

“Twink and Jimmy and 200+ years of Patriotism”

Psalm 104; Acts 2:1-21; I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23

The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens
Senior Minister

May 28, 2023

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

“Twink and Zimmy and 200+ years of Patriotism”

Psalm 104; Acts 2:1-21; I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23

A baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 2023, dedicated to Christopher James Hopkins on his baptismal day, to all the patriots of First Church and especially to Rupert “Twink” Starr and Lola “Zimmy” Davis Edwards and always to the glory of God!

+++++

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

+++++

Patriots and Pentecost people come in all shapes and sizes. When Lola Edwards was born in February 1923, she was so small, they wrapped her in a blanket and put her in a shoebox by the heater to keep her warm. It was one of the earliest incubators in America. She survived her early arrival and went on to have an amazing life – beginning with her service to our nation in 1945 immediately following the end of war in Europe. She landed in LeHarve on Christmas Day 1945, and it took an entire day to land due to sunken ships, etc. in the harbor. They traveled to Paris in a convoy and when they stopped for the night, they were told not to go off the gravel paths because not all areas were cleared of land mines. Needless to say, she listened to the orders from her commanders.

Once in Paris, she spent several days taking inventory of the surgery and sterilizing everything – this included needles and gauze bandages. They had POWs that worked with them, and the POWs were impressed that Lola knew how to work the sterilizer. Although she has never been specific about what surgeries they were performing in Paris, she had been trained at Greenbrier before going to France – where they were doing cutting-edge back/spinal type surgeries.

She was present when the Eiffel Tower was relit by General Dwight David Eisenhower, Charles De Gaulle, and Winston Churchill. Mother of nine, servant of God, and one of the absolutely kindest human beings I have ever known, Lola (or Zimmy as her family loving calls her), dedicated her life to family, faith and service. Here at First Church, we recognized Zimmy in 2022 as our Lay Leader Award winner.

Rupert Starr wasn't much bigger than Zimmy at birth in 1922, but his father, a doctor and his mother a teacher, knew their little one would be a shining star all the days of his life. He would be their Twinkling Starr. By 21, while a student at Ohio University, Rupert (or "Twink" as everyone calls him) volunteered to fight in WWII. By 23, Second Lt. Starr had seen the horrors of war and combat, had volunteered to run across enemy lines to get a message to the other side of the Bulge to warn the Americans what was coming. In that heroic and fearless move, he was captured as a Prisoner of War by the Nazis. It was a miracle – because during the Battle of the Bulge, the Nazis were murdering prisoners of war rather than hold them. After the war he was still held by the Russians (our Allies). He said to me once, the Germans treated him better than the Russians. Twink was awarded a Bronze Star for his heroism and returned to Mt. Sterling, Ohio and then on to Athens, Ohio to begin life after war as a student at Ohio University.

After his release as a POW and his return from war, Twink said to his mother, "Every day from now on is a free day, and I am going to do something worthwhile, accomplish something... every day. Every single day." He made good on his promise every day of his life.

Twink Starr would go on to become one of Columbus' leading Realtors in the 1950s and beyond, share 53 years with his life partner Alan Wingfield, become a Log Cabin Republican, an outspoken opponent of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy toward gay soldiers. He gained notoriety for his part in the documentary, "Courage Under Fire," and then in 2009 at 86 years old – Twink was the Grand Marshall of Columbus' Gay Pride Parade. Last year on his 100th birthday, the New York Post and many other media outlets around the world ran feature stories about Twink – The LGBTQIA+ champion and all-around wonderful man. Let's be honest, outside of Washington Gladden, Twink Starr is First Church's most famous member. He is known worldwide. He is the man! He is truly the man!

Twink will be 101 years old in July. Zimmy turned 100 in February. The two of them embody more than 200 years of patriotism and faith. Thanks be to God for Twink and Zimmy.

By this Memorial Day, Twink and Zimmy have buried more family, friends and fellow soldiers than any of us. They have been to more Memorial Day parades and celebrations than any of us. And they have lived their patriotism in real and practical ways – longer and in many cases better – than any of us.

We seem confused in these days by the word patriot. Sort of like "Christian" has been hijacked by those who wouldn't know Jesus if he came to their birthday party, Patriot has been hijacked, too. It is used most often and most fervently by those who storm the US Capitol instead of protecting it and defending it; wave the Confederate flag higher and more fervently than the US flag; and see single issue politics as the defining characteristic of what is truly American and what is not. Although some of these people may be patriots, they are not the only ones and don't have exclusive rights to the term. Calling yourself a patriot – against someone else – doesn't make you a patriot.

