

*A baptismal meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister of the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2009, dedicated to Lily Hogarth Schneider and Chase Matthew Washington on their baptismal day, to Marti Rideout on this last Sunday of her interim music ministry, and always to the glory of God!*

## **“Holy Spirit Led”**

### **Acts 2:1-21**

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Fragile, frightened, yet faithful, the circle of Jesus’ earliest followers found themselves “all together in one place” in the dark on the morning of the first Pentecost. Fifty days had passed since the first resurrection appearances of their friend and savior on Easter morning. Now, as dawn was breaking on the Jewish Feast of Weeks, or “Spring Harvest,” known as Shavuot, the first believers in the Jesus movement wondered if and when they would ever feel or see the much heralded and now seemingly absent Holy Spirit promised by their Lord on the day of his ascension.

Some must have clung to some vague hope. Others must have been turning and churning Jesus’ words of promise over and over in their heads. Others must have withdrawn in silence. Still others must have wondered: “*Where’s the Feast? What Spring Harvest? I am here, huddled in a room with people who, like me, don’t even know where their next meal is coming from!*”

Fragile, frightened, yet faithful.

Then it happened. Scripture tells us, “*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 wild-fire, the Holy Spirit*

*spread through their ranks and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.” (Acts 2:1-4)* They were thunderstruck. They couldn't figure out what was going on! They couldn't make head nor tail of any of it! Some who witnessed this laughed at them saying they were drunk on cheap wine at 9 in the morning.

Finally, Peter found the right words to say what was on everyone's heart and mind. He said, *“God is making good on the promise God gave to the prophet Joel. God is pouring out God's spirit on every kind of people!”* He went on to give the longest sermon recorded in the New Testament. He said that God, in Jesus of Nazareth, was fulfilling God's well-thought-out plan for the salvation of the world. This plan was made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Peter went on and on for a long time, in the same vein. He said, *“Get out while you can. Get out of this sick and stupid culture!”* (Acts 2:40)

That day, over 3,000 people were baptized into Jesus Christ. Out of a small fragile, frightened, yet faithful band of believers the church was born that day. That is this day. Continuing on into Acts 2:42-47, we learn what kind of a church they instantly became. We also learn what kind of church we are called to be.

Here are 10 characteristics of the very First First Church. Let's call it First Congregational Church of Jerusalem (FCCJ)!

1. First Church of Jerusalem was a **Learning Church**. The members listened to the apostles' teachings. They were always moving forward and being led by the Holy Spirit to take risks and be bold.

2. FCCJ was a **Church of Fellowship**. They liked being together. They were a band of brothers and sisters who broke bread together as often as possible. They liked each other!

3. FCCJ was a **Praying Church**. These First First Church members knew they could not meet life on their own strength, but needed the strength of God to get them through. They always went to God in prayer before going out into the world in action.

4. FCCJ was a **Reverent Church**. They lived in awe of God,

often translated a “fear” of God. They knew the whole earth was God’s temple and they revered the earth and all that is in God’s domain.

5. They were a **Church where things happened!** They lived each day in expectation. They arose thinking great things will happen today . . . and they did! They expected great things from God and great things happened. They believed with God all things are possible. Through the power of God’s Holy Spirit working in them, great things happened!

6. FCCJ was a **Missional Church.** They had an intense feeling of responsibility for each other and all their brothers and sisters in need. They could not bear to have too much when their brothers and sisters in need had too little. They were a church that gave away what they had. They were a household of faith in which ALL were Good Samaritans! They were a mission church whose mission was social justice and turning the world of injustice upside down. It is said of FCCJ that all that they did was mission and every act of mission was led by prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. They were a sharing church!

7. FCCJ was a **Worshiping Church.** They saw worship as a daily bending of heart, head and knee to God. They never needed Map Quest to figure out where church was. They knew God’s spirit moves upon God’s people in worship and they worshiped God whenever possible – which was often!

8. They were a **Happy Church!** They were genuinely joyful Christians. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. There was gladness in this church. Their smiles came through the pain of persecution. But, they were happy to be alive and to be worshiping and witnessing for Jesus Christ.

9. They were a **Church Whose People Others Could Not Help Liking.** There was a winsome attractiveness about these people. You enjoyed being around them. Ten days ago when we were joined by Jerome Dailey’s sister’s and mother’s church in Springfield, Greater Grace Temple, I had a strong feeling like this. Dorothy’s church, where Jerome’s sister Karla is a pastor, is a church whose people you can’t help but love being around. Greater Grace reflected FCCJ’s spirit – you enjoyed being around them!

10. FCCJ was a **Loving Church**. They loved God and one another. They looked out for each other and they loved one another.

Let's recap! On Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit was unleashed and "Ms. Holy Spirit" empowered the people of God following our Savior Jesus Christ to become his church. They were a learning church, a church of fellowship, a praying church, a reverent church, a church where things happened, a mission church which shared everything they had in common, a worshiping church, a happy church, a church whose people you couldn't help but like, and a loving church!

All I can say to this is: Where do I sign-up? Or better yet, how can we ALL sign-up? Don't walk out the doors today without these 10 characteristics embedded in your heart, mind and spirit. As the little church school song says so well, "*I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!*" We are FCCC!

Through listening and learning, through fellowship and prayer, through reverence and mission, through worship and joyful spirit, through love in action, we will be the church for years to come. Let's make this church today and every day to follow a church where good things happen and a church you cannot help but like.

How are you and I going to live this Pentecost season as faithful, not fearful Christians? How are you and I – who are living in fragile and frightful times – going to reflect the Holy Spirit of God that is like a strong wind poured out upon all of God's people? I anticipate a Pentecost season which daily reflects a spirit of joy and possibility; a spirit of love and sharing; a spirit of prayerfulness and care; a spirit of reverence and worship.

We are the Church of Jesus Christ. We are the people of God empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are First Congregational Church of Columbus. May we be blown away by God's gale force wind blowing through us.

Our children need us to be a Pentecost church. Our neighbors need us to be a Pentecost Church. Our guests and friends need us to be a Pentecost church. So, let us be a Pentecost church. May we be,

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from this day forward, Holy Spirit led! Amen.

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