

Down and Out

Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:22-27

Is today your birthday? Today is Pentecost so, in one sense, yes it is. Happy birthday! Pentecost was originally an agricultural festival for dedicating the first fruits of the harvest. It was a festival for giving thanks to the gods for bountiful crops.

The Jewish faith took that Pentecost festival and used it to celebrate the most important harvest of their faith -- God giving the Torah to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Pentecost means fifty: fifty days after the start of Passover. The symbolism was to celebrate the birth of the Jewish faith, of Israel as a people at Mt. Sinai, being tied to the remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt.

Pentecost Sunday now represents to us the birth of the Christian Church (Acts 2). The Spirit came down with commotion, activity, and noise. People were filled up with the Spirit and the church went out to tell the story and share good news with the world!

There are just two points to this sermon. First is the close connection between the birth of Judaism and the birth of Christianity. Second is that new birth is available for each of us as the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit and that this rhythm of death to life is the pathway to eternal, abundant life

Christianity has roots deep in Judaism. Nowhere is this more clear than in the birth of the two faiths. The birth of Judaism took place with Moses receiving the Torah, the Ten Commandments and Law, on Mt. Sinai. This birth had its origins in their experience of slavery in Egypt. They experienced a freedom that was much more profound than leaving physical slavery. Pharaoh's reality gave them one message: "make more bricks!" But in Moses' reality, God says, "You are not defined by how many bricks you produce."

Moses' reality became clear at Sinai, in the Torah. This was nowhere clearer than with the commands to honor God above all and to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Sabbath means that *what we produce and consume does not define us* in any economic or political system.

The giving of Torah was celebrated at Pentecost. That why Jesus' followers had gathered, along with huge crowds of people, for that festival in Jerusalem. They gathered, fifty days after death Jesus' death and some seven weeks after the first Easter, in a closed upper room. As they waited, perhaps cloistered or perhaps imprisoned, the wind of the Spirit blew open the lives of those first disciples and gave them a new birth, a new life. This was not a new religion being formed, but new life being stirred, aroused, and brought into being.

The Holy Spirit is many things and all of them are mysterious. One thing the Spirit seems to be is the abiding presence of the risen Christ with the first disciples and still in us today. The apostle Paul wrote about this Spirit in a very sensual and evocative way in his letter to the Romans. "All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within." (Romans 8: 22, The Message)

We are all about following Jesus here at Crossroads Church. It's what we do here. It's how we define our vision. This means following the example of his life – giving ourselves in love; giving ourselves for social justice, for racial, economic, and gender equity. This means learning from Jesus' teaching by finding truth in the parables and from his wisdom. This also means being filled with the Spirit – a mystical experience of living that is as individual as you and I.

The encouraging presence of God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. (Acts 8: 25f., *The Message*) Every detail of our lives is shared with the Spirit who is Jesus' abiding presence.

I don't know about you, but my life is not lived, for the most part, on a large, cosmic plane. Mostly life consists of day-to-day experiences – lots of nitty gritty experiences. It is good and important, from time to time, to step back and look at the big picture for yourself and our church, but life from birth to death is a matter of details. How will I relate to people I love today? Will they love me back? How will I treat strangers? How will I spend my money and invest my time? Will I receive respect? Birth and all that leads up to it, and all that follows it, is very nitty gritty.

In Charles Dicken's *Tale of Two Cities* the tale begins with three strangers traveling in a carriage along the road between London and Dover. The year is 1775. It is a dangerous road and so, with some trepidation, the carriage stops when a messenger on horseback catches up with them. It is a message for Mr. Jarvis Lorry who ventures out into the rain to receive it. He then sends the man on horseback off with a return message, a peculiar notice of just three words: "recalled to life"

The invitation of the Spirit is, "will you be recalled to life?" On this Pentecost Sunday, I invite you to consider this your birthday, your day also of giving birth, your day of being recalled to life. But the question remains, "Do you want to be recalled to life? The Spirit challenges us with this question and only you can answer it for yourself. And if you do want to be recalled to life, then what is it that brings you to life? What arouses the passion in you in a way that increases compassion and love? And what focuses your passion?

Finally, what will it look like for that passion to lead your life? What will it look like if, each day, you would allow what brings you to life to guide your choices and shape living? Being born in the Spirit is not really so much about big life-changing experiences as it is about a hundred individual choices each day in the direction of the big picture of your life. How will you spend your free time? How will you choose priorities for investing your money? With what attitude will you face the world today? Will you take a chance, take the risk, and let the Spirit of the risen and present Christ send you out to change the world -- one person, one attitude, one act of kindness at a time?

Ten years ago, Crossroads Church was born, yet today is the day we can be recalled to life. Each of us is a part of that rebirth when we commit to participate in the ministries, outreach,

community and Crossroads Church, when we commit to the financial support of this congregation. Each of you has a birthday to celebrate, yet today is the day you can be recalled to life. You are invited to say “yes” to life today, here and now. Say “yes” to what brings you to life a hundred times a day, now and when you leave this gathering. Say “yes” to the Spirit. Be filled. Be aroused and sent out into a world that needs you so desperately, in Jesus’ name.