

Grace, Diversity and Unity 2023  
Acts 2:1-4, 42-47

Acts 2:1-4, 42-47 (New Revised Standard Version)

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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, 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.

Back in the day, when my life was about running a business,  
from time to time I needed to stop, step back and consider  
how was my business operating and competing in the marketplace?

I needed to evaluate what direction we were going,  
how to respond to customer & economic variables,  
and what sort of business we were going to be.

Because, once I had figured that out, everything else seemed  
to flow naturally into place from that initial determination,  
because either a decision was consistent with that mission or not.

It is also important and necessary that from time to time,  
**for us as a church** we too 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 mission,  
our decisions of ministry should also fall right into place.

The question is, how do we know what sort of church God wants us to be?  
What direction should our ministries and our programs be going,  
and how do we know if we're on track with God's will & purpose?

Years ago, living near the ocean, I used to enjoy sailing.  
An important part of the joy and challenge of sailing,  
is setting the sails so that they catch the wind,  
which provides the power for sailing the boat.

Since there's nothing you can do that will produce more wind,  
what 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 it's written in Psalm 127:1 and Jeremiah 29:11,  
Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. For surely I know the plans I  
have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, **to give you a future with hope.**

**The Church is meant to be God-powered, not human effort-powered.**

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. vs. 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.

Like a sailboat with **a billowed spinnaker gliding across the water,**  
**their sails were caught by the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit,**  
empowering them to announce & proclaim boldly the Good News,  
in many different languages to the crowds in Jerusalem.  
**3000 received God's grace and committed to Jesus Christ that day.**

Those 3000 new believers became the Church, as we read, vs. 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.

And reading that passage,

I am struck by their sense of shared faith and community,  
that despite all their various cultures and languages,  
and that far greater than all their many differences,  
there is the strong message of their unity in Christ,  
**as they lived out the uniqueness of each individual together.**

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

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 another terrible world war,  
and the Christian Church needed to speak a message of unity.

So he urged Christian churches around the globe, **as a sign of unity**  
to all celebrate Communion on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in October.  
as a sign and symbol of Christian unity---

**-unity** – that we share the story of Jesus Christ in common.  
Whatever the specifics of my life, your life, or anyone's life,  
we are all sinners, saved by God's grace through Jesus alone.

**- unity** – for we share a common calling to authentic discipleship.  
We are all on a faith-journey, of becoming more Christ-like,  
so that more of the gracious love of God can flow through us.

**- unity** – because we share a common purpose to serve faithfully,  
by participating in God's Kingdom and building a community  
that serves to show and proclaim God's love for this world,  
and testifies to the wonderful diversity of God's family.

**Indeed it is through our unity despite diversity & differences,**

**that the Kingdom of God is most boldly and vividly revealed.**

World Communion Sunday, which is intended to recognize our unity,  
is still celebrated each year by Christian churches worldwide,  
reminding us that we are all truly one in Jesus Christ,  
bound together & connected because, Jesus is our Lord.

This has become one of my favorite worship services of the year,  
**as an annual reminder, a meaningful & blessed reminder  
that we are part of something much larger than just us,  
where all are appreciated & considered worthy, welcome & invited,  
because God's love, grace & Holy Spirit are directing our lives.**

**I am inspired by World Communion Sunday at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church,**  
for in a world and season of distrust, division and hostility,  
here we celebrate our diversity, our uniqueness & differences.

It is a most significant and important symbol of God's work among us,  
as we honor and celebrate the unity we share as followers of Christ  
that's become increasingly rich and meaningful over the years.

At first, when our youth processed into worship carrying flags,  
the different flags represented countries around the world  
where we supported missionaries and Bible translators...  
**... and so we celebrated those connections we had around the world.**

When several university students & their families from Cameroon  
became such a faithful & beloved part of our lives and church family  
it was that year that the flag of Cameroon was added  
in celebration of those wonderful new relationships.

**And what a joy it was to see their surprised faces and smiles  
when they first saw their own flag in our worship procession.**

For us, these flags represent more than just nations of the world.  
They are in celebration of the relationships we share,  
and represent far more than just a distant map location...  
**... they are symbols of people, our family we've grown to know and love.**

**I treasure the way our lives have intersected, which so greatly  
enriches the meaning and significance of World Communion,  
as we are reminded that we are but one small piece  
of the whole Church of Jesus Christ- of all believers.**

**Surely God has poured out grace & blessings on us, and on this church.**  
Faithfulness begins by living lives well right where we are,  
so that our lives are worthy of the grace we have received...  
... for our God **is so awesome**, and the breadth of his love **is so broad**,  
that he stoops down to our feeble human traits & particularities.

Holy God accepts and welcomes us all into worship, **whoever we are**,  
whether the language of worship is Korean, Igbo, Spanish or English,  
for we are all one in Jesus Christ, of the one body, and unified  
in our call to proclaim the Gospel. **That is our true mission.**

**Our unity, however, does not mean uniformity, and does not deny  
or obliterate our distinctions, differences and variances,  
but celebrates our uniqueness as God's gift toward mission.**

That also means that our diverse and unique gifts of God's grace  
are not just for our own pleasure or sense of satisfaction,  
but are actually God's gifts **to the community of faith**  
**intended to flow unimpeded and creatively through us.**

**Christ has set us all free to participate in God's grace & mission,**  
for it is when we live those values of unity and love faithfully,  
that we are able to live together in harmony as a community,  
separate the children of God.

breaking down the walls that

Current news makes it frightfully clear that these are perilous times  
of polarizing hatred, injustice, violence and the threat of war,  
unimaginable hostility, corruption and bitter divisiveness.

**We live in a world desperate for a word of gentle grace & hope.**

Meanwhile surely the mission of the church of Jesus Christ is,  
as called and equipped by God **to live out an alternative view,**  
as a place of welcome, joy, healing, hope, mercy and grace.  
That is the chief business, the mission and purpose of the Church --  
to live out, to reflect and share with others, the Gospel,  
**for the Church is called to be**  
**a visible and living representation of Christ to this world.**

**It is that same truth we celebrate today, World Communion Sunday,**  
**a very special worship service at First Presbyterian Church today,**  
**as we all come together today with each one contributing,**  
**to praise & celebrate this unity we share in Jesus Christ.**

Clearly, God has been up to something powerful & wonderful among us.  
**It is not that somehow we have figured all this out ourselves,**  
**but that the Lord God chose to bless this church abundantly,**  
**and that working together, somehow we have managed**  
**to set our sails to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit.**

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 gratitude and joy,**  
**and let us truly be one, the called & blessed body of Christ.**

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.