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Acts 2:1-4, "The Spirit's Church"
Pentecost Sunday
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It all started because the disciples went into the streets. What we are doing here today began because a door opened and the church's story unfolded. Ever since Pentecost we've been trying to understand how to be the church.

So each year we reread this story and attempt to understand. We know much about what happened with the disciples on Pentecost, but do you ever wonder why people joined them? I know that what took place must have been spectacular to witness and I understand why folks joined the movement; but I have to be honest with you and say I relate best to the folks who sneered at the disciples and thought they were drunk. I'm cautious by nature and would never be labeled and first adopter. I like to analyze things a bit before I dive in deep. What are the pros and the cons? How will this affect my family and me? Somehow the Spirit just doesn't seem to care much about being cautious. So the Spirit and I continue to have an ongoing tug-of-war.

I spoke with a woman this past week about our church. She is new to town and inquired about what we do at the church. I told her about our worship and Sunday school and our outreach programs and then starting naming specifics. By the middle of our conversations I had told her about when and where we meet and what we do when we meet. You are kind of bored aren't you? She was too. At this time I realized I was losing her. Have you ever been on the phone with someone and you can tell they are doing something else—their interest level has plummeted?

I knew it was happening and wanted to pull her back into the conversation so I asked her about her family. I thought I'd focus the rest of the conversation on making this congregation an attractive place to her family. The phone call ended and I realized I'm glad I'm not in sales.

But that conversation stuck with me. After being here a year I know this congregation pretty well—I can tell you what we do and how we do it. By now I know the times, locations and key players in each program and ministry. But let's be honest—all that stuff is boring and uninspiring. And I don't believe the Spirit created the church to be boring and uninspiring.

It was then that the Spirit hit me and I wondered: what if I'd told her we believe God is changing the world? What if I'd started the conversation that way and then told her about our programs and ministries? In sales, it is all about how you start, right?

The Spirit created the church with tongues of fire and the heaven's version of the Rosetta Stone curriculum. No one held plans or committee assignments and last I checked there wasn't a policy and procedures manual. I understand why people say the church should go back to the First Century model, although there are drawbacks. Here comes my cautious side, revealing itself!

The disciples didn't know what would happen after Jesus ascended into Heaven. He'd given them instructions to wait for the Spirit. But what was the Spirit going to do? Would Jesus be with the Spirit or was something new about to happen? Would they know what to do once the Spirit arrived?

As I thought about the disciples waiting I imagined they'd gone to the doctor and

been told to sit in a room and wait for instructions. No real instructions, just an unspoken request to wait for further instructions. Oh and they were probably told not to play with the tongue depressors or cotton balls.

I'm not good at waiting. That's why I use to-do lists. I want to keep myself from distractions and heading down rabbit trails that lead me away from productivity. Are you good at waiting?

No matter the reason, we know the disciples waited. Maybe they realized they weren't in control of the future. Or maybe they knew Jesus would keep his word and send the Paraclete—the Spirit to them. Or maybe they were scared of what was outside those walls and the emptiness of waiting was better than the unknown outside.

Remember these are the followers of Christ, the one who was put to death because he disrupted the status quo. These were the folks who'd walked beside Jesus as he told the Pharisees they were wrong and the Romans that their way of life was insufficient. And now their leader was gone. I'd stay in the room too.

To venture out of the room is risky. We can't control what lies beyond the doorframe. To venture outside requires stepping into the unknown. And we can't control what we don't know. To venture out means believing we can forge our own path. And despite our best efforts, we can't control the future.

The only way I could fathom stepping out would be with a well thought out plan. We'd need details on how we'd appease the various people we were certain might not want to see us. We'd need to determine how to apologize and mend bridges. Then we'd need to lay low and out of the spotlight.

The Spirit could care less about any of this. Instead of subtle meetings, the Spirit sends tongues of fire; instead of details about who to meet, the Spirit changes our language; and instead of trying to appease all, the Spirit sends us into the heart of the city where she knows people will think we are drunk.

Even two thousand years later we are still trying to tame the Spirit. I know I did it last week.

When I could tell the conversation with the woman was coming to a close I began wondering what my final remarks should be. Finally, I said, "You just have to come worship with us and then you'll know if this is the church for you." The Spirit broke through my malaise.

Do you have experiences that touch your soul, giving you goose bumps or making you feel weightless? And then you are helpless to describe what took place when you tell your friends or family about it. "It was..." Words fail you so you look for metaphors or similar experiences, "Well, it was like..." You might be a bit clearer, but you are still helpless to describe it.

But you keep telling it because you know something happened and it needs to be shared. So you keep telling it and then someone is able to write it down in a way that gives shape to your experience. "Yes, the colors looked like fire and yes, they looked like our tongues. Yes, I could speak in another language even though I've never spent a day in a school."

Somehow, somehow, the Spirit finds a way.

I'd imagine that even those of us who sneered would have gone home and been talking about what happened. "Did you hear what happened in the town commons? A bunch of those folks who followed that Jesus character started talking in all sorts of

languages.” The Spirit has a way of making everyone talk about what God is doing in the world.

I got stumped at this point in the homily; an ending wasn’t materializing. I’ve never done this but I got a little desperate and thought about using one of those books that offers sermon endings—yes, those books exist. But then I thought about the conversation with the woman this week—if I could bore a person over the phone then I was pretty sure I could bore an entire congregation in person!

Then I thought about using a quote from a leadership book I’ve been reading this week. Seemed appropriate since the church involves leadership. But it wasn’t working. I was trying too hard to make it fit within the homily.

Any good writing book will tell you to restate your introduction so I thought about going that route. What do we understand about the church since we’ve had 2000 years to think about it? Say something about that and end it. But the truth is I don’t know if I understand too much about the church. It keeps surprising me because the Spirit keeps leading it.

What I do know is that the first Pentecost set fire to a movement that hasn’t stopped gaining steam for the last two thousand years. In countless ways God has found a way to break through the human desire to stay within the comfortable rooms of our lives—where we are in complete control and can dictate how life will unfold—and sends us into the world.

But we don’t just go into the world—we do crazy things like talk to people and share our faith and tell them that we believe that God is changing the world. And we do even crazier things like feed people and care for them and send them cards when they are sick or on particularly significant days of the year. None of this is written down in a manual—it is the Spirit’s movements that invite us to do something different.

The Spirit’s church isn’t something we codify—it is something we experience and then spend the rest of our lives talking about it. Some times we do really well explaining what it is about; other times we fail. Nonetheless the Spirit keeps showing up and you’ll know it’s there because when you least expect it, a door will open and you’ll head out into the world ready to do something crazy like share your beliefs.

May God bless this witness and this congregation. Amen.