Patriotism is defined as *"a person's feeling of love, devotion, and sense of attachment to one's country. This attachment can be a combination of many*

different feelings, language relating to one's own homeland, including ethnic, cultural, political or historical aspects.” To be an American Patriot, in my mind, means to love all – love all the ethnic, racial, language, cultural, even political differences that make us who we are and thus, make us great as a nation. Our unity comes through our diversity. That is what Twink and Zimmy have embodied – collectively – for over 200 years. Thanks be to God for the way they have embodied patriotism for us at First Church and all Americans. They are each – in their own way - remarkable American and First Church heroes.

Today, we celebrate Memorial Day and all the ways people in our lives have served our nation and our God faithfully and well.

Today, we also celebrate Pentecost, the feast of God's HOLY Spirit filling the earth with all her creatures and cultures. To do this, we are invited into the feast.

Beginning with the Gospel of John, we can see the progression of the early church's reflection on the Spirit's effects on the Christian community. John begins by opening a window on what looks like the upper room where the disciples have recently celebrated the Passover with Jesus. But now, after his death, they have locked the doors and gathered together in fear.

Without warning, Jesus enters and stands among them and bidding them shalom or peace. Showing them the marks of his wounds, he again offers them his peace. Then, summarizing what he has said during their last supper and mirroring God's gift of life to the first humans (Genesis 2:7), Jesus breaths his Spirit into them and sends them out to carry his vocation to the whole world.

Luke tells a version of this same story in Acts, describing how the disciples have encountered Jesus over a period of 40 days. Then, after spending 10 days waiting and praying together, the Holy Spirit of God shakes them out of all inertia, impels them to assume their apostleship. Be who God has called you to be is the message there,

Thus begins an incredible, centuries long adventure of broadening horizons. Starting with the disciples' amazing experience of being able to tell the Jesus story to Jews "from every nation under heaven," this adventure continues for centuries, sending disciples to all the people everywhere – to all cultures everywhere in the world– right up to the present moment.

Although impelled by the Spirit, this evangelical adventure has never been easy. At each new step of the way, God has called Christians to broaden their outlook, to question their dogmatic assumptions, and to ask the Holy Spirit to guide and help them.

That's the process Paul describes in his first letter to the Corinthians, where he speaks of rejoicing in the Spirit's diverse gifts. Paul teaches that every gift of an individual, a people or a culture manifests the Spirit bestowed for the benefit of the entire body. The Spirit can come as a gift to one but it always is a gift to the whole body of Christ.

After the events of Jesus' life and after the Pentecost comes to fruition in the "Council of Jerusalem" (Acts 15:1-31), we become witnesses to the growth of our faith through the centuries. Periodically, we see major leaps forward in our faith. I believe one of the great major leaps came to the Christian community through the Reformation. The Bible took centerstage and the church opened up to the world around it in new and exciting ways. It was a preaching, teaching and musical revolution and revelation in the church. (Drawn from Sr. Mary McGlone, "Pentecost Sunday: Pentecost is ongoing," May 27, 2023, *National Catholic Reporter*).

In the 20th Century, the Rise of the Pentecostal movement and then the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council in 1962-65 – opened the church to the modern world and all her cultures and the vast varieties of experiences for the Holy Spirit moving in the world and in people's lives.

I believe, post-COVID, we are in a new movement of the Spirit today. We are all trying to figure out where God is in our lives and how God is making all things new. It is a scary and exciting movement – all at the same time. All

movements of the Holy Spirit across time are always exciting and frightening as we move into new understandings of faith and life.

So, what does Pentecost mean today?

In the 21st century, where no part of the world is unreachable and every language is translatable in an instant, this is the time to appreciate the unavoidable “and blessed awareness that we are all part of one another” and can “no longer think in terms of ‘them’ and ‘those,’ but only ‘us.’” That is what the Spirit is showing us today. And I not sure how it will all work out. But I do know this, The Spirit brings Patriots and Pentecost people together.

As we celebrate God’s Spirit present throughout creation, let us abandon our locked-up mentalities and venture into mind and soul-stretching interchanges with the wild and wonderful variety of the Spirit’s manifestations in our world.

Let us all acknowledge and celebrate that Pentecost is ongoing! It is never going to end as long as we are the Church.

I believe on this Memorial Day and Pentecost Sunday; we are all being called to be Patriots and Pentecost people. We are God’s holy and blessed ones living in a time and nation in flux. We are called to listen carefully and respond thoughtfully in these times. We are called to Pay attention. And I would add, follow the life examples of Twink and Zimmy who have dedicated themselves to live as patriots and Pentecost people and have shown us a good way – a beautiful way to be the church. Thanks be to God. Amen.

