

Welcome and Peace:

What a big day of Celebrations! This is the day we celebrate the 2,000 year old Christian event called Pentecost! It's been called the Birthday of the Church, so Happy Birthday, church.... Happy....

Whoosh!

We'll also lift up 5 graduating seniors during our prayer time. What an exciting time for them, and for my son, Abe, who graduates Friday. We parents may be a little torn in our excitement.

AND, our Christian religion is adding to its numbers today when baby Ella becomes a Christian in a few minutes. She didn't even realize she was choosing the day of Pentecost!

The choir will sing *Soul on Fire* to celebrate it all. Whoosh!

And, now, as we're able, let us rise and pass and receive the peace and whoosh of Christ with our neighbors.

WWWHHHOOOSSSHHH Part 2

First Congregational Church, Branford

Acts 2:1-21; June 9, 2019

Rev. Suzanne Personette

(following the Sanctuary Choir's anthem, *Soul on Fire*)

Now let's read about *the church on fire* in the Book of Acts:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And 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.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to

one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind!!!—WWWHHHOOOSSSHHHHH—now, just as loudly as you did last year, say it with me... and the wind filled the entire house where the 120 believers had been holed up together in Jerusalem for 50 days following the resurrection. Tongues of fire rested on each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were not drunk! While you *can* be drunk at 9:00 in the morning, they were not.

As I said last year, even if you’re a doubter, whatever happened that day of Pentecost had to be something pretty momentous. These believers were not going to budge from that house. With their association with Jesus, they knew the officials would be on the lookout for them. They were terrified to be persecuted, beaten, and hung on a cross like their leader. No, they weren’t going anywhere. So, God had a big dilemma, right?! *What am I gonna do to get them outta there to spread the Good News of My love, forgiveness, and resurrection.* God needed the church to be born! So, the Mighty Whoosh whooshed through – fear **left** them and they were filled with uncontainable joy. Say it with me: *wwwhhhooossshhh!*

Their souls on fire, men and women went out into the streets to prophesy about Jesus and love. A couple of years ago I figured that some of these women were pregnant, that these babies had mothers and fathers who were filled with an uncontainable spirit, and that the babies were filled, too! I thought about who these spirit-filled babies must’ve become from all of this fearless joy. Which made me think of baby Ella, and her parents, sponsors, family, CDC and us - may she be nurtured in the faith, and told *to go and tell*. Go and tell, baby Ella! She’s our newest recruit! We place our hope in her. We support you, Angelo and Kim, as you raise this *spirited* child. It’s going to mean something that she was baptized on

Pentecost. You watch.

Last Pentecost I assured you that God would transform the church, and I encouraged you to continue to be faithful as you awaited your new settled minister. Transformation... often involves hard, and emotion-filled things. So, you know what we do? We *ground* ourselves in something the apostle Paul said to the Roman community, *All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose*. Remember this.

Part 2, I'm having a feeling of new joy rising in me, that something different is wanting to have its way with us - that we're moving into a growing time - which is perfect because we need to prepare the way for that new minister!

The Pastoral Search Committee is up and running, the Governance committee will soon make their recommendations, the Joy Tribe is set to come up with fun ideas for us to gather together, and this week we rolled out our job description for a Christian Education Coordinator. Whoosh!

We've also been *Making Christ's Love Known in Word and Action* through Branford Builds - the report was in Thursday's eSpire. The church is serving those in need. And, of course, we're sending out five graduates and a baby to spread the good news - whoosh!

A little about all of the languages that were spoken at Pentecost. In the Tower of Babel story in Genesis, everyone shared one language in an effort to reach the heavens. Today's Acts passage tells of everyone speaking in his or her own language and of everyone understanding each other! Wow! The Holy Spirit could whoosh through the world to bring *the miracle of understanding!* You know, where we're less invested in our opinions and beliefs being understood and become more invested in understanding where others are coming from. Like, it becomes less important to me for you to understand what I think, feel, and believe, and more important to find out what you think, feel, and believe. I want to understand those Americans, I want to understand those Egyptians, I want to understand those Romans. God could bring *the miracle of understanding* to our world.

I was reading in June 5th's periodical, *The Christian Century*, of a rabbi who witnessed community support following the violence that took place at the Chabad Synagogue of Poway, California. He said, "We are all created in God's image; we're all partners in creation. No matter what faith or religion you're from, we all have to make this world a better place. All of us are human beings. It doesn't matter if you are Jews or Christians or Muslims." A minister in Poway said, "There is no superior race; we are all created equal. We are committed to loving all people."

Love is a powerful language.

Speaking of language, last week I lifted up during joys and concerns to speak positive words to youth - they receive so many critical messages, so flood them with positive ones. Not just to your own youth, but to any youth you're around. I then said we could do that with everyone, to speak positive words instead of critical ones, to just check ourselves before we're getting ready to criticize. I got a lot of positive feedback about that! And, on Thursday during Parker Fox's reception post he shared that after that message he intentionally told a checker at the supermarket that she was doing a great job and he said her face just lit up. She thanked him, and he talked about how good it made him feel, too - all for the price of one simple compliment - 5 words - you're doing a great job - whoosh!

Turn to your neighbor right now and give them a compliment...

Amen to the compliment! Whoosh!

After Parker told me that, I started telling everyone they're doing a great job - I told my mail carrier, the checker at Rite-Aid (the checker at Wal-Mart).

See, when you curse *something* or *someone*, it curses you....

I know that *whenever* I've cursed something, or someone, it comes back on me. I feel cursed. I am cursed. Be careful. Speak words of blessing, and have them come back on you.

One more example of how the *right words* make a difference.

There was another article in *The Christian Century* about eight teenagers in the confirmation class at First United Methodist Church in Omaha, who stood before the congregation on Confirmation Sunday in April and read a statement saying they do not want to become members of the congregation at this time. The teens said they took their stand on principle because they believed the denomination's vote to uphold and strengthen its ban on LGBTQ ordination and marriage to be "immoral" and "unjust." "We want to be clear that, while we love our congregation, we believe the United Methodist policies on LGBTQ clergy and same-sex marriage are immoral," they said. The eight teens received a standing ovation. Whoosh! That's how change happens. They said we're not going to take this. Thank God our own denomination doesn't have such a ban on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer folk.

Now, in terms of the Christian Church, churches wonder if they'll survive the winds of this century. But, who does the church belong to? Us? The church belongs to *God*, and it's within God's power to grant the spirit, for people to catch it, and to go and tell. God promises to set us on fire, with a fire that can't be extinguished! Too often people give excuses why they can't get out there, but all you have to do is wait and to let the spirit fill you up - and you can go - you can tell about this great church, about God's love, and what Jesus did for you. Go and tell.

Ya know, too often we look behind us and talk about what was, oh, I remember the church back in the day when so and so was here and we did this and that, and the church was packed, even the balcony... but, remember what happened to Lot's wife when she looked back... she was turned into a pillar of salt! Paul also encourages churches to *forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead.*

In this time of graduation, a mom shared with me that many moons ago when they dropped their daughter off for college, the daughter walked them back to the car and said goodbye. She then turned, and she didn't look back. Her mother couldn't believe she could just walk away like that. But, this newly adult daughter was moving forward into her new life. She couldn't look back.

My friends, we are moving forward. We are moving on. Whoosh?

And, what better day to begin anew when we get a little wind at our back, as well as the affirmation of a new recruit! This is a day to fill up with good news, to be a church on fire where all are welcome and understood.

May the fire of love and understanding be upon us as we're sent forth to spread the good news!

Whoosh!