



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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MAY 24, 2015  
PENTECOST SUNDAY

## A New Picture Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:1-21

There is a black and white photograph that has hung in the history room of the First Baptist Church in Savannah for at least thirty years. It was taken around 1929 and is a picture of the Sunday School members of the church—several hundred people—covering the broad front steps of that historic church. It is an impressive photo, reminding the viewer of the size and commitment of the congregation in those days.

Over the eight years that I served at First Baptist, almost every time I was in that history room with another person, especially a long-time member, they would point to that picture and ask, “Why can’t it be like that today?” meaning, “Why can’t we have that many people involved and active in our church now?”

It was not that they had forgotten that in those early days practically every member lived within a few blocks of the church or that most families had five or six children instead of one or two. They knew all too well that in the first half of the last century there was nothing much else to do on a Sunday but go to church. It did seem, however, as if everyone who asked that question was focused on the past and overlooking all that the church had done since that photograph was taken and was continuing to do in the present moment.

As the one hundred and ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the church approached, we had an idea. On a bright and beautiful day in November, we invited everyone out to the front steps of the church following worship and took a new picture which was placed on the cover of the next church directory and also hung in the history room. The older picture became a treasured reminder of the history of the church while the new picture became a reference for the ongoing ministry of the congregation.

Sometimes we need a new picture as a frame of reference for where we are in life now. I must admit that I like the picture of me that hangs in Sugg Foyer with those of our other ministers. I was younger and had lots of dark hair in those days! But the picture we just had made for our new directory

evidences the fact that I am still alive and kicking and looking forward to what God has in store for us. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that while God has certainly blessed us in the past, God is for more excited about the blessings of our future.

Peter and the other disciples understood. Fifty days following Jesus' death and resurrection, his followers could still be found cowering in that upper room which had become their headquarters and hideout. The room was thick with fear and doubt and uncertainty about the future of their faith.

Suddenly, like a mighty wind, the Spirit of God swept over them with what appeared to be tongues of fire. The room was immediately filled with energy, light, and a confidence such as none of them had ever before experienced. It was frightening and exciting, terrifying and invigorating all at once. Initial shouts of terror became joyful affirmations of all that God had done through the ages. Jesus' followers spilled out of that upper room into the streets below, speaking to anyone who would listen—and everyone was listening.

Jerusalem was a cosmopolitan city and pilgrims from all over the known world were gathered for Pentecost, as the Greeks called the traditional Feast of Booths which took place fifty days after Passover. The Feast of Booths, a harvest celebration, remembered the wilderness wanderings of the Hebrew people when they lived in temporary shelters. The festival was also associated with the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. Thus Jews from all over the world would assemble in Jerusalem to celebrate what God had done in the past. One hindrance to their celebration, however, was the fact that such a diverse group of people could not always communicate with one another. As William Shiell has observed, "In Jerusalem, the pilgrims sounded like people scattered after the Tower of Babel."<sup>1</sup>

When these Jews from all over the world heard the commotion coming from the upper room, they rushed into the streets to find out what was going on—and they listened. They listened because they could understand. No matter where they were from, visitors to the city could hear the disciples talking in their native languages and sharing the Gospel in their own tongues. Many of them were amazed at what was happening, while others scoffed and suggested that the followers of Jesus were drunk and profaning the festival which rooted the Jewish people in their sacred history. No doubt more than

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<sup>1</sup>William D. Shiell, "Revising Memories at Pentecost," *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics: Pentecost*, Robert B. Kruschwitz, gen. ed., (Waco: Institute for Faith and Learning, 2015), 79. This article provided the central idea for this sermon.

a few of these observant Jews turned to go back to their lodgings, muttering under their breath, “Why can’t it be like the good ‘ole days?!”

Peter had another idea. Speaking above the cacophony of voices, he shouted, “Wait! It is not what you think! These people are not drunk! After all it is only 9:00 in the morning! They are filled, not with wine, but with the Spirit of God—the same Spirit that God promised would one day inspire all people, young and old, women and men, to bear witness to the great things God is yet to do.” All around him, the other disciples were proclaiming that the same Spirit that had led their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt, the same Spirit that had accompanied them in the wilderness, and the same Spirit that had given them the law, was the Spirit who gave them Jesus who lived and died and rose again.

Peter and the other believers painted a new picture of what Pentecost meant for the Jewish people and all of humanity. No longer was it a time to look back on their important history; rather, it was an opportunity to see what God was doing in their midst now and to look forward to where the Spirit of God would lead them next. Indeed, from that day forward, the Spirit inspired and compelled the followers of Christ to share the Good News. The Spirit had come upon them, so they did what Jesus had commissioned them to do: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28: 19-20a).

