

"SOMETHING TO SAY"

Have you ever had the experience of receiving a gift but finding that when you open it you don't know what it is? It can be a little embarrassing. Is it a big napkin or a small scarf or a fancy hand towel? Are those fishing lures or earrings? Of course the person who gave it to you is anticipating your response. Finally, you say, "I really need a meat thermometer," only to have the giver say, "A meat thermometer? That's a tire gauge." There is a similar but more serious perplexity about the gift of Pentecost. You know the story in Acts 2---the disciples gathered together, the sound of a rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and each one speaking the Gospel in other languages. **Clearly, on Pentecost a gift is given to the church. But what is it? What is it for?**

The gift, of course, is the Holy Spirit. But what exactly is the gift and what is it for? Some people hear the story and are fascinated by the drama, and they conclude that the gift is excitement in the church. And, of course, excitement in the church is a good thing. Everyone likes excitement. And we would all like to be lifted up beyond mundane realities and the many problems and serious issues of life. But wait a second. Notice where the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 is located---it comes right after an apostle is chosen to replace Judas and right before the church listens to the leaders' teaching and tries to take care of the poor and needy. In other words, Pentecost comes between the election of officers and Christian education and service programs, between institution and ministry. **Pentecost does not lift us up beyond earthly realities but helps us go more deeply into those concerns.**

Well, if excitement isn't the primary Pentecost gift, maybe it is power. After all, Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall receive power." And of course we need power. As you know, there was a time when the church had more power in our society, more prestige and respect. There was a time when schools and sports clubs wouldn't have imagined having practices and games on Sunday mornings. But those days are gone. **Well, Pentecost may give us power, but it is not ordinary power, not worldly power. It is like Jesus' power, spiritual power hidden in vulnerability and weakness.** Did you notice how the world reacted to the disciples on that first Pentecost? They thought the disciples must be drunk. That's unlikely power.

So if the gift we receive on Pentecost is not superficial excitement, and if it is not power as the world thinks of power, then what is it? A real gift of

Pentecost is one the world desperately needs. It is the gift of something to say, a Word to speak in the midst of the pain and tragedy and brokenness of the world. Notice what happened when the Spirit was given to the church: the church spoke. It told everyone, of all nations and races and backgrounds, the Good News of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, in their own languages.

The Spirit gives us a Word to speak--even now in the midst of the pandemic, in the midst of deep economic distress, in the midst of anxiety and uncertainty. And that Word is that hope is stronger than despair, love is stronger than hate, life is stronger than death, and Jesus Christ is alive and will be with us always. We have the gift of a Word to say--God's Word of life and salvation in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God! We do not have to be afraid. God loves us. We are not alone. God is with us!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Steve