

“God Revealed”

June 8, 2025 – Pentecost

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Acts 2: 1-8,12-13

Today is Pentecost and it is a day filled with images that dazzle the senses. Today is the only day of the year that our pulpit and communion table colors are red. So we invited you to join in wearing red. Our Scripture passage which describes the very first Christian Pentecost speaks of a wind, the very breath of God, coming and filling the room where the disciples are gathered. Then tongues of fire come down from heaven and perch on each of the disciples. Those tongues of fire allow the disciples to speak in languages they do not speak, so that each person present could hear the good news of Jesus in their own native language. Some years we have tried to capture some of the visuals of the day with streamers that looked like fire in the baptistry and even hanging down from above. We have highlighted the ability to speak in different languages with people praying the Lord's Prayer and sharing Jesus' words at communion in different languages. For at least the last 15 years we have celebrated Pentecost as the birth of the Church and I think we have birthday cake today in the Fellowship Hall after worship. Wind, fire, different languages, birthday – there are enough images to dazzle the senses and keep the day from getting too boring.

But instead of exploring what happened at Pentecost, today I want us to explore what it means. What changed at Pentecost? What is different because of Pentecost? What is the point?

For that we need a little background. Yes, I chose to trade dazzling images for boring history. You're welcome. As we read the Bible, God's presence was first found in creation. God took a formless void of chaos and brought both order and life; and that is where people found God. In the consistency of the sun rising and setting, both rain and sun coming regularly, allowing plants and animals to grow and provide food. Religious festivals formed around times of planting and harvest for that is where they saw God. When the rains came and the harvest was good, they counted themselves blessed by God. When drought or fire or pests destroyed the harvest, they counted themselves cursed by God and tried to change their ways in order to be blessed again. The same concept was used to interpret foreign invaders. If God's people went to battle and won, it meant God was pleased with them. If they lost, God was punishing them. That concept was claimed and focused in the Old Testament with the covenant God made with Abraham. God said to Abraham and Sarah, if you follow me, I will give you land, wealth, influence and descendants. And God did. The idea being everyone would look at Abraham and his descendants and see how blessed they were, want what they had, and therefore live like them in order to be blessed like them. That is the first set of symbols on your bulletin cover that we will add to the screens. It is the earliest ways of God revealing God's self and God's

ways to people – through the sun and the rain that made the crops grow or not and military victory or loss. Basically, prosperity meant God liked what you were doing and was blessing you, and poverty meant God did not and was punishing you.



God further refined that understanding through Moses. Instead of the people having to guess what they were doing that pleased God and what they were doing or not doing that made God angry, God and Moses wrote it out. Exodus 24 tells us God literally wrote the 10 Commandments on tablets and gave them to Moses. God used Moses to explain hundreds of other commandments as well. Now the people knew. They knew exactly what they should do and not do in order to bring God's blessing upon them. And they knew exactly what they were doing and not doing that brought God's punishment upon them. God revealed both who God is and well as who God wants us to be through the law. That is our second set of symbols. The law and the scales of justice. When they followed the law, prosperity and military victory. When they failed to follow the law, poverty and loss. The law and its consequences defined God's presence and activity through the whole Old Testament after Genesis. That is where you looked for God.



That all changed with Jesus and the New Testament. In Jesus, God came to earth. That is the third image on your bulletin cover and on the screens.



God took on a body in Jesus. Jesus was God in bodily form – the very presence of God on earth. We no longer look to the weather to see God, we look at Jesus. If you want to know God, if you want to know what God likes and dislikes, if you want to know what God expects, if you want to know God's heart; look at Jesus. Jesus was the fullest picture of God ever. Jesus was God present with us in bodily form. But then we killed Him. That wasn't the end. God brought Jesus back to life, rising from the dead and showing Himself to the disciples and others. But then He ascended back to heaven, back into the presence of God, to sit at God's right hand and be an advocate for us.

Which left us alone again. We could no longer look for the presence of God in Jesus because Jesus was gone. And we couldn't go back to looking for God's presence in the weather and our financial blessings because Jesus made it clear that "God makes the sun

rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” (Matt 5:45) So where do we look, or is God simply no longer present with us?

Now we are getting to the meaning, the purpose, the point of Pentecost. At Pentecost, God came to the disciples through the Holy Spirit and the church was born. With the presence of the Holy Spirit, the church became the Body of Christ, God’s body, the continuing presence of God on earth. If you want to see God, to recognize God’s presence, to see God work, to see what is important to God, to see what God expects and what God blesses; you look to the church because that is where God’s Spirit is. Now is it limited to that? No. God likes busting out of any box we try to put God in. God shows up in other places too. But is the Church where we look to see the presence of God? Yes. God shows up in the Church in things like baptism, communion and even worship. They are things we do, but things that God shows up in and does much more than we ever could – claiming us, forgiving us, cleansing us, making us worthy of heaven. God does that through what the church does in baptism, communion and worship. The Church also follows Jesus’ lead in what is important to God. Jesus did a lot of healing, both physical and emotional. Therefore, so does the Church. Sometimes that happens with prayer and laying on of hands, and sometimes because the Church has established hospitals, medical facilities, nutrition classes, and counseling centers. Jesus spent a lot of time teaching about God, the kingdom of God, and our relationship with God. So does the Church. When you look close at Jesus’ teaching, He tended to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. At its best, the church does the same. Jesus fed people and reached out to the outcasts, the shunned and the lonely; offering forgiveness and new life. The Church often struggles with it, but strives to be that presence too. Jesus was actually arrested and killed because He was an alternative voice to the world. He spoke of compassion instead of control, empowerment instead of greed, and greatness being defined as a servant instead of a master. The powers that be were not happy with this alternative voice, and silenced it. The Church is called to be that voice.

Now, does the Church always live up to its calling? No. We have parts of our history and our present which are just shameful. As far as individual Church leaders and the work of the Church at large, we have way to many cringeworthy moments. Yet is God still working through the Church, still present in the Church, still revealing Godself through the Church? Yes. The presence of the Holy Spirit which descended upon Jesus’ followers on that first Christian Pentecost is the same Holy Spirit which makes God present in the Church today.

You may have noticed that the next symbol on your bulletin cover is simply a picture of our church building. That is because I need your help with this one. In addition to a bulletin, each of you was given a piece of paper with a picture of this congregation’s building on it. We know the church is the people, not the building, but we are using symbols today. What I need from you is to answer the question on the paper – “How or where is God revealed in the Church?” You can write a paragraph, a sentence, a word, draw a symbol; whatever works best for you. We are going to collect those papers during

communion today and then display them for a few weeks so you can have a chance to read them. Because it is important. The Church is the body of Christ, the biggest way God reveals Godself to the world. Where do you look for and see God's presence revealed in the Church? I am going to give you a minute to work on that before I pray.

Mike Van Heyningen