

“Tag, You’re It” Pentecost/Volunteer Recognition Sunday

May 20, 2018 Bill Chadwick Oak Grove Presbyterian Church

Pentecost was one of the three main Jewish festivals in which people gathered at Jerusalem. It was fifty days after Passover—fifty days, hence Pente cost—and was the celebration of the harvest and also commemorated the giving of the Ten commandments to Moses.

Wind and flames were both familiar symbols of God’s presence. We think of the fire of the burning bush. Also important to know is that in the biblical languages there is just one word that gets translated for three different English words—wind, breath, spirit. All the same word.

The last bit of background information to keep in mind is John the Baptist’s promise that , “I baptize with water, but one is coming who will baptize with fire and the Spirit.”

Now listen to portions of Acts, chapter 2.

*When the Feast of Pentecost came, the followers of Jesus were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.*

*5-11 There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. They couldn’t for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, “Aren’t these all Galileans? How come we’re hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?...”*

*Their heads were spinning; they couldn’t make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: “What’s going on here?”*

*13 Others joked, “They’re drunk on cheap wine.”*

*14-21 That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:*

*"In the Last Days," God says,  
"I will pour out my Spirit  
on every kind of people:  
Your sons will prophesy,  
also your daughters;  
Your young men will see visions,  
your old men dream dreams..."*

*(Then Peter went on to tell the story of Jesus, his teachings, his miracles, his death and how God raised him from the dead.)*

*Peter concluded, "Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."...*

*"*

*41-42 That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.*

## Portions of I Corinthians 12

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...*

*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make*

*it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?*

*If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*

Pentecost used to be a liturgical season, not just one day. We are reviving that this year at Oak Grove, the next several sermons will touch on this season.

The church service started out boring. The people gathered together—120 of them—were moping around like the Vikings, Twins, Timberwolves, Wild, Gophers, Loons and even Lynx had all been eliminated from the playoffs the same day.

These people had fallen in love with Jesus and committed their lives to him. On Palm Sunday they acclaimed him Messiah and King! On Friday Jesus was nailed to a cross. But then God raised him from the dead! He was alive again! Yay! For forty days he was appearing all over the place. But then he left again, ascended into heaven.

What the heck? What are they to do now? Suddenly, in the inimitable words of Barbara Brown Taylor, “a holy hurricane headed their way” and then everyone of them “was filled to the gills with God’s own breath...and the air came out of them in languages they did not even know they knew...Like a room full of bagpipes all going at once, they set up such a racket that they drew a crowd...Before the day was over, the church had grown from one hundred twenty to more than three thousand people.” (The Gospel of the Holy Spirit, a sermon by BB Taylor.)

How exciting!

Ever been part of a church rapidly growing? The best I’ve ever experienced was the little church in Wahkon, MN, on the south shore of Lake Mille Lacs. It was 106 people when I arrived as the very part-time pastor there in 2004. Five years later it had grown to 126 people. Certainly not 120 to 3000 in one day, but almost 20% in five years at a time when most small churches were declining at that rate.

In fact, lest you get the wrong impression the OTHER little church I was serving *declined* at the same rate. That church in five years experienced a bunch of deaths and took in ONE new member. Same pastor. Similar communities. What was the difference between these churches?

Well, did you know that I am in the Guinness Book of World Records? Actually, I'm not because they don't keep this record, but one day in February of 2008 in that second church we held our quarterly session meeting (required by the Book of Order), then worship, and then our annual congregational meeting, all in a total of sixty minutes. In a Presbyterian Church. Friends, that is a record that will never be broken. That's a record by at least an hour and fifteen minutes. So, worship was regularly 40 minutes, but how does one get a session meeting and an annual meeting accomplished in the remaining 20 minutes? By not doing anything. Not a thing. Worship was it. Despite my repeated encouragement, cajoling, whining, the congregation refused to do anything besides worship. Not that you can expect huge things out of a little church, but seriously...

The first congregation I mentioned, the Wahkon Church, was ministering in the community in several different capacities. And it was growing.

The folks at Working Preacher from Luther Seminary have put together a cute little video to encourage churches. Oak Grove is in a much healthier place today than the churches this video is targeting, but the point is the same:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmweXyEoBw>

Carol Wickersham sums up Pentecost beautifully. All through the gospels the people have been watching Jesus do stuff. Now it's our turn.

***Pentecost means, "Tag, you're it."***