

Back when I was running a retail business, from time to time I needed to stop, step back and consider what was going on with my business in the marketplace?, evaluate what direction we were going, and what kind of stores were they going to be? Then, once I had figured that out, everything else seemed to flow naturally from that initial determination, which generally settled what to do and what decisions to make because either it was consistent with that mission or not. It is also important and necessary that from time to time, we as a church need to stop, step back and consider, what sort of congregation has God called us to become, for once we have that figured out, our decisions of ministry should fall right into place. But how can we really know what sort of church God wants us to be?, which direction our ministries and programs should be going, and how do we know if we are on track with God's will and design for us? Many years ago, I used to enjoy sailing with friends, and part of the joy and challenge of sailing, is setting the sails so that they catch the wind, which provides the power for moving the sailboat. Since nothing can be done that will produce more wind, all you can do is follow the wind and set your sails to catch it. Surely the Church of Jesus Christ is something like that. It's not though our own efforts, hard work and good planning, but by the faithfulness of God that builds up the Church... as we read in

Psalm 127:1

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

According to Scripture, after the resurrection, after Jesus ascended to the Father, the disciples were together, trying to keep out of sight, and uncertain about what they should do next.

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. ... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

We see that like a boat with billowed sail gliding across the water, their sails were caught by the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit... empowering them to announce and proclaim boldly the Good News in all different languages to the crowds in Jerusalem... and 3000 received God's grace, and committed their lives to Jesus Christ that day. As I read that passage, I am struck by their sense of shared faith and community, and that despite all their various cultures and languages, there is a strong message of their unity in Christ, that was far greater than all their many differences... as they lived out their individual uniquenesses together. Those 3000 new converts became the Church, as we read,

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... All who believed were together and had all things in common... they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

That event of Pentecost marked the beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ, and ever since then, the call and task of the Church has been to set sail and catch the Holy Spirit-wind... which empowers the Church and sets its direction and mission.

Sometime during the mid-1500's, it became the tradition of Presbyterians to celebrate "Communion at the Long-Tables"... as John Knox explained concerning the Lord's Supper, "the sacrament signifies that Christians are the sons and daughters of God, invited by the King to his own Table." So Presbyterians would set up lines of tables and benches outside, so that there was room for everyone to sit down together, and the whole community would gather, all invited and welcome to share the meal together. In fact one 1740's document about such a gathering in Virginia, describes how slaves, masters and even strangers all sat down together for Communion at the Long-Tables... in an amazing and incredible proclamation of our unity in Christ. According to church historians, it wasn't until the 1800's that, "Presbyterians gave up their long tables and benches in favor of a small table in front of the pulpit, and passing the elements from hand to hand, prefiguring the heavenly feast in which all would share as equals." Indeed it is through our unity despite diversity and differences, that the Kingdom of God is most boldly and vividly revealed, where all are considered worthy, welcome and invited, because God's love, grace & Spirit directs our lives... as Jesus prayed on the night of his arrest,

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John 17:1, 11, 23

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; ... and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them ... so that they may be one, as we are one. ... that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"that they may be one, so that the world may know" That is the call and proclamation of the Church of Jesus Christ. In 1933, the pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg was concerned about the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany. He felt the impending threat of war against world peace, and that the Christian Church needed to speak a message of unity. So he suggested that on one Sunday each year, every Christian church all around the globe ought to gather together at the Lord's Table as a sign and symbol of Christian unity--- -unity – that we share a common story whatever the specifics of my life, your life, anyone's life, we are all sinners, saved by God's grace through Jesus. - unity – for we share a common calling we are all on a faith-journey, of becoming more Christ-like. - unity – because we share a common purpose of participating in God's Kingdom, building a community that serves to show & proclaim God's love for this world, and testifies to the wonderful diversity of God's family. World Communion Sunday, is still celebrated each year by Christian churches worldwide, reminding us that we are all one in Jesus Christ, bound together and connected because, Jesus is our Lord.

Today is World Communion Sunday, when we celebrate communion with Christians around the world, as we are reminded that we are but one small piece of the whole Church of Jesus Christ- of all believers. It's a reminder that though we are different & diverse in many ways yet our shared faith in Jesus Christ and God's gracious love, inseparably binds us together as one... into Christian harmony... for our God is so awesome, and the breadth of his love is so broad, that he stoops down to our human traits and particularities... that he accepts and welcomes into worship, whoever we are, whether the language of worship is French, Korean or English... we are all one in Jesus Christ, of the one body, and united in our call to proclaim the Gospel, that's our true mission. Jesus Christ sets us all free to participate in God's grace, and so we become one the one body of Christ, one with him which leads to being one with each other, as he draws us into a unity of loving each of us and through us loving one another. Our different cultural tastes, our various traditions and rituals, our talents, our interests, our loves, our sense of holiness, all that makes us who we are, each special and unique, are all valued and accepted as valid by our God... who delights when we bring our all and our very best. It is that same truth we celebrate today, World Communion Sunday, a very special service at First Presbyterian Church today... where 4 unique worshipping communities: Comunidad de esperanza, traditional worship, Korean Presbyterians, Faith & Fellowship, we all come together today with each one contributing, to praise & celebrate this unity we share in Jesus Christ. This is an incredible gift and blessing, and an amazing sign that God is up to something among us. And I assure you, that none of us figured this out. It is entirely the work and grace of our Lord, and at best, maybe somehow we managed to set our sail to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit.

And so this day, let us stop, step back and consider, what sort of church are we called to be and to become, and what is God up to among us, in this place... for surely we want to set our sails to catch the wind of the Spirit according to the will, desire and purpose of the Lord. As we are instructed in

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Clearly, God is up to something very powerful and wonderful here at First Presbyterian Church of Las Cruces, so friends, let us come to the Table with joy, and let us be one.