being church, but it is not the church. When we forget that, we forget what Jesus was all about in the first place...people.

Ordinary people. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things by the power of the Holy Spirit. Unremarkable people doing remarkable things by the power and presence of Jesus.

Look at Peter for example, in vs. 14. Peter, who failed Jesus, denying to even know him following Jesus' arrest. Vs. 14 Peter begins preaching fearlessly and later stands up to the Sanhedrin, the most learned body of men in all Judea. He was just a fisherman and he lectures scholars of the Torah on the Messianic passages of Scripture and what it means to obey God rather than humans.

Ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

That's all we are church. I am more and more convinced it is not us but God's Spirit that does the extraordinary. How else would any of what we do happen? How else would it make sense? How could it be that we are who we are and do what we do as Grace church - the lives it touches, and the difference it makes for so many?

Only by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit AND you could we be a part of:

30 State and National Missional Connections

40+ Local Partnerships

35 International Mission Groups

Not to mention:

9 weekly sunday school classes

4 weekly worship services
4-5 midweek bible studies
7 Easter / Holy Week services
7 Christmas services
8-10 outside groups that use our building throughout the week - every week!
Monthly and Quarterly family events
Annual events for all ages
Specialty ministries like sr. for sr., confirmation, lunch bunch, choir, bells, and other music ministries, preschool ministry, care team, stephen ministry team, special projects team, communion stewards, and on it goes!

I can't do all that! My paycheck doesn't go that far. Andy doesn't do it all. No one committee, task force, or ministry team does all that. It is all of us church. It is you and your faithfulness that allows God's Spirit to take that which we give and make it go beyond anything we could imagine or measure.

That is how Faith Promise is an expression of the Holy Spirit - It is a pentecost moment allowing God to take what we give and do so much more than we could on our own. It is a practice of discipline and an act of trust that transforms lives, ours included.

You are an amazing church, an amazing group of ordinary people. Today I say to you, let's do this Grace church. Let's accept the mission that sometimes seems impossible in our world today with all its conflict, division, and cynicism, and watch as God makes it possible. Let's invite the Spirit to teach us a new language like the day of Pentecost - a new way to speak (and listen) to one another AND to those that others want to silence or ignore. Let's take prayerful risks and find new ways to grow and care together even when our fracturing culture and power hungry society tells us to take care of only ourselves. Let's invite the Spirit to translate the needs of those inside and outside these walls, within and without our denomination and show us what our next steps to be the people God wants us to be. Let's do this.

Let's ask the hard questions and have the tough conversations and live into the answers with love, respect, and kindness. Let's trust God with our money, our skills, our relationships, our future as individuals and families, let's trust God not just with what we know, but what we don't know. Let's be brave AND vulnerable. Let's be courageous AND compassionate. Let's be convicted AND kind. Let's be a gathering of ordinary people and see what extraordinary things God will do with what we give and when we follow.

Let's do this Grace Church! This is our mission, should we choose to accept it. Amen.