

World Communion and Pentecost A Wave of Change in the Christian Community

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27-28)

This past Sunday was World Communion Sunday, one of my favorite church celebrations. I picture the unfolding of this celebration similar to the “wave” at a football game, smoothly sweeping across the globe. Early in the morning, before I even get out of bed, people begin celebrating Communion in the Far East. Then, it moves to Taiwan with John McCall, to Indonesia with Becca Young, to India and Pakistan where Marlene and Gary Van Brocklin will be, then on to Africa at Nkhoma where Barbara Nagy serves, and Europe and then to Guatemala and the USA. This Communion may be on beaches, under canopies of trees, in mud huts, in secret, around a simple table, or in cathedrals, homes, and church buildings of all sizes.

I also associate World Communion Sunday with Pentecost and the blowing of the Holy Spirit. Together, World Communion and Pentecost remind me of how much the church changed and is changing. On Pentecost, the church went from “the Galileans” and others who had followed Jesus, to 3,000 new people who didn’t know all the stories, and perhaps were more cosmopolitan and maybe spoke a different language. When the church was persecuted, disciples went to Samaria. The new Samaritan Christians were from a hated group of people, but they also received the Spirit. Then Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, a man who could not worship in the Temple with the men and who was from the “ends of the earth.” Then God sent Peter to Cornelius, a Gentile, whose house he should not have entered. Cornelius, and his whole household, received the Spirit and were baptized. If that was not enough, the first European convert was a woman, a foreigner, and an immigrant.

The wave of energy that is God’s Spirit is blowing (or moving or sweeping) today. I think of the changes that the churches are making and will make, energized by God’s Spirit. Vera White is coming to talk with us about 1001 New Worshiping Communities. This is another way to try to reach out to people not connected with Christ or a Christian community. Every congregation cannot create a 1001 New Worshiping Community but, we can all reach out in new ways to new people, some of whom will be different from ourselves.

I picture a train that left the station with Jesus’ immediate followers, added 3,000 new and different people, picked up the hated Samaritans, the Ethiopian Eunuch and those he converted from that far land, Cornelius and his family, then lots of Gentiles, a woman leader and her house church, and all those people celebrating communion around the world. And the train added those Presbyterians from Western North Carolina. That train has a lot of strange and wonderful people.

Paul said that on that train, there is no longer Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. We are all children of God, clothed with Christ.

Our culture today is more similar to the early Church than to the 1950s Church that so many of us remember. For the most part, the younger generation does not have church participation high on their

priority list. Many do not know the stories of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, of Ruth and David, of Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene, or of Jesus. Who are we inviting and what new ways are we willing to try to reach those who do not know Jesus? How are we relating to those who know Jesus, but don't feel welcomed or may not see the need for Christian community?

I see the Holy Spirit moving in this world and in this Presbytery. We need to celebrate it when the Spirit moves among us, and open our eyes to see where the Spirit would have us join in the work.

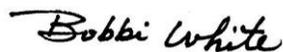
The Spirit is working in the world through Pope Francis. Pope Francis is doing and saying things that some people say, "Popes should not do and say." He is not living in the spacious "Pope quarters," but in the guest house. He has washed the feet of men and women. When he travels, he has not just seen the officials, but has visited the least among us in the slums. He is about following the Master and caring for people on the margins. Young people are flocking to him like a rock star. He is challenging all of us, not only the Catholics, to look at our priorities versus Jesus' priorities. Because of the way the Pope projects the love of Christ, people are drawn to him, wanting to know more about Jesus.

I see the Spirit working where churches are reaching out to new people who have never been to church, and where they feed children through back pack programs, grow fresh food for others, and care for the homeless. The Spirit moved in a very small church that grew from twelve in worship to about twenty five, with three new baptized members. New Vision, our new church development, welcomed their Hispanic brothers and sisters from Iglesia Presbiteriana Emanuel and became one church reaching out. Unity and Black Mountain continue to grow and reach new people with creative, meaningful worship and faithful witness. Westminster works with the veterans. Grace Covenant visibly witnesses to their care of others with a garden on their front lawn.

I see the Spirit at work when for the first time churches in Avery County work with Covenant Church in Charlotte to do a Habitat house. They join with the Hickory area, Gastonia Area Presbyterians (GAP), and Buncombe County/Asheville and other churches who also build Habitat houses. Third Street and the Gastonia churches provide new shoes and wash the feet of the poor. The lives of youth are changed for Christ at Triennium. Many Guatemalan children have gotten scholarships and we have grown in our faith as a result of our relationships. The Spirit is at work.

The Spirit is blowing in so many ways on us like it did on the early church. If we are timid and expect things to be like in the 50s, we will miss the Spirit's power. The Spirit is blowing within this Presbytery. Wherever the Spirit blows, it brings renewal, tremendous challenge, and unexpected change. Don't miss the "wave" of the Spirit. Let us pray that we may respond to Christ's command with willingness to risk, so that others will know Christ's saving love. Who are we inviting and adding to the people on the train, already full of strange and wonderful people, including us?

Peace,



Bobbi White