

PENTECOST REFLECTIONS
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Acts 2:1-21
 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

Meditation – “Happy Birthday Church!”

(by Ann Weems, 1980)

There once was a church that had party rooms: the **Council’s Party Room**, the **Music** Party Room, the **Feasting** Party Room, the **Do Justice** Party Room, the **Love Mercy** Party Room, the **Touch Lepers** Party Room. In the center of the building was a large round room with an altar and a cross: **God’s Party Room**.

There was in the church an air of festivity and brightness that could not be denied. The people outside the church pointed their fingers and shook their heads: “**Something should be done about that church**.” They were especially upset when they saw that the members wore party hats and smiles both inside and outside the church.

Other congregations came to take a look and were shocked when they saw this church having so much fun during a worship service, snapping their fingers and dancing.

“**Sacrilegious**,” screamed the crowd. But the people in the church just smiled at them and went right on doing things like taking people in wheelchairs to the park and playing ball with them.

When everybody else was collecting canned goods for the poor, this church bought pizza and marched right into dingy, paint-peeling apartments and sat down to eat with the tenants.

They held picnics for the nursing home, and old men ran races while the congregation stamped their feet in applause. It was at one of these picnics that some of the members climbed up on a roof and shouted, “**Good news!**”

“**Now we can get them for disturbing the peace**,” said one of the outsiders. The police arrived with sirens, ready for the arrest, and came out two hours later wearing party hats and smiles.

One Sunday afternoon, the entire congregation met at the jail and passed out flowers to the prisoners. The following week after bread and wine and much laughter at the Lord's Table, the people went to the hospital and asked to see the dying patients. They held their hands and mopped their brows and spoke to them of Life.

"Disgraceful!" shouted the crowd. **"They must be stopped."** So the crowd appealed to the governing body of the denomination, and a committee of respected church people went to see for themselves.

"Do you deny the charges of heresy?" asked the committee. **"Do you deny that you've mocked the church and the Lord?"** The people of the church looked into the stern red faces and smiled at them. They held out their hands to the committee and led them to the **Birthday Cake Party Room**. There on a table sat a large cake decorated beautifully in doves descending and red flames and words that read: **HAPPY BIRTHDAY, CHURCH!** The people began cutting cake and blowing up balloons and handing out party hats to the committee members.

"Wait! Wait!" cried the chairperson. **"Can't you take anything seriously?"** **"Yes,"** said the people. **"We take our commitment to the Lord very seriously indeed."**

"You don't take it seriously at all," interrupted the chairperson in a loud voice with a red face. **"You have parties and wear silly hats and blow up balloons and sing and dance and have fun. Do you call that commitment?"**

The people smiled at the chairperson and asked him if he'd like a glass of wine. The chairperson hit his fist on the table. **"I don't want wine, and I don't want birthday cake. We're here to reprimand you. We're here to show you that you're wrong. Can't you be serious?"**

"We are," said the people. **"We're asking you to take communion with us."**

"With birthday cake?" screamed the chairperson. **"Outrageous!"**

"Outrageous?" [said the people] **"We ask you to sit at our table and sup with us. God gave the Holy Spirit to believers, and that is**

something to celebrate! It's an occasion for a party. We are celebrants of the gift of Life. We are community. We are God's church. Why are your faces red when we are trying to do justice and mercy? Why do you shake your fists at us when we are trying to discover the hurting and begin the healing? We are overjoyed that we can be the church, a community of people, who are many, yet one – who are different, but who walk together and welcome any who would walk with us. When we weep there is someone to weep with us and to affirm us and to take us to the party. When we see injustices, we must be about God's business of freeing the oppressed. When we are faithless, we have God's promise of forgiveness. Isn't it remarkable that we can be God's good news? Is it any wonder we have a church full of party rooms? There is so much love to celebrate!"

The committee stared at the people, and the people moved closer to them and put their arms around them. The committee chairperson stepped up to the table and sliced a piece of birthday cake, took a bite, and laughed out loud. He began slicing and passing it out.

When the wine was poured and the hands were held, the chairperson raised his glass and said, "**There is so much Love to celebrate! Happy Birthday, Church!**"

And all God's children say, "**Amen.**"

Dear friends in Christ, **how does this church**, First Lutheran faith family, **look to you?** How does it look to **outsiders?** How does it look to **God?** A couple of weeks ago, we had a **red letter party day** here celebrating the 125th Birthday of this church. We **thanked the Lord** for giving us **faith and life**. We **prayed and sang**; we **listened to God's Word** and **dined at the Lord's Table**. People wore **colorful t-shirts**. We **shared chicken and cupcakes** together. There was a **lot of laughter, applause, hand-holding** and **hugs**. It **got a little noisy**.

