

Psalm 104:24-35
Acts 2:1-21

Day of Pentecost, Year C
Midway Presbyterian Church
June 5, 2022

The Gathered Community

Introduction to the Psalm

Our psalm today is one of the “Creation Psalms.” God creates not only the church, but the entire universe. All the creatures of the earth and sea God made, and they all depend on God for sustenance. Listen to these words from Psalm 104:24-35...

Introduction to the New Testament Lesson

In our New Testament Lesson this Day of Pentecost we hear of the coming of the Spirit, as Jesus had promised (Jn. 14:15-26). People who spoke different languages could understand each other. The church was born as the gathered community experienced wondrous things. Listen to these words from Acts 2:1-21...

Sermon

Today’s passage from Acts tells the story of what we have come to consider as the birthday of the church. Luke says that they were all gathered together in one place when it happened. This place may have been in the “upper room,” where Jesus had earlier shared the “Last Supper” with his disciples. For in Acts 1 we read that following the Ascension of Jesus,

Then they [that is, the disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. (Acts 1:12-13a)

Pentecost Sunday is a chance to pause and celebrate the faithful who *still* gather, week after week, month after month, here at Midway, throughout Anderson County, and around the world, to meet the Spirit of Christ. To give the Lord the glory due unto his name, to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. (Is. 29:2)

Ronald Byars, in his book *The Future of Protestant Worship: Beyond the Worship Wars*, tells a story about a couple who have a son with developmental disabilities. Byars writes:

The family is active in the church. They seldom miss worship. One winter Sunday morning they awakened late and breakfast took longer than usual, and everything seemed a little off-balance. Well, the parents decided, for this one Sunday, to stay home from church. They told their son, and he seemed to accept their decision. But after pondering this news, he asked his father, “Won’t Jesus miss us?”

In the introduction of her book, *Sharing the Word*, former Associate Professor of Preaching at Columbia Seminary, Lucy Rose tells a rather humorous story as she reflects upon preaching in the church:

My relationship to preaching began during my childhood when I heard my father preach good sermons Sunday after Sunday. I grew up *listening* to his sermons because my parents promised us four children a nickel up to a quarter for every point or illustration we could remember and relate at the Sunday dinner table.

Very quickly I discovered that if I remembered five parts of the sermon, I could always earn a dime, quite a treasure in my mind in the early 1950s.... And I remember the excitement of a further realization, “If my brother and sisters don’t listen to the sermon, I *could* get a quarter!” I therefore began to listen very attentively to each sermon and usually to *all* of the sermon in order to identify and remember five points or stories. Even today I can almost recapture the thrill of this Sunday ritual. I can almost conjure up the fun of earning at least a dime and hearing my parents’ exclamations of surprise and delight.

Well, you're not going to be paid for remembering the points of my sermon, but hopefully when the Word is rightfully proclaimed, you will remember something that will make a difference in your lives.

Listen to what the author of The Letter to the Hebrews says in chapter 10:

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:24-25)

Worship is not just for preaching, praying, singing, and offering, but also for praising God with deeds of compassion and mercy. So we are taught to encourage each other to love and good works. Sunday School is not just for learning about the faith, it's also about building one another up in the faith. Some of the believers to whom the verses in Hebrews were written, had previously made it a practice of coming together, but for some reason have now ceased to do so.

Jesus meets us in Christian community. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:20) We experience the risen Christ through our gathering and the spiritual rituals—baptism and communion, prayer and the singing of hymns, preaching and offering, confession and affirmation. These are the traditions passed on from generation to generation. As the pandemic forced us into isolation, we have recognized now, more than ever, how good it is to gather as a Christian community.

In their book, *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church*, William Willimon and Robert Wilson write:

When the old catechism spoke of the “chief end of man” as being “to glorify God and enjoy him forever”; when the Reformers spoke of the church as the place where “the Word is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments are duly administered”; when Paul spoke of a gathering of Christians as being “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27), they were all declaring the same thing that Sunday worship declares. The primary focus and reason for our worship is God. We worship simply because God is God and because we are God’s children.

Whether it takes place in St. Peter’s Basilica on Christmas Eve, or at Midway Presbyterian Church on Sunday mornings, the coming together of people is vital for the Christian life. To neglect our coming together is to forfeit the encouragement and help of other Christians. For we need each other; we need the fellowship that we share with each other as we mutually strengthen and encourage each other.

Yes, there are many options available in our day and time: the Sunday paper, the park across the way, getting some extra sleep, a movie to watch, a round of golf to play, even a worship service on TV. And it’s easy to get into the habit of not going to church. But developing the habit of gathering together in Christ’s name is much more fruitful—not only for us but for others as well.

At a Presbytery Meeting a few years ago, Jackie Putnam was being examined as a Candidate for Ordination. She was being called to be an Associate Pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Greenville.

The question that was asked of her in the area of Theology by Amos Workman for the Examinations Commission was: “Do you find John Calvin (1509-1564) relevant for life today in 2018?” Then she was playfully cautioned to remember in answering that she was in a Presbytery Meeting in a Presbyterian church.

Her answer was that she had found Calvin transformative for her own life. For the 16th Century Reformer had enabled her to see that the Christian life was not so much about *her* as it was about *God*. That placed God at the very center of her life. God didn't revolve around her; she revolved around God.

And that's what Worship can do for each of us. It can move our focus away from "me" to God. As we join in praying, singing, confessing, hearing God's word, and giving of ourselves, for one hour of one day in the week, we practice what Calvin had taught Jackie Putnam. And hopefully, what we practice in Worship on Sunday mornings, more and more carries over to our lives throughout the coming week. As Calvin himself said,

Believers have no greater help than public worship, for by it God raises his own folk upward step by step. (*Institutes* 4.1.5)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.