

ARE YOU READY FOR THIS?

"Welcome to Pentecost 2011!

Pentecost is a time to open up to the mind-blowing, heart-warming, life-changing power of God.

The power of God can invade the body, inflate the mind, swell the soul, lift the Spirit and make us more than we ever imagined. It'll make you young when you're old, and it'll make you live even when you die. The power and presence of the Spirit will disturb, delight, deliver and lift.

When God sends forth the Spirit, as we read today from the Psalms "the whole face of the earth is renewed." When God sends forth the Spirit, chaos is changed into creation, and the Red Sea opens up to a highway of freedom.

When God sends forth the Spirit: A young woman says "Yes"...and Jesus is born, and life is never the same again on this planet. When God sends forth the Spirit, amazing things happen:

[Please repeat after me]

Barriers are broken, communities are formed, opposites are reconciled, unity is established, disease is cured, addiction is broken, cities are renewed, races are reconciled, hope is established, people are blessed, and church happens!

Today the Spirit of God is present and we're gonna have Church!" I'm not talking about religion, I'm not talking about mumbling through words and seeing our friends again, I'm talking about Church! Church happens when the

Spirit of God is present and poured out on all flesh! Church happens when God sends forth his Spirit! Today the Spirit of God is present and we're gonna have Church!

So be ready, get ready, Jesus said always be ready, for you never know when God will break through the walls of your life...I'm here to proclaim to you that God is up to something today right here and right now!...

discouraged folks cheer up,

dishonest folks 'fees up,

sour folks sweeten up,

closed folk, open up,

gossipers shut up,

conflicted folks make up,

sleeping folks wake up,

lukewarm folk, fire up,
dry bones shake up,
and pew potatoes stand up!

But most of all, Christ the Savior of all the world is lifted up!"

(Rick Kirchoff, Germantown United Methodist Church, Opening remarks to the 2000 Memphis Annual Conference)

And that's why we are here today, to lift up the crucified, risen, and ascended Savior of the World, Jesus the Christ! This is why we exist as a Church of Jesus, the Body of Christ, to lift up Jesus and proclaim to the world that everyone is dead, everyone is a deflated balloon, everyone in this world is living a flat, monotone, and colorless existence!

But when God's Spirit is poured out...life is restored! The dry bones of this valley of the Inland Empire are everywhere, but when God's Spirit is poured out, when the wind blows into the room where Jesus' disciples are gathered, when fire and flame and wind and water are combined into one immeasurable force, bones are put back together and people are recreated into a new creation of God!

When the Spirit of God is poured out: the deflated balloons of our families are filled with life-giving air, and energy for motion is created!

When the Spirit of God is poured out: human life has dimension for the first time!... people experience life in Technicolor!... and the sound of abundant, zoe life in God is

better than anything Bose can create!... but are you ready for this University United Methodist Church?

You may say "yes" on this energetic Pentecost Sunday, but I am not so sure that this church is ready to be the Church. The disciples of Jesus certainly were not ready to have Church happen, for the Spirit of God to be poured out on them, but instead of standing against the current of water, wind, and fire that filled them, they accepted what God wanted them to do. All throughout the Bible and Church history there are people who think they are ready, and they are the ones who end up making a mess of things, because they think they know what God wants them to do. And then there are those who accept what God wants them to do without any preconceptions, without any anticipation or

expectations, they only participate in God's activity in the world. So it's okay not to be ready, or try to anticipate what God is doing, but at the same time, don't try to stand against the current of wind, water, and fire of the Holy Spirit moving in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our city and this whole valley! Don't quench the Spirit, University United Methodist Church! Don't try to stamp out the fire, put a dam on the rushing flood of the Spirit, or build walls to keep out the wind of God blowing in you and me! Put up a windmill! Let the spillways of our church rush with hydro Spirit power! Let the flame of the Holy Spirit warm our hearts as God teaches us how to proclaim and lift up the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus the Lord! For that is why we are here, that is our mission as the Church of Jesus Christ, that is why

this congregation exists...to proclaim the zoe, Technicolor, 4D, abundant life that Jesus offers to the world to the dead, colorless, flat, and monotone people we see every day! Are we ready for this?

This week our entire Annual Conference will descend upon Redlands and we will hear the trumpet sounds of United Methodism and how wonderful is our Methodist doctrine, and our acts of social justice, and our sense of mission to swell the ranks of the church. We will hear fiery sermons on how our church is declining in numbers and money, and that we need to redraw the lines of the districts, restructure the leadership into Essential Ministry Teams, and have Mission Areas together as churches to feed the hungry, give clothes to the naked, or even clean up a widow's house

every fifth Sunday of the month. We will hear that the dove of the Holy Spirit's peace is given through our acts of kindness and our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ so that the world is a better place to live. Walls, dams, and how much fire retardant to use...that's all I believe that we will hear this week at Annual Conference. Our conference leadership is trying to control the Spirit of God because they proclaim that they are ready, they know what to expect when God's Spirit is poured out...they expect a peaceful dove.

Celtic Christians chose, not the dove, but the wild goose as a symbol representing the Holy Spirit. It sounds strange to us, but it has a long tradition in Ireland. While the Roman Church imagined the Holy Spirit in the form of a peaceful,

graceful dove, the Ancient Celts understood the Holy Spirit to be like a wild goose. When you hear of the Spirit descending like a heavenly dove on you, you hear harps and strings softly playing and get a peaceful feeling. The image of the Holy Spirit as dove has become so familiar and domesticated an image we pay little attention.

The image of a wild goose descending upon you is a different matter altogether. A wild goose is one noisy, bothersome bird. I like this image of the Holy Spirit as a wild goose because it jars us out of our complacency. We need such an image to correct our overly safe and overly sweet image of the Spirit. One preacher asked, "How many times can you sing 'There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit in This Place' without your blood sugar reaching diabetic levels?"

When the Spirit is poured out in the Bible, it never seems to be sweet or safe. God's Spirit called the prophets to speak to Israel in words that were bold and sometimes dangerous. Ezekiel saw a vision of God's Spirit blowing through a valley of dry bones and bringing them to life. John the Baptist dressed in camel's hair and eating wild locusts proclaimed, "I baptize you with water but he who comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Paul gave this advice to young Timothy, "For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a Spirit of cowardice, but rather a Spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Neither safe nor tame, the Spirit inspired Paul to

proclaim, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28).

It was this wild Goose and not a peaceful dove that Jesus referred to when he preached his first sermon and quoted Isaiah, saying, "For the Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of God's favor"(Luke 4:18) Mickey Anders, "Pentecost"

Are you ready for this University United Methodist Church of Redlands? Are you ready for the wild goose of the Holy Spirit, the wind, the fire, the floodwaters of God to be poured out? Are you ready to accept wherever God moves

you, blows you, and whenever the Spirit sets you ablaze to proclaim Christ crucified, risen, and ascended to the world? Get ready! Be ready, Jesus says, for you don't know where the Spirit comes from or where it is going, just like the wind, but you know when the Spirit is blowing, because people are moving, the city is moving, this valley is in motion because God has poured out His Spirit on all flesh! Are you ready for this? Today the Spirit of God is present and we're gonna have church! Amen!