Today we have the choice of looking back on what happened on that first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection and simply remembering that on that day the Church was born or we can experience what the Spirit is doing through the Church at this very moment. It a choice between remembering Pentecost as an amazing historical experience that may never be repeated or experiencing a new Pentecost as the Spirit moves among us at will today.

What is God doing among us today? We know that for sixty years amazing ministry has taken place on this block and throughout the community. Lives have been changed, souls have been nurtured, children have been blessed, and grieving families have been comforted. Myriad difficult questions have been asked and answers sought. Food and shelter have been provided, hope and dignity have been offered, opportunity, acceptance, and understanding have been shared. Our sixty years of ministry have been nothing short of a profound witness to the love of Christ.

Nevertheless, it is time for a new picture. What will it be? Our world today is different from what it was in 1955. Our congregation today is different

from what it was in 1955. You and I are different from the people we were whenever we first became a part of Lakeside. We have grown and changed and been swirled around by the Spirit of God until we are different people, and thank God that we are! The question is, what will God do with us now?

On this Memorial Day weekend we are grateful for the men and women who have served our country and for all they have done for us and the world. In the face of brutal aggression, they drew a line for liberty. Confronted with evil in the form of war, they sought to change the world. They did not seek to restore it to what it had been, but to make it better than it ever was. They sacrificed their own lives attempting to begin a better story, to paint a more beautiful picture of the future than they had experienced in the past.

Pentecost is a festival celebrating the continuation of life for us all. It is an opportunity to re-frame and re-imagine the ministry of our Christian witness. While flames of fire may not dance upon our heads, the Spirit of God burns brightly within our hearts. We know that our faith is not simply about laws given on a mountaintop but about grace demonstrated on a cross. Christian faith is not about wandering in a wilderness of beliefs but about discovering clarity and purpose in what we profess. It is no longer about gratitude for a successful harvest of crops but about the growth of souls and the fruit of the Spirit.

Lakeside looks a lot different now than it did sixty years ago when the Spirit invited those first members to dance to a new song. Our clothing styles are different, our worship has changed, our thinking about life and the world is vastly different. In our beginning, most members were from a Baptist background. Today, most of our new members come from traditions other than Baptist. Sixty years ago, our social structure was rather homogenous. Today our culture is diverse and changing day by day. Even our understanding of God's love and acceptance of us has changed. We experience God's love as being far broader than we ever imagined. Big ideas and small acts of kindness are a part of who we are. We nurture families and provide shelter. We feed the soul and the body. We learn what it means to be righteous and then welcome other people whose faith and needs challenge all of our preconceptions about God.

The Spirit of God may not swoop down upon us before we leave here this morning, pushing us into the streets to preach the Gospel to all who will listen; yet, those first believers did not expect it to happen either. God created the Church because he wanted us to have the power to make a difference in life, to change the world so that it becomes what God originally dreamed it to be. By faith the Spirit of God is within us and compels us to change the world

for the better. We are called to leave the upper rooms of our fears and insecurities and step into the future of our ministry. With our lips and our lives, we are called to speak the universal language of God's love which is goodness and grace. We are called to share the Good News in new and creative ways that will address the needs around us. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, let us create a new picture of God's love at work in this day and into the future. Amen.

May 24, 2015

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Once again the darkness could not hold its own against the light and night gave way to the dawn of a beautiful day, O God. In the same way, we know that the darkness which sometimes overshadows our lives cannot compete with the light of your goodness and grace. For that gift, we are most grateful.

You are our light, and we sing your praise, O God. You are our hope, and the brightness which makes each day possible. You are the foundation of our lives and the reason we do not fear. Illumine every dark corner of life, we pray. Walk with us through the shadows and bring us to the place of beauty and light where you dwell for all eternity.

This weekend we remember the light of those who serve our country and especially those who have given their lives in its service. We pray for them and for their families who have also sacrificed much. May their work not be in vain. May their efforts and courage inspire us all to work harder for peace. May we soon discover a path to peace that will end all killing and begin to nurture life and wholeness among all people.

We also pray for one another, O God, for we know the hardships and difficulties that we bear. Illnesses, weaknesses, tension at home, problems at work, frustrations at school, crises in the community, fear, and despair all touch us every day. We pray for your assistance, for your presence made known to us, for someone with whom we can talk, for respite from the daily drain of worry. Help us, O God, for so often we feel as if we cannot help ourselves. Clear for us the pathway ahead that we might walk more securely this road of life.

We also rejoice in the goodness of life, our Father, and we never forget the joy we share as part of your church. Celebrate with us the glad tidings you have given us, good news of life that conquers death and of faith that overcomes despair. As we have opened our lives to you, so open to us the riches of your mercy that we may live renewed by your grace which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we always pray. Amen.