



The Hope Present in Pentecost

“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the mighty rushing wind...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. Amazed and astonished, the people began to say...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

--Acts 2, selected verses for the retelling of the story of Pentecost

Sunday, May 31st on the liturgical calendar of the Church is Pentecost Sunday. For Christians, Pentecost has become the celebration of the birth of the Church. One of the scriptures allocated for that day is from the Book of Acts. These first verses of Acts 2 are the retelling of the moment in which the Spirit of God made it possible for the all people to hear and understand the power of God through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak languages that would allow people from far reaching places of Jerusalem to hear the message of Jesus Christ. Thus, the good news was spread far and wide birthing new believers, birthing the beginnings of something new...the Church itself.

In this collective moment, as a whole people of God we universally face much uncertainty, pain, loss, and even death, and it might seem unfathomable to believe new life is emerging. It might seem inauthentic or artificial to celebrate Pentecost, as many will still not be joining in person for worship services like we have known in the past with beloved members of our communities of faith. Pentecost celebrations might even feel a bit flat or forced as we boldly proclaim the power of the Holy Spirit, which birthed the beginnings of the Church, when we quietly question the future of its existence.

The truth is, before we entered this moment in which our norms as churches would be turned upside down and inside out, the narratives of decline had already begun to shake us. We were already feeling the loss from changes and worried about things, which were out of our control. Moreover, maybe for some we were even already losing a bit of hope not certain of what the future would hold. All which has lead to a wondering of “Where is the hope?”

Yet, the hope is all around us.

The hope is those who have learned in a relatively short period of time to learn a new language, a language of technology.

The hope is churches whose primary focus had been upon buildings are now focused on how to build and maintain relationships.

The hope is those who were isolated in their homes because of disabilities now have access to communities of faith and support.

The hope is those who did not feel brave enough to walk through the physical doors of a church, afraid they would not be welcome and accepted, are discovering a wide open virtual welcome and hearing of God's mighty deeds.

The hope is in the midst of an unsettling time; many of the things we would not dare to believe we could change have needed to change in order for the life of the Church to continue.

The hope is while many question when the church will reopen, many understand and know fully the church has never been closed.

The hope is the work, mission and ministry of Jesus Christ has carried on by incredible leaders and pastors who trust in the power of the Spirit to lead them on.

The Spirit of God IS blowing. New life IS emerging. The Holy Spirit IS enabling us to speak different languages. For as always has been and as always will be, nothing will be able to stop the power of God to bring forth new life. Something new is being birthed among us.

It is a resiliency. It is an evidence of our ability to adapt and change. It is a recalling of how we have survived and thrived through difficult moments in our life together and how by the grace of God we will do this again. It is a reminder that the core of who we are called to be as the Church is to be the manifestation of God's love, power, and hope in the world.

Yes, this Pentecost might look and feel a bit different than Pentecost celebrations of the past. Yet, I believe it still calls for a celebration. A celebration of the power of the Holy Spirit. A celebration of what is being birthed among us. A celebration of the Church being and becoming the Church God has and is calling us to be. This Pentecost, this moment, invites us to celebrate the mighty power of the Spirit moving among us as we testify to God's deeds of power and hope.

On this Pentecost may we draw near to God trusting in God's power and grace. May we bear witness to the ways the universal language of God's love continues to connect us and bind us together as the Church. And may we name and claim the hope present in our collective Pentecost praise and thanksgiving.

With the many blessings of the Spirit,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Shana Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Shana Johnson
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of the United Church of Christ