

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Alive in the Spirit of God: We’ve Got Good News”  
Rev. Dr. John Judson  
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Ezekiel 36:26-32  
Acts 2:1-13

I want to begin this morning with a test your memory quiz about birthdays. I will ask a series of questions and raise your hand if you know the answer. First, how many of you know your own birthday? Good! How many of you know the birthday of at least one of your parents? Good. How many of you know the birthday of a spouse, significant other or a good friend? How many of you, if you have children, nieces or nephews, know at least one of their birthdays? Great. Now we will get a little Biblical. How many of you know Jesus’ birthday? Excellent! Now how many of you know the birthday of the church? Pentecost? Sorry, that’s wrong. OK, so I know that most of us in the church have been programmed that Pentecost is the church’s birthday. In fact if you go online you will see lots of churches celebrating today with birthday cakes, balloons and celebrations. But if we are to believe John Calvin, who for those of you who are not life-long Presbyterians, is the founder of Presbyterianism, the church has been around since Abraham. It has been around that long because the church is nothing more, and nothing less, than the called out and gathered people of God. The church then was around in Egypt, in the wilderness, in the Promised Land, and in the exile. So what then is Pentecost?

Some people claim that it is the first arrival of the Spirit. Yet again, as we saw in our call to worship moment, the Spirit has been around since creation. It has been around for the prophets. It was around for Jesus. What then is Pentecost all about? The answer I would offer is that Pentecost is about restoration. To understand this, we need only to look to the Woodward Dream Cruise. Any of you ever been? Right, so there are two basic kinds of cars that come to the Dream Cruise. First there are modified cars. These are the hotrods and others who have gleaming new engines, wheels and the like that would never have been imagined by those who designed them...well maybe just a little. Then there are the restored cars; cars that look like they just rolled off the factory floor and had never been driven. What Pentecost celebrates is God’s action of sending the Spirit to begin the process of fully restoring humanity; of bringing us back to the original condition in which we, in Genesis, rolled off God’s assembly line.

We can see this in the passage from the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel is writing to a people who had lost all hope; who were being sent to the junk yard of history. My image of them is that of the crushed cars that Cindy and I saw on a trailer heading to be recycled rather than to be restored. Ezekiel tells the people in exile however, that God has other plans; that there will come a time when God will give them a new heart, a heart of flesh to replace their heart of stone. That God will give them a heart that allows them to follow God’s rules for right living. That will save them from the kind of lives that bring death rather than life. And that will allow them to be the

kind of people who enjoy the richness of God's creation. In other words, that they will be completely restored. What Pentecost is then, is the moment when God sends the Spirit to begin this restoration work. When God begins to restore God's people and through God's people the whole creation. The Spirit does not come to start something called the church. The Spirit comes to begin this promised work of restoration in order that all of humanity and creation become what God intended it to be.

This gift of God is that this restoring Spirit is not limited to one day, or to one people, or to one denomination. We see this in that the Spirit causes the disciples to first go out in order to tell people that the restoration has begun. Second to go out and speak in all languages in order to remind the people in Jerusalem that this restoration is for all nations. What this means for us is that God's restorative Spirit is still with us. This Spirit is alive in each of us, taking our brokenness, our fear and our hurt and restoring us to be like those original models that lives in right relationship with God, others and creation; who find joy in living; who show the love of God to all that we meet; who offer the compassion and care of Christ in every moment of our lives. It also means that the Spirit is at work in our community; in Everybody's Church as we welcome all people into the community of restoration, so that all people can discover this love and grace of God in Jesus Christ, in our midst; so they can experience the restoration as well.

This morning, then my challenge to you is this, to ask yourselves, where am I allowing the Spirit's restoring work to change me that I might be an agent of restoration in the world? I ask this because we can either resist or embrace this restoring work. So once more, here is my challenge. Ask yourselves this question, where am I allowing the Spirit's restoring work to change me so that I might be an agent of restoration in the world?