

Happy Birthday to Us
Acts 2:1-13

[1] When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. [2] And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [3] And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. [4] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. [5] Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. [6] And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. [7] And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? [9] Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, [11] both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” [12] And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” [13] But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

People who have birthdays in the same month seem to share a quiet pride, that they had the good sense to be born in the same month. If you share the same birthday with someone, it seems as if you have so much in common. If you share the same birthday and the same birth year, don't you feel almost like identical twins? How did one get taller or brighter?

We did, of course, have life before we were born. At our conception, God gave each of us the miracle of life, designed for fulfillment. And even though we had life before birth, we make a very big deal about the day we began living on a different level, on the day we were born, interdependent in a way we did not know before. In school we may bring party treats for our classmates. At work, we may get taken out for lunch. We can't help but break into a chorus of “Happy Birthday” when we hear of one.

Who has a birthday today? Let's sing! We can't help ourselves.

Pentecost is the birthday of the New Testament church. It too had life before its birthday. The Church is people, and the Holy Spirit had created faith in the hearts of people, one by one, centuries before Pentecost. But the individual miracles that took place on the inside were different from the party that took place on Pentecost.

Pentecost is celebrated on the 50th day after Easter, and so it always falls on Sunday. The apostles were in the temple when it was open, but stayed together in a nearby room when it was closed. Wondrous and powerful things happened that day. A sound like the blowing of a violent wind filled the house. The sound filled the house, even though the wind did not. It was the sound without the fury. The leaves on the trees were perfectly still, while the sound outside was like a freight train closing fast.

It's hard to describe in human terms what happened next, and even Luke seems to have a tough time finding the words to describe it. “And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

No Rosetta Stone software. No aps. They were given the gift of languages unlearned. Ever since the Tower of Babel, language had divided the human family and posed a significant barrier to the spread of the Good News. No longer! Just as the apostles had received the gift of faith, having done nothing to prepare themselves for it or deserve it, now they received the gift of languages, having done nothing to learn them or practice them.

The influential Jews of the day could make no better sense of it than we can today. It was a miracle of the first order. While believers tried, with the help of God to understand what God was doing through this mighty act, other looked for a logical explanation or an easy answer: Those crazies? Drunk as a skunk. Plowed. Not just under the influence, but WAY over and beyond the limit.

Peter remembered Joel's prophecy, and interpreted it in light of what was happening that day. His

message hit home. Wherever the Word of God is present, things happen. People came to faith in Jesus, were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to God's family that single glorious day.

What a day! What a party! It was overwhelming. It IS inspirational. The power of the Word of God changes people and changes lives. God's enemies become God's friends.

After the party, comes the growing up. The Christian Church has gone through stages over the centuries, and each stage has its share of problems. You might think that something almost 2,000 years old should have solved all its problems by now. You've heard it said that you can't step into the same river twice. The water that was there one minute ago is now down river. It has been replaced by fresh water from upstream. The same is true for the Christian church. Some of the people in it today will be with the Lord tomorrow. Some with birthdays on June 5 will be added tomorrow. But the church is changing, by virtue of the people who are part of it, but it is not changing at its center. Jesus Christ is there, as Lord of the Church. It is not changing its purpose, and that is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

What happened on Pentecost was not a sound and light show for the pleasure of the people there. It was a powerful equipping for the proclamation of the Gospel. It was a flashy start, and the fulfillment of God's promise to His people.

The Christian Church has always had to struggle with its past. It is part of growing up. Today, cynics believe that the seven last words of the church are: We never did it that way before! The truth is, those were the first words of the Christians Church. Proclaiming Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation for Jews AND Gentiles was a remarkable message.

Much of the New Testament is a sobering account of some of the problems which have surfaced as the Christian Church has been growing up. It has received false prophets and heretics, and even warmed up to them. It has compromised with the sinful world that is living apart from Christ and in rebellion against God. At times, it has lost its focus,

and has been tempted to exalt the importance of who WE are and what WE do. Its people have been a poor example of stewardship and faithfulness, and at times, we have eaten our young. We have often been hardest on our own. We have been unforgiving and unloving. We have been selfish and self-centered. We have been guilty of sins of commission, omission, and no mission. But our gracious God is ready to steady us, affirm us, discipline us, forgive us, and bless us as we move into the next stages of our growing up.

If you like parties, I believe your prospects are bright. The Holy Spirit is preparing to distribute special gifts to the people of God today, as much as ever. The Pentecost gifts were used then for proclaiming Christ crucified, and we have powerful and convincing gifts today.

On the birthday of the Christian church, we might want to have a big birthday cake. If we had the customary candles, just one per year, the smoke alarm would definitely go off. What are the chances for more parties in the years ahead?

The Holy Christian Church, while embattled, will not only survive – it will triumph. The Christian Church, which continues to trip and stumble as it grows up and matures, remains the bride of Christ the Lord, who rules over all things in heaven and on earth for the benefit of the Church. Jesus does not love the church apart from its people, because the Christian church IS people – HIS people. It is said often that people in our time are turned off by the organized church. I think not. I believe that people are turned off by the DISORGANIZED church – the Church that has lost its Pentecost fire or its passion for reaching others with the good news about Jesus.

The earthly birthday parties for the Christian Church will eventually end, because the Lord of the Church has promised that he will come again to judge the living and the dead. Believers will celebrate eternally in heaven with the King on His throne.

Since we believe that to be true, let us catch the fire and enthusiasm of Pentecost. We celebrate, not only

a past event like our birthday, but we celebrate our
FUTURE, secure in Jesus Christ.

Happy Birthday, Christian Church. We are blessed
to be a part of it. Happy Birthday to us!

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