

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“The Spirit-Filled Church”

Introducing Pentecost

Today is Pentecost, the day that we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles. It is also the day we celebrate the birth of the universal Church. The Church has existed since the time of Adam but this is the day that we celebrate its formation as an institution.

I find the Book of Acts one of the most fascinating books of the Bible. The Book of Acts describes how the early Church grew. Maybe I find this interesting because as a pastor my job is the development of a congregation. Nonetheless, all Christians should be interested in learning about how the Church grows.

What Is the Church?

Because this is the Birthday of the Church, it is a good day to think about what the church is. (The church is not a building. I hope you all know that much.) *The church is made up of everyone who has faith in Christ.* In that sense, the true church is invisible. We can't see into people's hearts. Therefore, we don't know who really has faith and who does not. We need to wait for judgment day to find out who is truly Christian and who is not.

The true Church is invisible but this does not mean that denominations are unimportant. The fact is that there are many groups that claim to be Christian: The Mormons, The Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Scientology, The Moonies. They all

claim to be part of the Christian Church. How do you determine whether they are or not?

Denominations are important because they provide summaries of what is taught in their congregations. People need to know that or they might be led astray from justification by grace through the merits of Jesus Christ. Some denominations are visible expressions of the invisible Church. Some are not. Their doctrine and practice will clue you in on what they are.

An Efficient Church

Now that we understand that the Church is the society of all people who have faith in Christ, I would like to discuss how the church has changed over the years. One change that I see between the church of the first century and today is that we have become much more efficient.

There is a story about an enlisted man that enters an army hospital. At the front desk, he was told to go into the next room so he pushed open two wide doors and went to the next room. At a second desk, he was told to go into another room so he pushed open two wide doors and went to the next room.

Just before the enlisted man went to the hospital, an officer was at home complaining to his wife about a medical problem. She told him to go the hospital but he refused. She continued pleading with him to go until he promised to go. When he arrived, he went through the first set of doors. Then he went through the second set of doors. Before he knew it, he wound up back in the parking lot. He thought to himself, "Well, I kept my promise to go to the hospital so I am going home now." When he arrived home, he told his wife he had been to the hospital. She asked him how it went and he told her, "The care isn't that good but it is the most efficient hospital I've ever seen."

I have to admit that I thought of St. Martin when I read that joke. St. Martin is the most efficient church I have ever seen. You are in and out in hour. There is no waiting, no inefficiencies but I wonder if you are getting the best spiritual care. Are you like this army officer who is happy to say he went to the hospital even if it didn't help him?

Greater Church Fellowship

An hour per week is better than nothing but you could be getting a lot more from this congregation if you stayed for Bible study. A lot of preparation goes into those classes and you are missing out if you don't attend. In case you've never been to an adult Bible study, it's not like a sermon where you sit quietly while I talk. A Bible study includes a lot of dialogue between the students and the instructor which makes it a lot more fun. I think that is the way it was in the early house churches in the apostles' time too.

Studying together builds friendships. Think about your classmates from school. There is a real bonding that can go on in those classes. I know many of you are friends from growing up around here but studying together and praying together can make those bonds even stronger.

The Master Church Builder

Some of you may be disinclined to go to Bible study because someone there rubs you the wrong way. Some people avoid church altogether for that reason. But that is not good reason to stay away. There is a story about tools that illustrates this point:

One day all the tools in the shed had a meeting. Brother Hammer stood up to lead, but nobody liked him; he always knocked people! Brother Saw was always cutting people down. Brother Screwdriver

went round and round, talking in circles. Brother Ruler never thought anyone measured up. Of course, Brother Sandpaper rubbed people the wrong way!

They parted company, went to opposite ends of the shed, but then one day a carpenter from Nazareth came in. He picked up the ruler and measured. He used the saw to cut. He used the hammer to nail and the sandpaper to create a beautiful finish. With all these tools, the carpenter built a beautiful church where he could preach the gospel!

At the end of the day the tools got together and realized what they could accomplish when they stop focusing on each other, and simply placed themselves in the hands of the Master!

Conclusion

It is true that we won't all get along all the time – even in the church. But in the hands of the Master we can build together. Today is a day when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the Christian Church. We may not have the ability to build this Church into what it should be but that's OK because we don't have to have that ability. God supplies it for us. Just as the disciples couldn't speak many languages by their own powers but the Holy Spirit gave them that ability, we can count on the Spirit enabling us too. God has not stopped building his Church and we shouldn't think that he has stopped here at St. Martin either.

May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.