

## **Pentecost Sunday**

**June 8, 2014; Acts 2:1-21**

**This sermon was preached by Pastor Jim Page at Trinity Lutheran Church**

It's great to be back with all of you today after my two month sabbatical from April 1<sup>st</sup>-June 1<sup>st</sup>. Some of you may be thinking, "Hey, Jim's back" while others are thinking, "I didn't know he was gone."

Rather than give a long summary I'll give you a one minute summary of what I accomplished during my time away. In April, I volunteered at Reach, Inc. While there, I assisted individuals with developmental disabilities in doing their work tasks while learning an array of details from their staff. It was an experience that will be the springboard for a specific ministry framework, here at Trinity, to individuals who have developmental disabilities and their families.

I read five books with topics ranging from the power of vulnerability to public

speaking to spiritual care for a busy family. Finally, and I have a prop to share with you...my family and I ventured away for a week-long vacation in Orlando. Four days were spent at Disney World and one day at Lego Land. This photo is what Ben, Abby and Katie were doing when we were driving back to the resort after a full day at Legoland.

So, thank you for being a congregation that supports sabbaticals for your pastors. Thank you to my three colleagues who took on added duties while I was away.

You didn't come here to hear about my sabbatical but to hear some good news from God's word.

Let's begin with a question: When you hear the word 'church' what do you think of? Perhaps it isn't so much a thought or a memory but an emotion that rises up within you. I'm sure that what you think of from the past or now or how you feel is a far cry from what people thought about back when the church began in the first century.

In the first century, the church was a movement. There was no tradition, no liturgy, no Bible, no hierarchy. It was a movement sparked by a single event in history: the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection shows us that Jesus was in fact who he claimed to be and it launched the local church as a movement to change the world. Today, my goal is to lead us to re-think church and re-define what the 'church' is all about. I'll give you a little history lesson, we'll look at three scripture readings that'll show us how purpose of the church and finally, we'll see how you as a key part of this movement known as the local church.

In the Greek New Testament, we get the word church from the word 'ekklesia' and it literally means an assembly, a gathering of people, or a congregation. Jesus launched the church around his mission of restoring all people to God. Then something terrible happened in history. The Greek word 'ekklesia' transitioned to the German word 'kirche' from the Goths around 300 AD and it is where we get the word



church. 'Kirche' became the new translation for church and it meant "the Lord's house"; a term for a gathering in any religious space not specifically Christian.

This horrible linguistic transition resulted in horrible theology. Before long, the church was located in a building. Whoever controlled the building, controlled the church. Whoever controlled the church, controlled the scriptures. Whoever controlled the building and the scripture controlled the people. In some sections of Europe, whoever controlled the building and the scripture controlled the government.

Then something awesome happened. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a British author and linguistic scholar named William Tyndale decided it was time for the common person to have access to the Bible. It upset him that the priests would read from a Bible that no one could understand or read.

He became the first person to translate the original Hebrew and Greek text into English. The church leaders were not happy about it. He became an outlaw and he fled to Germany to finish his work. Gutenberg lived a 100 years earlier to Tyndale and others were able to print copies of his work. They smuggled copies into England. The people were finally able to hold copies of the Bible in their hands. Tyndale was eventually betrayed by a friend, he was brought back to England, tried for being a heretic. He said the following to the religious leaders and authorities as he accused them of abusing their power and God's word, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy who drives the plough to know more of the scriptures that you do." They hung him and then set his body on fire.

What made the church leaders upset was that Tyndale took the word 'ekklesia' which was then regarded as a building and he translated it as 'congregation'. It was his attempt to return the gathering of God's people back to what it was meant to be back when it began: a moving, multi-cultural, mission-centered movement for all people based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

His inspiration was Jesus' words in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of Matthew. There, Jesus asks his disciples a question many of us may hesitate in asking our friends: Who do people say that I am? They replied that people thought he was Elijah, may be John the Baptist. But Peter, he stands up to say, "I'll tell you who you are. You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus looked him in the eye and said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it."

