

“Going Viral”

“The well-known author and preacher Fred Craddock [told] a rather funny story about a lecture he was giving: A few years ago, when he was on the west coast speaking at a seminary, just before the first lecture, one of the students stood up and said, ‘Before you speak, I need to know if you are Pentecostal.’ The room grew silent. Craddock said he looked around for the Dean of the seminary! He was nowhere to be found.

The student continued with his quiz right in front of everybody. Craddock was taken aback, and so he said, ‘Do you mean do I belong to the Pentecostal Church?’ He said, ‘No, I mean are you Pentecostal?’ Craddock said, ‘Are you asking me if I am charismatic?’ the student said, ‘I am asking you if you are Pentecostal.’ Craddock said, ‘Do you want to know if I speak in tongues?’ He said, ‘I want to know if you are Pentecostal.’ Craddock said, ‘I don’t know what your question is.’ The student said, ‘Obviously, you are not Pentecostal.’ He left.” (as reported by sermoncentral.com)

Craddock’s story reveals some of the confusion and conflict, which folks have expressed about the first Christian Pentecost and its meaning for the Church – the Body of Christ. So, let’s examine the history about Pentecost. There was Harvest Festival of the Jews, which occurred 50 days after Passover, including Passover itself. The Greek Jews called it Pentecost because that name means 50 days in Greek. There is also a Jewish tradition, which claims Pentecost commemorates God’s giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, 49 days after the Exodus, which was initiated with the first Passover Feast – the Passing over of the Hebrew’s homes by the Angel of Death. Since the Gospel of John says Jesus was crucified on the eve of the Passover at the time the Passover Lambs were slaughtered, the first Christian Passover was approximately 50 days after Jesus’ crucifixion. Pentecost happened just a few days after the Resurrected Jesus Ascended into Heaven. Pentecost is called the Birthday of the Church – the Body of Christ

The first Christian Pentecost became the Birthday of the Church because it led to over 3,000 people believing Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah. They demonstrated their faith by being baptized. The way this dramatic transformation occurred was the direct result of the disciples receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture from Acts reported in **verse 4**, *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”* The language manifestation of the Holy Spirit has popularly been thought of as speaking incomprehensively in tongues but the Pentecost Event was much more! The miracle was the Spirit enabled the believers to declare God’s mighty deeds to everyone from many different lands in their home languages, even though the disciples did not know those languages. That heightened the curiosity of Jewish pilgrims, just as Moses had been enticed to investigate the burning bush, which was not consumed in the fire, on Mount Sinai.

Luke shared how they wondered about the meaning of this in **verses 6-8 and in verses 11b and 12**, *“When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ... — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own*

tongues!’ Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” So, God got the crowd’s attention through this language manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

After the Divine Parent confronted the people with this miracle, the eldest disciple of Jesus, Peter, explained the meaning of the Pentecost Event. The Apostle began by reminding them of the prophecy by Joel in his Hebrew Scripture book. Peter spoke in **verses 16-18**, “... *this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.’”* If we examine those words closely, then there are some important insights for us and our Faith Relationship with God. First, please note, the prophecy indicated God’s Spirit would be given to both women and men – not just the males! Second, God’s Spirit would not be limited to certain nationalities but given to all people!

After reminding the Jews from nations throughout the world of God’s message through the Prophet Joel, Peter went on to declare what had happened to Jesus – how, even though he was revealed as God’s Representative through Jesus’ miracles, he suffered, was put to death, and was raised back to life! Peter argued that Jesus is God’s promised Messiah and the result was the people begged to know what they should do with this realization of the truth about Jesus. He called on them to have faith and be baptized. Over 3,000 people were baptized! The Birthday of the Church started with the Gospel of Jesus Christ going viral. It was empowered by God’s Holy Spirit and the Church demonstrated its commitment to the Divine Parent and Jesus Christ through her bold dependence on God and God’s Spirit.

Now we come to our calling. What difference does the first Christian Pentecost make for you, me, and this congregation? It reveals to us how our Divine Parent invites everyone – women, men, Jews, and non Jews into a Faith Relationship with the Almighty. Further, not only are all people Welcomed by God but, also, everyone is forgiven, healed, loved, and called to follow the example of God’s Agape Love shown in God’s Crucified and Risen Son, Jesus Christ! This is a powerful message – one which Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, has sought to manifest toward everyone, even toward persons, who have either been rejected or who are afraid they will be rejected. This God Is Still Speaking Message provides New Life and it is both needed and wanted by everyone. It is going viral!

Remembering God’s Holy Spirit is always with us, let’s be part of this wonderful Good News going viral! Let’s manifest God’s Extravagant and Radical Invitation, Welcome, Love, and New Life toward one another and with everyone! Amen.