

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
May 11, 2008 – Pentecost Sunday
Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture Readings – Acts 2:1-21

Sermon Title – “The Holy Spirit”

(open with prayer)

Last year, we gathered on Pentecost Sunday and I preached a sermon about the beginning of the church, not as a political institution, but a place where people actually felt heard and understood one another. I asked you to turn to the people around you and remind each of them they were truly a beautiful and wonderful child of God. It was a beautiful moment as each of us received the wonderful affirmation that the church is inhabited by the children of God. What I should have said in that sermon was that the world as well is the domain of the Holy Spirit.

The story of that first Pentecost describes the people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jews came from every region to gather for that feast. It was a huge convention. The Parthian delegates stayed at the Hilton, the Mesopotamians stayed at the Radisson, the Elamites had to stay at the Marriot while those from Phrygia and Pamphilia got rooms at the Holiday Inn. It was in those ballrooms that they caucused together and celebrated the leaders of their own groups. They knew there were others in town, but because of their odd customs and language each group basically stayed to themselves. The disciples of Jesus, of course, were huddled, scared and depressed in the upper rooms of the Super 8. There had been conventions like this for as long as anyone could remember. The temple was there to bring to people together at this holy time of year, and whether they were worshipping Jews during the rest of the year, or not, they always showed up for Passover.

So, the scene is diverse and cosmopolitan in one sense, but incredibly separate and homogenous in another sense. But, something happened on that Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down and gave the people the gift of listening and understanding. Just like all other conventions, at 6:00pm, Jerusalem time, the meetings adjourned for dinner time and everyone rushed out of their hotels in order to find a seat at a restaurant. If you didn't get there quick, you'd be in for an hour long wait or more, usually standing with people from different regions and with different customs. It was during this time of hurried lives, hungry bellies, and hushed prejudice that the Holy Spirit swooped in started to work on something that we are continuing on this day. On that day, in that time, with all of those differences and fears and worries, people understood not just that they were children of God, but that they were not alone in the world. The Spirit's movement on that day from the hill to the valley was to get people out of their world of perceived safety and to bring them face to face with another person who may speak differently, but shared the same desires, hope, and prayers. We gather every year on this amazing day to affirm that our

ministry is out there listening to the desires, hopes and prayers of those who may be different from us.

So, two things happened on that day that the church was born. The first was the message that the church belongs to the people who listen and open their circle of understanding. The second was that some are called out of the people to share that message with others. Today the Holy Spirit is upon us and will help us to practice these two foundations of our church. The first is listening to those in another pew. Find someone you don't know real well and learn something about them. Listen to them, open a place for the Holy Spirit to be in your conversation. Find out what they pray for.

(Time to chat)

The second gift revolves around those who are called out of the people to follow in the steps of Peter, who emerged from fear and shadow to accept the mantle of preacher and teacher. As Dwight has promised to keep us lovingly in our hearts, I ask that each of you take a heart from your bulletin and write a message of learning and love that Dwight can take with him into his ministry. When you are done, I am going to ask Dwight to come forward and receive these hearts, as public proclamation, still whispers, or loving touch.

(Dwight receives our gifts)

This is the church that the Holy Spirit birthed, listening, calling, and creating something new. AMEN.