

# SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

Pentecost Sunday  
Year B

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Text: Acts 2:1-21

Title: “A Place to Call Home: What’s Mind Is Yours”

Last week I did something I’ve never done before, and I was a bit uncomfortable doing it. I went into a bar, sat down, ordered lunch and asked to speak with the manager. I’ve been in bars before but never asked to speak with the manager. The waitress said she was in the back cooking. I said “Fine, but when she has a minute I’d like to talk with her.” She gave me a strange look but said okay.

Just before I received my order, out from the kitchen comes a smiling woman looking for me. I introduced myself as the pastor of Auburn UMC, and I was wondering if it would be okay if I brought a small group to the bar to do a small group study over dinner. The study is called The Art of Neighboring, and since she is one of our neighbors—it was the Auburn Hotel—I thought it seemed appropriate to meet her and spend some time at her place if it was okay.

She was delighted. Said she was married at AUMC by Lawson Crane. Apparently she knows quite a few of you. Then she invited me to call ahead to make sure they saved a table for our small group of 5 or 6 as we learn about ways of being intentional about loving the neighbors who live near us. I wanted to start with Mary Williams, the manager of the Auburn Hotel.

Why did I feel so hesitant to take this kind of step? Why was I uncomfortable? It is different, not something we’ve done before. At least, as I said, not something I’ve done before. Maybe it’s fear? Fear of what others might think. Maybe it’s just fear of change. Or maybe it’s simply stepping out of the comfort zone of the church building. It’s safe here inside these walls. We know—at least those of us on the inside—what to expect, where to go. It’s our home. But what if God is calling us to move? What if God is calling us to get out of our comfort zone of this building and get out there and be the church? What then?

We need look no further than the story of Pentecost in the book of Acts to gain some insight. First, what does Pentecost mean? The Rev. Dr. Mark D. Roberts provides a nice synopsis:

The English word “Pentecost” is a transliteration of the Greek word *pentekostos*, which means “fifty.” It comes from the ancient Christian expression *pentekoste hemera*, which means “fiftieth day.”

But Christians did not invent the phrase “fiftieth day.” Rather, they borrowed it from Greek-speaking Jews who used the phrase to refer to a Jewish holiday. This holiday was known as the Festival of Weeks, or, more simply, Weeks (*Shavuot* in Hebrew). This name comes from an expression in Leviticus 23:16, which instructs people to count seven weeks or “fifty days” from the end of Passover to the beginning of the next holiday (*pentekonta hemeras* in the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture).

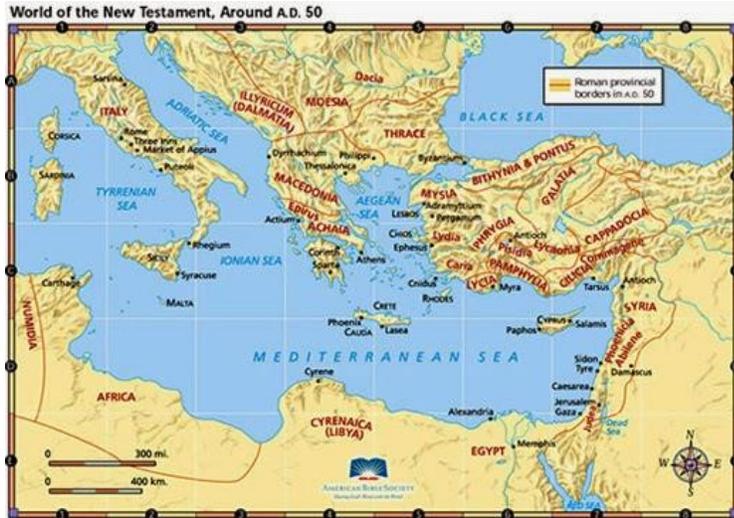
*Shavuot* was the second great feast in Israel’s yearly cycle of holy days. It was originally a harvest festival (Exod 23:16), but, in time, turned into a day to commemorate the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. This day became especially significant for Christians because, seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, during the Jewish celebration of *Shavuot*/Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon his first followers, thus empowering them for their mission and gathering them together as a church.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/what-is-pentecost-why-does-it-matter/>

So Pentecost basically means “50 days”. Before this 50<sup>th</sup> day, the disciples were not active beyond their own circle. Earlier in Acts, we hear of Peter speaking to a group of about 120 people, but no missionary journeys were begun. No congregations formed. In fact, they were often in fear for their lives after Jesus was crucified, fearful they’d be next. In his appearances following the resurrection, Jesus repeatedly tells them “Do not be afraid” and “Peace be with you.” Still, in the intervening 50 days between Easter and Pentecost, they clung to each other, apparently unsure as to how to proceed. What would come next?

But then this 50<sup>th</sup> day comes and the disciples are all together again in their own group, in a house, and this strange, powerful, overwhelming experience of God’s Holy Spirit overtakes them. It’s so strange, so unusual that images of tongues of fire and a description of the sound like the rush of a powerful wind—I’m thinking tornado or gale—are used to try to convey what’s happening here. This is a new experience. Something is happening here.

Yet, it’s not just the sound like a powerful wind or the sight of strange images of tongues but other sounds too that reveal something new is happening here. I want to show you a map of the Mediterranean region around A.D. 50.



