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Acts 2:1-21
6-5-2022

Holy Fire Transforms the Circle

Good morning church. Today's sermon is a mixture of Pentecost and the special delegate session last week. The Holy Spirit calls us into uncomfortable emotions and tensions, moving us forward into something new. Sometimes this newness is a cause of great joy and other times sorrow. Because as we've learned, letting go of something can be painful regardless of if it is a good or bad thing.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Why widen the circle?

When I was at Goshen College, the college was wrestling with the problem of fewer and fewer Mennonite students coming to the college. Either because people were having fewer children or Mennonites were choosing other schools. But we asked ourselves what was the core to being Mennonite and what was secondary. Presumably, so that we could shed the secondary to be more appealing. And I did not really want to be more appealing to those non-Mennonites. To me, the non-Mennonites were the basketball or baseball teams. People I associate with controversies like singing the national anthem at the beginning of ball games. I did not want to widen the circle, because I was afraid that making it wider would change things.

But I also know the pain of being outside the circle.

During the special delegate session last week, we sang the hymn, "draw the circle wide." It became a theme for many of us and a cause of fear for others. Where do we draw the lines of who is included? And what happens when we listen to the voices from the margins. Might they ask for ramps and mechanical doors so they can navigate this church with their walkers? Might they want to become pastors and marry someone of the same gender? Of course. We've known for years that our churches are old and difficult for people with disabilities and that church policy has hurt to the LGBTQ community is well documented.

Perhaps the circle looks different depending on where we are located. When I am on the inside, I worry about how pure and perfect the circle is so that I can see myself as pure and perfect. But when I am or my loved ones are on the outside, I want to tear down the boundaries that separate us.

On Pentecost, we see the Holy Spirit appear in power.

Suddenly, the disciples are able to speak to everyone in their native language. They were inside the same circle in that they were all Jews, but outside of each other's circles because they spoke different languages and called different places home.

There was a dividing wall between the disciples and their fellow People of God. Language and culture, I'm sure many of you know how difficult those two things are to overcome. But the power of the holy spirit drew these people together. The Holy Spirit drew the circle wide.

I'm not here to tell you how far the circle is supposed to be drawn. I'm not here to say who is in and who is out. Unless you mess with my family or people I love, cause you better let them in or we're going to have problems. But as I read this message of the Holy Spirit descending on all flesh, of widening the circle. I recognize it for the scary amazing miracle it is. Every person we let into our circle, into our lives, is going to change us, transform us by the power of love. Just like you have transformed me by letting me into your circle.

What this passage is saying to me is to let go of fear, and trust that the widening of the circle is part of the plan. The plan is to reconcile all of creation to itself. To make our enemies into neighbors. And to teach us that if we do not love our neighbors, then we cannot love God. Amen.