

All Together In One Place

A sermon preached at Second Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Pentecost Sunday, May 18, 1997. Scripture Lessons: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34. 35b; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

On the first Christian Pentecost an explosion took place in Jerusalem comparable to the Big Bang that many scientists say took place at the beginning of the universe. Scientists claim that about 20 billion years ago all the matter in the universe was *all together in one place* the size of the nucleus of an atom. Then the Big Bang took place and that infinitesimal singularity began to expand at the speed of light, 186,000 miles per second and has continued to expand to this day. Keep that image of the Big Bang in your mind as we look at the story of the first Christian Pentecost.

~~When the day of Pentecost had come, Luke tells us, they were~~
all together in one place. "They" refers to the Christian church. All the Christians in the entire universe were in one room in Jerusalem. Luke tells us in chapter 1 that the number of Christians was 120. One hundred and twenty Christians in the entire universe.

Compare that to the population of Jerusalem in that day estimated to be about 100,000. One hundred and twenty Christians in a city of 100,000, less than 1/10 of one percent. The estimated population of the entire world at that time was about 138,000,000. 138,000,000 people versus only one hundred and twenty Christians. Last Sunday there were 250 Christians present at the eleven o'clock service, over twice as many Christians at the eleven o'clock service as there were in the entire universe

on that first Pentecost Sunday. Do you get a sense of how small and puny and infinitesimal the Christian church was in comparison with the rest of the world?

They were all together in one place. Then the Big Bang banged. Something happened at about 9 o'clock in the morning on that first Christian Pentecost that started a new creation, the creation of the Christian church. "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

Such an incredible phenomenon attracted a growing throng of curious Jews who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Pentecot; Jews from all over the world, Parthians, Medes, Romans, Libyans, Egyptians. Many people were able to hear their own national languages plainly above what must have been a din of foreign tongues.

Peter became the spokesperson for the Christians. He stood up and addressed the assembled multitude. He said that what was happening was a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. He went on to preach about Jesus. Finally, he stung his hearers for their involvement in the death of Jesus: "This Jesus... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men". But in closing he announced the way of salvation: Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They

responded. And Luke tells us three thousand men and women received his word and were baptized. So on the morning of the day of Pentecost there were only 120 Christians in the entire world. At the end of the day, 3,120. The Big Bang had begun.

But it was only the beginning. In chapter 4 of Acts we read that a few days later Peter preached another sermon and 5000 believed and were baptized. In chapter 6 we read that "the word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Do you see what I mean by a Big Bang? The Christian church was expanding like the universe expanded following the Big Bang.

Across the ages the echo of that first Pentecost can still be heard. In the year 100 AD, two generations after Pentecost, the Scriptures had been translated into Hebrew and Greek. Six tenths of one percent of the world's population had been baptized into the Christian faith. By AD 200, six generations after the Big Bang that was Pentecost 3.5% of the world had been baptized into the Christian faith. The Scriptures have been translated into Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Syriac. By AD 300, 9 generations after Pentecost, 10% of the world's population had been baptized. The scriptures have been translated into Coptic, the language of ancient Egypt. AD 400, 12 generations after Pentecost the effects of the Big Bang were still being felt as the Christian church continued to expand rapidly. Nearly 20% of the worlds populatation had been baptized. The scripture had been translated into 11 languages including Gothic, the language of

the barbarians in the North. By 700 A.D. the scriptures had been translated into Armenian, Georgian (the language of southern Russia), Ethiopic, Nubian, Arabic and Slavic. Nearly 2000 years after Pentecost the church is still expanding rapidly especially in Africa and Asia. The nineteenth century saw the most extensive expansion of the Christian church in its history. And it all started with 120 men and women in one place filled with the Holy Spirit.

What holds us back, the Oxford Presbyterian Church, from turning this town upside down? ^{and being the nucleus of a new creation, individually corporate,} What obstacles? What fears? What inhibitions? We believe in Christ. We've been baptized. God has promised us the Holy Spirit. What obstacles prevent the Holy Spirit from using us as the Spirit used those 120 Christians?

When the day of Pentecost had come, all the members of the Oxford Presbyterian Church were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind coming down third street, and it filled the entire sanctuary where all those Presbyterians were seated. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among the elders, deacons, choir, visitors and members and a tongue rested on each of them. Teenagers woke up, sat up straight, looked all around wide eyed and said, "Wow! I've never seen anything like this before. Am I really in the Oxford Presbyterian Church?" And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ~~Wouldn't that be great?~~ Teenagers - I understand the Preacher. The Hispanic Community ... And every member of our church able to speak effortlessly so friends neighbors understand that God has come to us in Jesus ...

It shouldn't surprise ... ⁴ The one who created the universe ... loved us so much he came in the person of Christ ... and sent His Spirit to bring about a new creation.

Hispanic
Ethnics
Chinese
State-bounded
language