The disciples are in Jerusalem. They are located in the postage stamp of a country in which Jesus spent his life and ministry. However, with the experience of Pentecost, the disciples are blown out of their little house into a world of people who speak other languages from other places in the world. Some of them are mentioned: Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, even Arabs. The Holy Spirit gives the disciples the ability to communicate the gifts of God in Christ with those from other lands. No more are they limited to the confines of their little group in their little house. Now, the Spirit blows them out of the house and out into the vast uncomfortable world unknown to them. Now, God is casting them out as Jesus told them in Matthew's Gospel "to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." It's not just Jerusalem God is interested in saving but the whole world.

When the Spirit of God shows up one thing is certain: change happens. Things are stirred up. Of course, when God moves people off center--when God does a new thing--there are always critics, always those voices that have other explanations or criticisms.

"Nothing holy about this. They just drank too much wine for breakfast!"

Ever hear voices like that or share such interpretations yourself? I suspect the truth is we all might have some of each in us: the voice of the critic and the conviction of the faithful. Yet, how often someone catches the excitement of the Spirit and wants to do something new as the church or maybe they really want to change the way they're living-- believes the Spirit is leading them--and out come the critics:

"It'll never work."

"Costs too much money. We can't afford it."

"We tried that once in 1968 and it didn't work then and won't now."

"You want to lead a small group study where?"

"You can't change. A leopard cannot change its spots."

It might help to remember that Jesus faced such criticisms, being accused of being a drunkard and a glutton, condemned for eating and drinking with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners, even being accused of being possessed by a demon as he brought healing to those

suffering from mental illness or demon possession. In spite of alternate interpretations, still--one thing is certain--when the Holy Spirit shows up, change is in the air. It's not change for the sake of change but change in order to share with more people the good news of the mighty acts of God through the love of Jesus Christ for all people.

So Peter, the one who is evolving from denier to leader, the one transformed from stubborn fisherman to powerful apostle, speaks to the critics among them and interprets for everyone present that this isn't about intoxication. Rather, it's a fulfillment of scripture. It's the movement of God in the last days in which the promise of God to pour out God's Spirit on all flesh has come to be. It's the fulfillment of God's promise in which that Spirit-coming would result in people dreaming of the great possibilities God has in store. It's the power of God evident in the visions of those who are inspired by that same Spirit. It's not about intoxication. It is God present and alive. God among us. Now! Trusting this, "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

As I was thinking about this all week, I noticed a Facebook post a colleague shared. It was a provocative slide with a quote. It read, "We will never change the world by going to church. We will only change the world by being the church." And then there was a string of comments in response to the quote from other readers. Comments like:

"Performance, not attendance"

"Relationship, not religion."

"Be ye doers and not hearers"

"I really do believe that if Jesus was walking on Earth today, He wouldn't be preaching in the church. He would be out in the streets, night clubs, to save which is lost!"

"We need to do both."

"You can't be the church without going to church first."

"Amen! The world does not see how you live in church, it sees us when we are amongst them and face the same problems they face and how we deal with them. I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day!"

If we only go to church to sit and listen, or to sing a few praise songs, but don't take any of what we learn in church outside and put it into action we are only fooling ourselves. That is not Christianity, it is religion. Christianity drives us to go out and make a difference. Religion only makes us feel good about ourselves."

Pentecost is a challenge to be blown by the Spirit outside these walls. The men's t-shirts they are selling are appropriately red in color which is the color of Pentecost representing the

tongues of fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit. What is written on the back is also appropriate for Pentecost: “The Church has left the building.”

I want to challenge you to do that. I want to challenge you to volunteer to step out of your comfort zone and leave the building, to allow the Holy Spirit to blow us out of this place in order to share the love of Christ. I want to ask you to be proactive and volunteer to help with the many events Tina Musial and the Faithbuilders and Evangelism teams are working on to do exactly that. Talk with Tina about helping with the Bike Night at Williams Township Hall on June 9<sup>th</sup> or to help with kids with the new Garden Club. Maybe you can't run with the kids anymore but you can sit at a registration table or help prepare something ahead of time or help serve snacks. Encourage the Evangelism team by putting the yard signs in your yards for VBS and the new contemporary service coming up this fall. Watch for the new billboard going up on US10 on August 17<sup>th</sup> to invite people to a new beginning as we begin anew with the new service on September 13<sup>th</sup>, and use it as a reminder to invite people yourself. Talk with me about coming to dinner with me at The Auburn Hotel as we gear up for the study on loving our neighbors who live near us. Write a note on the communication card about how you want to help the church leave the building in order to love people in the name of Christ.

Watch for opportunities to be blown by the Spirit out into the world of our community in order to share the mighty works of God through the incomparable love of Jesus Christ for all flesh. And then don't wait for people to beg you to help. Some of you already do this, but how about flipping it around and asking how you can help? About what action might the Spirit be prompting you on this Pentecost Sunday as one who follows Jesus who calls us to be his witnesses “...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)?

I never considered leading a small group study in a bar before, but I believe the Spirit is prompting us now in new ways to be blown out of our little house and into the world because we can't help it. We have a story to tell. We have a Savior who, as he shared with his disciple in John 15, basically says “what is mine is yours” as he told them before his death,

<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”