

June 5, 2022
Pentecost/Communion

Romans 8:14-17

“Listen to Your Heart”

Here we are on *Pentecost!* Woo-hoo! Is this celebration something you grew up with? I didn't grow up with the awareness that *Lent-Easter and Pentecost* are all tied together in the remembrance of the mighty acts of God and description of our spiritual journey. Some of you may be wondering if you wound up at the wrong church today. After all – the Pentecostal tradition is quite different than the experience most of us have as Presbyterians. But as is so often the case – it is really a matter of emphasis.

It is common to read the story of the first Pentecost from the second chapter of Acts when we celebrate Pentecost. But today, instead, we read a passage from Romans which speaks not of the events of the day – but of *the outcome* of the day. Not of the story of how the spirit descended in Jerusalem – but how the spirit descends upon our hearts, our community and our world.

Paul was constantly arguing with people who believed that his message of the grace of God was not an innovation on the law and the Jewish tradition out of which it comes but a watering down. You can hear the same in churches today who feel God's call is to *tell the world the straighten up and fly right*. Paul, on the other hand gives us a perfect message for Pentecost, it is all about the spirit. The key to our lives is *not conformity to religious prescription*, but life lived by the spirit of God who redeems us.

So, if Paul says we are to live by the spirit does that mean we all really *should* be attending a Pentecostal church? Or is there *something deeper* here than any of our religious traditions? Our chapter begins with the marvelous assertion, *“There is therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus – for the law of the spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death.”*

Paul is pretty no nonsense here. Anything we set up to follow – even what feels like good and meaningful rules – instead of the spirit of Christ, leads to death.

If ecstatic emotional worship isn't the heart of Pentecost and our lives of faith, and Paul doesn't seem to think it is, then *how do we get our focus* for living as God's faithful children, *“By the Spirit.”*

Paul tells us there is a negative sign as to whether we are in sync with the spirit or not. Yes, the proverbs say the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...but that really should be “respect” for God being the place we discover wisdom – and we know that because Paul says we have *missed something if we are afraid of God*. We have misunderstood what it means to be God’s child if we are afraid our life mistakes will put us *out of the orbit* of God’s love.

Pentecost means we have a close relationship with God who loves us – God whom we address in familial terms – God who has become one of us – and suffered for the reconciliation of the world.

Our passage was winning us over – we live by the spirit by being free, by living in relationship and by suffering with God as well. Wait what? Freedom, relationship, and suffering? I guess two out of three isn’t bad – but who saw that last one coming? Think about it this way. Has life been *easy and flawless* for you? *Was it easy and without pain for Jesus?* If neither Jesus nor we have had the experience of life without pain – why *would* we expect that to be normal?

Faith means we develop the reflex to call out to God in our pain...not cuss our neighbor or assume everything is someone else’s fault or that God is falling down on the job. ***When it hurts, we remember whose we are***. Jesus didn’t become the savior without suffering and we don’t grow as Jesus’ brothers and sisters without it either. The one who saves us takes us along the same path upon which he travels. That means *both suffering* in the moment and *glory in the future*.

How in the world are we to live in relationship instead of by rules? Listen to your heart. Listen to the place the spirit of God resides. Listen to God whom the spirit tells us is our father. When we are hurt – and we don’t know what to do – it may well be time to listen to our heart. Live by the spirit. Listen.