**WEST CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC MAY 24, 2015**

***Come, Holy Spirit***

**A Sermon for the Day of Pentecost by The Rev. John M. Barrett**

**WELCOME**

Good morning, and welcome to worship at West Center Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, on this Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, and the Sunday of Memorial Day Weekend.

**THE STORY OF THE DAY OF PENTECOST** Acts 2:1-21

On Pentecost we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ. The holiday is called Pentecost because it is always seven Sundays, which is also fifty days, after Easter. The word “Pentecost” means “fifty” in Greek.

Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival, coming fifty days after Passover. At the time of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jerusalem is filled with followers of Jesus and others who are celebrating Pentecost. Once again as at the Burning Bush and on Mount Sinai where Moses receives the Ten Commandments, fire appears as a manifestation of God.

**THE GOSPEL WITNESS** John 15:26-27; 16:4-15

Today’s Gospel is from the Final Discourses of Jesus after the Last Supper and before he is arrested, tried and crucified. In these verses, Jesus is talking about the Coming of the Advocate, the Spirit of truth or Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Advocate will guide the disciples into the truth.

**SERMON**

The Day of Pentecost brings good news of great joy. I imagine the followers of Jesus had been ill at ease that morning, glad to be in Jerusalem at the time of the harvest festival, but wanting also to celebrate Jesus and his Great Commandment:

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.**And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:36-39)

Jesus has told his followers that after he was gone, the Spirit of truth, the Advocate, would come and guide them into all the truth. But where was the Advocate? When would the Spirit arrive? How would they recognize the Spirit of truth from false spirits?

Although it may have felt like ages, the followers of Jesus had been waiting only a week since Jesus ascended into heaven.

The morning of the festival of Pentecost Jesus’ followers were finishing breakfast when, “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.”

But the most amazing thing was still to come: “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

 (Acts 2:2-4)

Jesus’ followers must have sounded like the Tower of Babel, as they rushed outdoors in excitement at what had just happened.

*“At this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered because each one heard the followers of Jesus speaking in the native language of each.”* Amazed and astonished the crowd asked*, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”* (Acts 2:6-7)

In other words, how did these simple people, who seldom left Galilee, learn all these languages? What does their new and miraculous knowledge mean?

The disciples speaking in all the different languages of the known world means that the Good News that Jesus has proclaimed, Good News of God’s love and forgiveness, will travel throughout the world to all nations. Followers of Jesus will bring the Good News everywhere.

While the disciples were ecstatic --- and some who heard them speaking were both amazed and perplexed, others in the crowd doubted, sneering, *“They are filled with new wine.”* They’re drunk. There is nothing miraculous about that.

The disciple Peter stands with the others disciples, defending them, saying that the early hour of nine o’clock in the morning made drunkenness unlikely. What was happening was not an example of having too much to drink. Peter explains that what was happening was fulfilling the ancient prophesy of Joel:

*“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”*

 (Acts 2:14-18)

The prophet Joel had a radical vision of the world that was shared by Peter and of course, Jesus. The radical vision was this: The Spirit of God comes to all --- sons and daughters, men and women, slaves and free. Sons and daughters shall prophesy. The young shall see visions, and the old, dream dreams. And even slaves, both men and women shall prophesy.

In Joel's vision everyone has a place under God, and everyone’s place is important. Remarkably, the most powerless --- sons and daughters, and even male and female slaves have the extraordinary responsibility to prophesy, to speak the word of God’s love and God’s judgment.

In addition to prophesy, there will be visions, visions of God, and dreams, dreams of days gone by and yet to be. With the coming of the Spirit, everyone has a role to play. Everyone contributes. Everyone makes a difference.

The Spirit of God comes, not just to the Galileans, who are the first followers of Jesus. The Spirit comes to all people who are receptive to God’s Spirit, regardless of where the people stand in the social order. Instead of primogeniture, where the oldest son wins and takes all, there is universality, where everyone wins and everyone shares.

This is the dream, the prophesy of Joel come to life in Jesus, but the reality is often different. In our country and around the world, power and resources are not shared; the few have more, much more than the many. I've read that soon 1% of the world's people will control 50% of the world's resources. Can you imagine that?

This discrepancy between prophecy and reality is why the Church, including West Center Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, has an important message and mission: Our mission is to prophesy --- to tell and live the story of God’s universal love made known in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our mission is to see visions --- to seek a better world, a world of justice and peace, and as we seek this world, to remain hopeful, to envision different ways to live, different ways to be, ways and places where “me and mine” becomes “you and ours.”

Our mission is to dream dreams --- to remember the past and celebrate those who have gone before us, with thanksgiving, and to dream dreams of the future, working to make the world a better place for the generations who will follow us.

We may feel hopeless, due to climate change, as well as severe weather patterns of flood, draught, tornadoes and hurricanes, severe weather patterns that are becoming normal weather patterns. Just look at Texas the past few weeks.

However, regardless of the weather, regardless of the climate, we have hope, the hope of this morning’s Psalm 104:31, “O Lord, you send forth your Spirit and life is created; and so you renew the face of the earth.”

And the best thing about our mission is this: We no longer have to pray, “Come, Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit has come. The Holy Spirit is here, here among us.

The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost, and each succeeding day, enlightening and enlivening us, bearing our burdens with us, and showing us the way, and the truth, and the life in Jesus Christ our Lord, if we will but receive him.

I am going to close by reading a sonnet of hope by the English poet Gerard Manly Hopkins, who was born in 1844 and died in 1889 at the age of 45. You may recall that I used Hopkin's poem, "Pied Beauty," as our Morning Prayer last Sunday.

In addition to writing poetry, Gerard Manly Hopkins was a Jesuit priest, a teacher, and a preacher. Like Emily Dickinson, Hopkins’ poems were not published during his lifetime. His poems were too modern for Victorian England. A close friend and fellow poet, Robert Bridges, saw to it that a volume of Hopkins poetry was published in 1918.

Hopkins found hope in God’s creation, despite the effects of industrialization.

Today's poem is called “God’s Grandeur.” He wrote it in 1877.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

   It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

   It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

   And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

   And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

   There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

   Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs--

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

   World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Amen.

**HYMN OF RESPONSE** “Come, O Spirit”

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