

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**PENTECOST SUNDAY**  
**“GROW YOUR SPIRIT WITH US”**  
**REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON**  
**May 31, 2009**  
**Acts 2:1-11**  
**10:00 A.M. Service**

Today is Pentecost, when we celebrate the birthday of the Church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

*“Pentecost”* is from the word **“fiftieth”**. It is the name of the Jewish Festival of Weeks, which falls on the fiftieth day after Passover. Because this was the day the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, *“Pentecost”* was applied to the Christian festival celebrating this event. For more than 2000 years we have been celebrating the gifts of Pentecost that have been bestowed on God’s people, the church. Today we are dedicated to grow our spirits and faithfully use our gifts in service to Christ.

There is an unfortunate irony in the fact that Pentecost is associated in the minds of many people with the excessive expressions of **“Pentecostalism.”** Pentecostalism is a modern movement represented by specifically Pentecostal churches. Of course, there are other churches that are equally misguided as well. Those who follow Pentecostalism share a common belief in the possibility of receiving the same gifts as those first Christians on the day of Pentecost. Their worship is usually characterized by great spontaneity, and they stress the exercising of gifts listed in 1 Corinthians and Acts: *“speaking in tongues”* or *glossolalia*, prophecy, healing, and

exorcism. The irony is that Pentecost in Acts means the unification and empowerment of the apostles through the Holy Spirit, while modern Pentecostalism has been often characterized by division, controversy, and confusion.

The first Christian Pentecost involved three manifestations of the Spirit's coming in power. **First**, there was a noise like a strong driving wind. **Second**, there were tongues like flames of fire, dispersed and resting on each one present. **Third**, there was speaking in other tongues. (It was "**other**" tongues, meaning other languages, not unknown tongues.) What was happening later in Corinth was entirely different and received a negative critique from Paul. The first Christian Pentecost was a unique event, not intended to be a normative experience. Throughout Acts, the Holy Spirit works less and less as a source of ecstatic experience and more and more as a problem-solver in the Early Church. The presence of the Spirit was manifested in mutuality and unity, its greatest gift being love. (1 Cor 13)

Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, also wrote the Book of Acts. In Acts 2, Luke describes both the amazing phenomenon of Pentecost and its immediate aftermath. On that day Peter preached, interpreting what had happened in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. The response to the gospel was overwhelming and many were baptized. The new community ***"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."*** (2:42) And ***"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."*** (2:44-45) It was a dramatic example of spiritual and communal living, a shared life and a shared commitment. ***"Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread from house to house and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."*** (2:46-47) This was life in the Spirit!

God's people had always understood the importance of faithfulness and obedience to God. The ethical dimension of faith, however, was often forgotten, and religious observance became empty and mechanical. In such times God raised up a prophet, like Micah, to declare: ***"He has showed you,***

***O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8)***

God’s Spirit transforms selfish concerns into concerns for others. True goodness affects the lives of others. True goodness contributes to the common good. Good, or godly, people put themselves in the place of others. Ultimately the needs of the whole world become their concern.

How did the early church grow its spirit? What is the most characteristic way we can express the presence of the Holy Spirit today? Through instantaneous, miraculous healings? Through ecstatic sounds and actions by individuals? Through enthusiasm and excitement in worship? Even if these things happened right here and right now, could we say that we have demonstrated the ***most characteristic*** ways the Spirit can be expressed? Perhaps not, because in Galatians 5, Paul says the ***“fruit” of the Spirit are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*** In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of other gifts of the Spirit, such as wisdom, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. But each one, he says, is for ***“the common good.” (12:7)*** This is the common denominator of the Spirit: it contributes, not to individual gratification, but to the common good. The Holy Spirit strengthens the Body of Christ through love. That’s why we invite you to grow your spirit with us.

I submit to you this morning that each of you has a distinctive gift with which to make a difference. The key to your joy and fulfillment is to understand how your gifts can contribute to the wholeness and effectiveness of this community of faith we call Park Hill.

This phenomenon we call Pentecost was a powerful symbol that the gospel of Jesus Christ is intended for all people, all nations, all races, and all sexual orientations. Even linguistic barriers were overcome by the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Use your spiritual gifts for the common good of all! Come! Grow your spirit with us. I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.