Jesus' ministry continued. He was crucified and rose from the dead. Scripture tells us that he spent 40 days with his 11 disciples, his mother Mary and his brothers and about 100 other people. They ask him a question and it's in the book of Acts, chapter 1. "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They were thinking of a kingdom for themselves, for God's people.

Jesus says to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Imagine, sitting near Jesus Christ, a man who Rome crucified, who the religious leaders hated and there's a hundred people with you and he says, "you will receive power and this message of God's love will touch the

rest of the world.”

Jesus departs and the group goes back to Jerusalem to pray and be together. Two weeks later Jerusalem is packed with people for the Jewish celebration of Pentecost. We know from historical documents that people came from 14 different regions of the world.

When the 100 people were meeting on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was in their midst and it manifested itself in such a powerful way in that they could speak the languages of those from around the world. People on the outside heard the sound and were confused and amazed at what was happening. They were shocked and asking, “How is it that you are speaking my language? You’re a Galilean!” They looked across the way and see other Galileans speaking in different languages. They’re talking about a man named Jesus who was the Messiah, the Son of God. He died for our sins and rose from the dead three days later.

And in the crowd...there is a stir. They thought, “Jesus, I remember watching his trial.” “That’s right, remember him; I heard him teach out in the country.” My friend says she saw him heal a blind man.

In that moment, Peter, you recall was the one Jesus said was the one he would build the church upon, decides to preach the first Christian sermon on opening day of the church. He says, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth, was man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs. This man was handed over to you by God’s sets purpose and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death.” (Acts 2:22-24)

Peter’s point was that being a follower of Jesus, is about seizing an event that happened two months ago in the city they were in.

When the people heard him they responded, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “You should go to church.” No, he said repent and be baptized. “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off.” You know who is far off? Me. You. Everyone now. Everyone in future generations.

The message of Jesus isn’t about how often you go to church, it’s not about earning points to be in God’s favor. The message is that all of us are far off and some how, some way...God’s love breaks through all our failings in order that we can know the love, the hope and the new beginnings for our lives.

Peter didn’t say go to church. What he said was, “Repent and be baptized.” Step away from the past and seize a new life in Christ. What happened then? 3,000 people were added to their number that day. Do you know how long it would take to baptize 3,000 especially if they had to take a video? 3,000 was a huge number of people committing their lives to following Jesus Christ and having their lives restored by God.

Since day 1, there has always been a remnant of people that have believed that this movement needs to move and this dynamic needs to spread, this message must touch every area in the world. To do so, there has always been missionaries, Bible smugglers, Bible translations, preachers, people who serve the poor, people who would not be controlled in believing God’s word is for all people. There have been people like William Tyndale who believed the scripture is for all people and have said “I am willing to give my life to

this message in order to put the scripture, the story of Jesus, into the hands of people that when they read it they say, ‘Wow, I want to be a part of that.’”

The church is not a building, but a movement. The church is what you do; it’s who you are. The church is the human outworking of the person of Jesus Christ. Let’s not go to church, but let’s be the church.

Do you know what I love about Trinity? You get this. When children are baptized-everyone’s eyes are on the child. When you gather with others to serve the poor...you gather as the church. When you gather together to go on trips overseas to bless others, wondering if all will go well, you’re gathering as the church. When you serve as an usher, as a home communion minister, in our food pantry, when you gather in one of our children’s day camps or Vacation Bible school this summer, when you gather to lead a group of teens...you’re gathering as the church. When you allow your Christian faith to guide your relationships and the decisions you make, you are a part of the church moving in our midst.

There’s has always been people who have believed it is not location, it is not style...it’s a message that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for our sins that the world would be renewed and restored.

I don’t know what you think of when you hear the word ‘church’. But my hope is that today you see the church as not a building where we gather once a week. It is a movement that happens every day as you live out your faith in Jesus Christ.

What would happen if all the churches put their energy into being a part of the Pentecost momentum rather worrying about their differences, who is in and who is out? The one thing you, and we together as Trinity Lutheran, can do is do everything we can, in what we say and do, to bring the message of Christ into our world. Because, what God can do through us is inspiring and it’s exciting.

Let’s not go to church. Let’s be the church. Amen.