

A traveling evangelist always put on a grand finale at his revival meetings. On the last night he was to preach at a church, he would secretly hire a small boy to sit in the ceiling rafters with a dove in a cage. Toward the end of his sermon, the preacher would shout for the Holy Spirit to come down, and the boy in the rafters would dutifully release the dove, allowing it to fly down and alight on the pulpit as trained.

At one revival meeting, however, nothing happened when the preacher called for the Holy Spirit to descend. He again raised his arms and exclaimed: "Come down, Holy Spirit!" Still no sign of the dove! Much to the preacher's consternation and more to the surprise of the congregation, they then heard the anxious voice of the small boy call down from the rafters: "Sir, a yellow cat just ate the Holy Spirit. Shall I throw down the yellow cat?"

The church is still tempted to throw down the yellow cat. To do something, to say something, to cause a stir, to offer a spectacle; something, anything to attract attention. But the truth is we do not need the yellow cat – but we certainly still need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit remains as God's gift to the church, God's gift to God's people, God's gift to the world. The Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus! The Holy Spirit is not a force that we can generate by the strength of our commitment or the fervor of our enthusiasm. We do not "have" the Spirit, the Spirit has us! It is the Holy Spirit who names us and claims us, as God's own! The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, is for us both the whisper and the shout of God. The Holy Spirit is both the whisper and the shout of God because God gets through to some of us with a whisper, and to some of us with a shout. Either way, with a whisper or a shout, God, by means of the Person of the Holy Spirit, will get through to us.

That is the lesson of the Day of Pentecost when God stretches beyond the limitations of divided languages ensuring that the Good News of God's love and salvation for the world is heard in every tongue. On Pentecost, with a whisper and a shout God was heard, love was offered, hope received.

All of us who trust in Jesus Christ have been named and claimed by God. It does not matter what words or terms any of us prefer to use to talk about our faith – all of us belong to God. There is no room for anyone or any group ever to imagine that they and they alone have a monopoly on truth or faith. There is never, ever any reason for spiritual pride. All of us are God's children - Jews and Greeks, sober and drunk, black and white, old and young, poor and rich, pious, holy types and rough regular types; loud and quiet; those who are able to talk using a religious vocabulary and those of us who stumble and stutter when we describe the faith within us – all of us who trust our lives to Jesus as Savior and Lord – are named and claimed by God, by the Holy Spirit, the whisper and the shout of God.

As we near the end of our Easter season and this sermon series on being face to face with Jesus I want to highlight five essential elements, five markers that need our attention so that we as a church can both hear and act upon both the whisper and the shout of God.

Marker 1: Rooted in faith.

On the first Pentecost Peter and the other disciples were rooted in faith, they gathered together, waiting, waiting, waiting, just as Jesus had instructed them. They waited for the gift of the Spirit, and then receiving this gift they then proclaimed the message of God's love in the Person and Passion of

Jesus. Such faith was not limited to the day of Pentecost but in so many ways the early believers lived out of their faith. As a result they faced derision, they were accused of being mad or drunk, they endured persecution and even martyrdom but they continued to be rooted in faith. And so it needs to be for us today – only as we are rooted in faith and only as we allow that faith to be our lifeblood can we be serious about being the church together.

Marker 2: United in fellowship.

“When the Day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place.” And this being together continued as the story of the Book of Acts unfolds. This new type of community became the model for the Church of every age. The time is long overdue for us Christians to think in terms of "We" rather than "I." The biblical focus is on the community. God's answer to the human predicament was to create a new community in Jesus Christ, to start a family, in Jesus Christ. Individuals gain their identity by belonging to the community, and the community finds fulfillment in the individual.

