



May 27, 2007

Acts 2:1-21

“Birthday parties and Birth Givers”

Birthday parties are a way to celebrate the passing year and the joys they bring. They can be times of enjoying delicious food, people who are dear to you, laughter, music, games.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. On this day we celebrate the birth of the church—we’re having a birthday party! What do we always need to have a birthday party? Two things: First- someone or something that’s been born! And second: Birth givers who made that birth possible.

In the church we recognize both of these essential components to our celebration.

The thing that’s been born is THE CHURCH. Sometimes I have trouble celebrating the Church. It often seems just like any other human institution. News programs report on ethical scandals of ministers and priests, on lavish lifestyles of religion leaders, and the internal bickering of various denominations. We who make up the church are broken, sinful people. We let God and each other down in innumerable ways. So what’s to celebrate today, as we celebrate the church’s birth?

Our reading from Acts describes several special, unique things to recognize and rejoice in:

The church is a place touched by God’s Spirit, a people filled with energy, excitement and power.

Have you those T-shirts that say: “If I am good and say my prayers and live a good life, when I die I’ll get to go to IOWA!”? That may be cute publicity for our neighboring state, but it shows the way we tend to think too small about life, God,

eternity. This Acts passage says God does not have a tame, peaceful, nice-as-Iowa life in mind for the people of the church. God shows wonders and signs; God's spirit unleashes power and excitement that can only be described as NOISE (like a mighty wind) and FIRE (dancing flames). God is not boring, nor should our churches be boring--- this is something we can CELEBRATE!

The church is a community that recognizes the importance of ALL PEOPLE.

The Scripture tells us that God's wild, powerful Spirit is poured out on EVERYONE: sons, daughters, men, women, young, old, servants and bosses, underdogs and top bananas. The list of nations in this passage includes countries and regions described in the work of ancient geographers and astrologers. This is a list that catalogues all the known people of the earth in Biblical times. This reading tells us that the church is to be a place of unity in diversity. We are people of many languages, races, nations, experiences, feelings, attitudes and opinions. AND we all rejoice in and tell of the mighty works of God in Jesus Christ. You don't have to be male, female, a particular age, or speak a specific language to KNOW GOD, to TALK ABOUT GOD, or to be LISTENED TO and UNDERSTOOD. This is worth a party in itself! This is something we can CELEBRATE!

We celebrate the BIRTH OF THE CHURCH TODAY.

We also celebrate the Birth-Giver who makes that Birth possible: The Holy Spirit. This Spirit is sent to us; it is a GIFT. It is God's Spirit; Christ's Spirit. The Holy Spirit formed, and still shapes, the church. As we show the characteristics of the community described in Acts, we are being faithful and co-operative with God's will and God's own Spirit.

As we are open to excitement and power, and share those, WE ARE FAITHFUL.

As we rejoice in our differences, rather than trying to live in cookie-cutter uniformity, WE ARE FAITHFUL.

As we recognize in humility that English is not God's language nor the United States God's country, WE ARE FAITHFUL.

The Holy Spirit is the mysterious power behind the conception and birth of the church. WE are the midwives or medical assistants who help that birthing process along.

We couldn't have our birthday party today without the Birth-givers and midwives. The church wouldn't BE without the Holy Spirit. The church wouldn't BE without faithful followers of Christ.

Let's say "thank you" to God this morning.

"Thank you, Lord for the Holy Spirit given to us day after day. Thank you for the vision, truth, power and excitement—thank you for the peace and joy- thank you for new life!! Thank you, God, for our hearts that can be stirred, our hands that can help and heal. Thank you for our feet, that can follow CHRIST'S WAY. Thank you for mouths that can tell others about Jesus and his love.

Every day of our lives the Holy Spirit is bringing about something new. No day is like any other. TODAY the Spirit is here bringing each of us a new beginning. Each day we are BORN anew.

God's Spirit is here. Now. Around us. Within us. The flames are dancing. If you look, you'll see the: flashing out of someone's eyes; dancing over someone's shoulder. Maybe you can feel them dancing in your own heart.

Happy birthday, church. Thanks to the Holy Spirit that brings us new life. Thanks to God who helps US be faithful midwives, assisting and the births the Holy Spirit makes possible. Life is before us! We journey forward in faith, companions to one another and led by the Spirit. AMEN!