

Pentecost
May 31, 2009
St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Grand Island, NY
Acts 2:1-21
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15
Romans 8:22-27

“Excited”

by

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If I were to pick one word to describe today, the word would be **excited**. The word excited would also describe the mood on that first Pentecost day. I believe that there were three reasons for their excitement...three reasons which also account for the excitement we feel. The three reasons are: hope, potential and change.

I. Excited by Hope

The sense of anticipation for this day is palatable. “Surprise birthday party” we billed it. The anticipation we feel is born of the hope that today will be a memorable day...that today will signal movement at St. Timothy’s...that today will be a portent of things to come.

The Hebrew community of Jesus’ day likewise lived in the anticipation of the great and holy day when the words of the prophet would come true:

“In the last days it will be, God declares,
That I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh....”
[Acts 2:17-21]

Imagine the excitement they felt when they realized that this day was beginning to happen...when in an unforgettable moment there came the sound like the rush of a mighty wind and tongues of fire rested upon them... when the people became filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Their long awaited hope was coming true...right in their midst. Pentecost like no other Pentecost was happening among them. Imagine what they felt.

Excitement. That’s what they felt. They felt excitement because their hopes were being realized.

The apostle Paul would write about hope. “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:24-25)

Hope is an essential to life. One cannot live without hope...at least not for long. Thankfully, Christians have hope—hope grounded in the promise of God. Hope grounded in a God who makes good on his word. Hope fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

We too live by hope. Without it we could not survive.

Our hopes range from the very mundane to the ultimate. We hope for a sunny day. We hope simply to get through the day. We hope for a glimpse of God. We hope for heaven one day. How exciting it is when any of these hopes come true!

Last Sunday I preached at our sister congregation in Buffalo (the Evangelical Church of the Resurrection). I preached on the I John 5 text for the day which ends: "I write these things to you...so that you may know that you have eternal life." The title of my sermon was "Blessed Assurance." (named after the old hymn of the same title)

The African-American Community Choir was leading singing that day and its organist (by prior design) broke in to the old hymn just as I was bringing the sermon to a close on a very high pitch. We sang, with all of our hearts: "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh what a foretaste of heaven divine!"

After the service, as people filed by me, shaking my hand, one little lady (she must have been in her 80's) literally came skipping out, exclaiming: "I'm going to heaven! I'm going to heaven!"

Here was excitement born of ultimate hope realized. Hope...hope in Christ can do that to you.

Exited by hope!

II. Excited by Potential

Another thing that can get you excited is sensing potential that can be realized.

The apostle Paul would teach about the role of the Holy Spirit...how the Spirit helps us in our weakness...How the Spirit intercedes for us and expresses our deepest thoughts and feelings before the throne of God. (Romans 8:26-27) The Holy Spirit, he explains, gives us the potential to pray deeply, pray effectively and pray in the will of God. Think of the potential of that!

Jesus said: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-14) The Holy Spirit will give us the capacity to know the truth, in particular the truth of Christ and the truth of life in him. Think of the potential that releases in us when it comes to being persons of the truth.

That same Holy Spirit is a potential force for our lives...in every aspect. And not only for our lives, but for the life of St. Timothy's. As a congregation you may be experiencing many different emotions. You may be looking around and wondering "What's next for St. Timothy's?" You may be missing some of your friends...or, perhaps, seeing them less regularly. But the Holy Spirit has not gone away. The

Holy Spirit is still active and well. I can feel it. I can see it in little bits and pieces here and there. Your potential is great!

The potential, however, is not human potential. It is divine potential. Never forget that. Try to operate without Him...and you are doomed.

Just like God pouring out his power upon the early church that first Pentecost day...when He awakened a sleeping giant and exposed its incredible potential...which was manifested in the numbers of disciples that grew from a handful to over 5000...just like that, God is awaiting an opening to pour out His Holy Spirit upon you.

Witness the turn out today. What is it? Double? Or triple? Or what? What does it say about St. Timothy's potential...true potential? What power could God unleash upon Grand Island if He had a 100% St. Timothy at His disposal? What if St. Timothy was fully anchored in core essentials...essentials that hold true for eternity? What if St. Timothy took its mission so seriously that it took the necessary steps to grow in the essentials necessary to a life in Christ.

Imagine the potential!

I get excited when I contemplate the potential!

III. Excited by Change

Another thing that can excite you is seeing actual change.

We read in Acts 2 about the change that occurred in people's lives. The change was not a surface change, a cosmetic change. People were challenged and cut to the quick. They repented and turned to God. They were baptized. People surrendered their personal possessions and held everything in common...for the common good. We are told that "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42) They were changed!

Deep seated, fundamental change in the form of renewal is needed at St. Timothy's. Launching the future "Next Generation St. Timothy" requires that we first anchor the present. That anchoring needs to be centered in renewal...even revival.

Anchoring implies coming back to basics...re-awakening old loyalties to Jesus...getting intentional about shaping future generations for Christian discipleship...re-committing to faithful stewardship...embracing mercy in our relating to one another...becoming bold in our witness to Jesus Christ.

It would be exciting if this kind of change would occur here...both in the life of St. Timothy's and in our individual lives.

The first Pentecost saw those kinds of things happening. We want the same this Pentecost!

IV. Conclusion

There is excitement among Christ's followers here today. Perhaps we are witnessing an historic moment. This I do not know. But this I do know. It is a new day.

I invite you to step up and to step out for Christ. Whether you are a child...a teen...a young adult off to college...a young adult in the work force...a mom or a dad...a "mature" person with lots of life experiences...an old veteran of the church or a new person to the church...whatever your "category" I invite you to step up and to step out for Christ. I invite you to get excited for Christ.

I invite you to be excited that Christ's mission has a church...and that church includes you!

[PRAYER]