Among all the miracles contained in the New Testament, aside from the Resurrection of our Lord, an argument can be made that perhaps the most astounding is the emergence of the enduring foundations of the Christian church out of a small, scattered, disheartened, confused, and weak collection of hesitant believers. Beginning with the event of Pentecost the early Christian believers devoted themselves wholeheartedly to building a distinctive community of faith, unique to the world. And so it is for us – God has given us the task of being united in fellowship. And remember that this fellowship included and includes and needs to include people of every tongue and tribe. The experience of Pentecost continues in our midst as each and all of us speak out of our experience of the grace and goodness of God, there are people who will only be able to hear and receive and understand and own the message from God through you!

Marker 3: Devoted to the God

There are lots of things that churches do that other people or groups also do. We have all our activities for different age groups and interests. The one activity where the church is the only show in town is in our primary task and calling of worshipping God. In the aftermath of the coming of the Holy Spirit the Church, rooted in faith, united in fellowship, devoted itself to worship. Day by day the Christian community gathered in the Temple and in their own homes for worship and teaching and the breaking of bread.

Such worship involves participation and it is an offering we make, not a show we observe. In worship as in most things no one congregation can be all things to all people. As we plan and prepare for the future here at OAPC we plan to build on the foundation of the style and tradition which is part of our shared life while also being ready to welcome and include modern hymns and songs as we have been continuing to do over the past year. One hope I have for this summer when we will maintain our regular schedule of Sanctuary Worship at 8:45 and 11:00 and Sunday School at 9:45 is that a greater variety of people will choose to worship at some different times than they normally do as they seek to make the most of the long summer Sundays. There is Nursery each week at 8:45, there is a Children's sermon. There are not two or even three congregations at OAPC, there is one congregation that worships at different times and sometimes in different ways. At all Services of Worship it is part of how we worship God and part of our shared life that we aim to create an ever more welcoming attitude toward all those who choose to join with us in worshipping God.

Marker 4: Dedicated in stewardship.

All of the future plans that we will identify and all the efforts we will make to turn these plans into realities will cost. There will be a cost in terms of our time, our talents and our budget. I want to let all of you into a secret! Once you hear the secret, you can decide where it is a little secret or a great big secret! As a congregation we have many, many faithful people who are pretty dedicated in stewardship – but some of us, most of us, all of us are still holding out at least a little on God! We know it and God knows it – and God still loves us anyway. The future will involve us in releasing more of who we are and what we have money, time and talents into the work of God in this place.

Rooted in faith, United in fellowship, Devoted in worship, Dedicated in stewardship, these four markers both lead to and describe the **fifth and final marker: Inspired in mission.** Jesus Himself had commanded the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit and then to go as His witness in the world! They were to begin in Jerusalem – the very place where we are; then to Judea – to the people who were like them in most things; then to Samaria – to people who are different and finally to all the ends of the earth – because there is no limit to God's love. This was not only Jesus' model for the first disciples but it remains the model for you and I. An outward mission focus is part of what it means to be a healthy congregation. We are called to have a focus on our neighbors across the street, around the corner, across the city and county and region and nation and world. The many partnerships, ministries, and missions founded and supported and held so dear by this church bear witness to our heritage and our history and our future that is Mission.

Rooted in faith, United in fellowship, Devoted in worship, Dedicated in stewardship, Inspired in mission. These can and need to be our markers as hear again of the whisper and shout of God in the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church on Pentecost and as we, in our time, answer God's call to be the Church together, for each other and for all who will be welcomed in.

It is to this great endeavor that we are all called by God and this great endeavor asks and expects of all of us our involvement and commitment. In what God is asking of us and in where God will lead us I sense opportunity and growth and challenge for all of us – so despite not having all the answers and not knowing exactly what we will become and achieve I wouldn't want to miss out on it and I look forward to being a partner with all of you in this future in which we live out what it means to be named and claimed by God: Rooted in faith; United in fellowship; Devoted in worship; Dedicated in stewardship; Inspired in mission. God has a whisper and a shout for us to hear and act upon. That was the meaning of Pentecost then and this is the meaning of Pentecost for us still today. AMEN.