

Excitement, Motivation and Change – a sermon by Gary R. Hindman, FPCUC. Scripture, Acts 2:1-13.

Text: “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.” --Acts 2:2

The followers of Jesus gathered together in the upper room to celebrate the Jewish Harvest Festival known as Pentecost. Suddenly, there was a sound like a mighty wind and then, appearing over each of them was an apparition that looked like tongues of fire and they were filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

They began to speak in other languages and devout religious people who were in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost were able to hear them speaking, each in their own tongue and they were amazed at the miracle of language. Unlike the confusion of language at Babel in Genesis, they understood what the disciples were saying and began to ask, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and accused the disciples of being drunk.

Unconsciously, Peter set himself up for the all-time come-back because he answered, “We’re not drunk, it’s only nine o’clock!” I am sure none of the disciples had a problem with drinking but some wise-guy in the audience could have responded by saying, “Right, they’re not drunk because it’s only nine o’clock but just wait until noon or three at the latest!” But in fact they were drunk, of sorts! They were drunk on the Holy Spirit of God in the sense of the prophet Joel who said, “In the last days, says the Lord, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

Peter linked what was happening not only with the prophet Joel but with the message of Jesus Christ. He went into the street and began to preach and that day some three thousand souls were added to the Kingdom of God. And after that these Spirit-filled followers met regularly for fellowship, prayer, study and outreach “and the Lord added to their number daily such as should be saved!”

Pentecost is an electrifying story and our passage for this morning is how it all began. It is the birth-day of the church, the beginning of the great saving-history of God and the people of God. It is one reason we are here this morning celebrating Pentecost and celebrating the rich heritage of our First Presbyterian Church of Upland.

There were essential ingredients in the church born at Pentecost and we would be wise to think about them and what they mean for our lives and our church.

FIRST, THERE WAS EXCITEMENT. We all need a little excitement in our lives. We need it at work, we need it at home, and we need it in church. But some people are scared to death of getting excited in church.

When young Teddy Roosevelt was a boy he was afraid to go with his family to the Madison Square Church in New York City. His mother discovered he was terrified of something he called "zeal." This zeal, he said, was crouching in the dark corners of the church ready to jump at him. When his mother asked just what this zeal might be, he was not sure. So she took out her concordance, looked up the word and found the verse that had troubled the young Roosevelt. John 2:17 reads: "And his disciples remembered that it was written, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up!'" Teddy wanted nothing to do with this zeal that could eat people up!

I understand how a mistake like that could happen. But there are also many adults who want nothing to do with zeal in church. They are bothered by outbursts of emotion excitement. I'm sort of that way myself.

In college I went to a Pentecostal church with a fraternity brother. On this particular Sunday everything went together to create a great stirring among the people. Suddenly the dam broke and people began to wail, dance, cry and speak in all manner of tongues. This Presbyterian did not know what to do so I bowed by head and started to pray like crazy. I figured if they saw me praying no one would bother me and I was right. After about ten minutes of pure bedlam the pastor, whose face looked something like a weasel, began to speak in clear utterance. He had the gift of interpretation of tongues and was telling everyone what was going on. His was the only tongue I could understand! After a while the emotion died down and the service came to a close.

I do not wish to criticize other people's expression of religion but I have to tell you, I don't think I would not make a very good Pentecostal because I like a mixture of order with my ardor, mind as well as spirit, thought along with emotion. That said, I do think there is a place for emotion in worship. I love the word *enthusiasm* for instance. It is a Greek word that means "the God within in you." We should be enthusiastic about our church, our work, our loved ones, our life and the things we do. I've heard it said that Eugene Ormandy once dislocated a shoulder while directing a symphony. That's enthusiasm! It was there at the first Pentecost and we could all use a little more enthusiasm and excitement!

But the Pentecost excitement was a kind THAT MOTIVATED PEOPLE.

Sometimes we get excited, enthusiastic and revved up but then nothing happens except we feel good.

That was the thing that amazed me that day when I experience the breakout of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecostal church. When the service suddenly ended, the women dried their tears, put on some lip stick and make up and the men combed their hair and families stepped out of the sanctuary into the out-of-doors. I could overhear people saying things like, "I wonder whose going to win the World Series? And, what are you having for dinner this afternoon?"

It takes a lot for this stoical Scandinavian to get worked up, but once I do, I want to do something about it. I kept waiting for someone that day to pass out the

protest signs or the hammers and nails so we could go work in a needy neighborhood some place. Anything, to work off that great emotion! But it did not happen. Evidently people were used to getting all excited and then going out the door and home!

Someone once prayed, "Lord, grant that the heat in my heart will melt the lead in my feet!" That could have been our prayer that Sunday. We need excitement but we also need motivation.

When the Holy Spirit touched the disciples they immediately went out into the street and began to proclaim the gospel. Then, when the people heard the gospel they were cut to the quick and asked, "What must we do?" That's the right idea! James says it well, "Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your selves!"

Motivating people is a perennial problem. The 80\20 principle seems ever at work. Eighty percent of the people do 20 percent of the work; 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work! 50,000 people quit their jobs every day across America, mostly out of dissatisfaction. But a whole lot of others let down on the job that they are doing. In one survey it was discovered that some 85% of Americans admitted they could work harder on the job; more than half said they could double their effectiveness if they wanted to. If we could do better, why don't we?

Sometimes, when I think about our church, I wonder if we are really worthy of the legacy that is ours. On this heritage Sunday I am reminded of those who created and planned for a Presbyterian Church here in Upland back in 1887. I think of those who had the courage to re-build after a Santa Ana wind blew down the church the night after the mortgage was burned and had a new sanctuary in place and paid for within a year! I think of those who hauled stone from Baldy to make the beautiful and unique structure that is our present sanctuary. I think of those great saints that have passed in just the 16 years I have been pastor. Are we worthy of their faith? But more important, are we worthy of the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Motivation that lasts comes from having someone greater than ourselves instructing us, encouraging us, prodding us, exhorting us. The disciples were motivated because they had excitement but something more--they had the inner witness of the living Christ. They had more than excitement, they were changed persons. The Holy Spirit of God came into that room and settled upon each one of them, he came into them, he dwelt within them and they were excited and they got motivated and they were forever changed.

Excitement, motivation and change—these were the qualities that blessed the first Pentecost but the question is, what kind of change came over them? It was a change like that which comes over a person when he or she comes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We see something of the manifestation of this change in their actions. The Scriptures tell us they devoted themselves to study, prayer

and praise, fellowship and outreach. In short, they looked in, up and out! And their excitement was contagious so that new persons were added to their fellowship daily.

It is recorded that when the renowned comedienne Fannie Brice was offered a job by Florenz Ziegfeld, she accepted the job quietly and with little show of emotion. She thanked his secretary and his doorman very politely but as soon as she was out of the building, she raced down Broadway to the front of the theatre and grabbed people off the sidewalk and said, "There's the theatre where I am going to be working! I'm really excited about it and I hope you will come down some night when I am there, I'd love to see you!"

Wouldn't it be marvelous if we would leave church this morning with that kind of excitement, that kind of motivation, that kind of desire to change and effect change in others? Wouldn't it be great if we would go out of the sanctuary and into the streets of Upland and surrounding cities and say, "Wow, I had a great experience this morning in church. I met God there and I felt the power of his Holy Spirit and I would like that experience for you as well!"

Excitement, motivation, change—these are the ingredients of Pentecost. May the spirit of Pentecost grab each one of us and cause us to be better people and better disciples. Amen!