Today is **another red letter party day** at our church. Today we celebrate the birthday of the **whole, ancient, yet very much alive, Christian church** on that first day of Pentecost when God's Holy Spirit rained down on those first Christian believers. God's **Holy Spirit is here with us**, **within** each of us, **amongst** all of us, again today. That's **something to celebrate!** Amen.

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, do any of you have a **birthday coming up**? How old are you going to be? Do you usually have **birthday cake** for your birthday? **Candles**? Does everybody **sing "Happy birthday?"** Three weeks ago, we had a **red letter day of celebration for the birthday** of our **First Lutheran Church** in Aitkin, Minnesota. How old is our church? **125** years. Today, we are having another red letter day of celebration for the birthday of the **whole Christian church** all over the world! How old is the whole Christian church? When did the Christian church get started? **Almost 2000** years old! We call that day, **Pentecost**.

Do you remember what happened that **first day of Pentecost**? Jesus had risen from the dead and gone back to heaven. Then **God's Holy Spirit came like tongues of fire** and entered into each one of those first Christian's hearts. The Holy Spirit promised never to leave them and to help them to:

1. **love and trust God**.
2. **love and care for other people and God's creation**.
3. And to **tell everyone how wonderful God is!**

Kids, do you have the **Holy Spirit in your heart**? **Yes!** If you've been **baptized**, you have the Holy Spirit in your heart too! And the Spirit will never leave you and will always help you to **love and trust God** and to **love and care for other people and God's creation**. And to **tell everyone how wonderful God is**.

Three weeks ago, we celebrated the birthday of? **First Lutheran**, our church family. **Today**, we are celebrating the birthday of? The **whole Christian church!** So, do you think we **should have some birthday cake, candles, sing Happy birthday?** Yes! Yes! Yes! **Karen Newton** brought a cake for us. It has the number **125** in candles on top for our church's birthday. (Light candles.) Now all we need is to sing, "**Happy Birthday to our church**." Please join me in **singing**. (Blow out candles.)

Thanks be to God for our church, First Lutheran and the whole Christian church around the world. And kids, this **birthday cake** will be there for **you** to enjoy in **fellowship time** after worship. And there will be **Jerry and Linda Delaney's 50th Anniversary cake** for everyone to enjoy as well! **What a party!** Amen.

HOLY SPIRIT HOLES

It is **Pentecost** – the day we celebrate God’s gift to us of the fire of the Holy Spirit – the **same fire** that burnt the **bush before Moses** and attended **God’s gift of prophetic speech** in the Old Testament. Amidst wind and tumbling tongues of fire, the church is born and **prophetic witness to God is renewed** in the **visions and dreams** of men and women, girls and boys. **Our task** is therefore to be **open enough to receive what God wants to give us** – to watch for **how the Holy Spirit might be moving in our own lives.**

Back in the **middle ages, in Europe**, very few people could read for themselves, and there were no mass produced books to read anyway. So the only places where followers of Jesus **heard the stories of the Bible were in the churches**, where they were depicted in **paintings and murals, sculptures and icons, stained glass windows** and in the **drama and pageantry of worship.**

People in the middle ages **loved the great festivals** of the church, when the Bible stories came alive as they were re-enacted. **Pentecost was one of their favorites** for they really threw great parties! As they celebrated the church’s birthday and the gift of the Holy Spirit to all people, the churches were **decorated with bright red** to symbolize the **fire of Pentecost**. As the people entered the church, the choir and the organ would make **amazing swooshing sounds like rushing wind.** And one of the really amazing things in some of the churches in Rome was the holes that were made in the church ceilings – they called them **Holy Spirit holes**, opening to the sky. Through those holes, they would **drop symbols of the Holy Spirit**, like real **doves** and **red rose petals** fluttering down on the people! It is an **amazing concept** - the **willingness to make holes in their churches to let the Holy Spirit in.** **Are there holes today too?**

GLIMPSES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The first Christians, by the work of the Holy Spirit were enabled to proclaim **“God’s deeds of power”** in languages that everyday people could understand. In middle ages Rome, churches had Holy Spirit holes where **signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence** could be shown to the Christians who gathered there. So, today, here in **Aitkin, Minnesota**, two thousand years later, I’ve asked a couple of our sisters and brothers in Christ to share a brief story of **someplace they think they may have seen the Holy Spirit slipping into our world to reveal the mighty works of God** in their own lives, in our church or world. **Saturday** – Bill Hakes and Lewann Sotnack. **Sunday** – Linda Hommes and Don Hagestuen. Thanks be to God. Amen.

