

May 31, 2020

*"They and the Others"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Acts 2:1-8, 11-13

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If you remember, last week I used a football analogy in my sermon because I don't know if we're going to have a continuation of the basketball season, hockey season, or even a baseball season, this year. Games are still on hold. But I'm hoping that football, at least in some form, will start as scheduled. So since everyone seemed to enjoy my analogy comparing us now knowing the "ending" of Super Bowl LI, the famous 28-3 game, with Jesus knowing the "ending" for us being heaven, I thought I'd use another football analogy this week. And, of course, I'll use my favorite player, Tom Brady, though I may have to find a new one since he's no longer a Patriot. Now there are a lot of statistics that quarterbacks use to measure their proficiency, how good they are. There are statistics on completions and touchdowns and interceptions, but looking at passing yards is a great measure of how potent both the quarterback, and the offense, is. This is how it works: let's say Tom Brady is on his own 25 yard line and throws a 5 yard pass to Julian Edelman, and Edelman then runs 70 yards down the field for a touchdown, Brady gets credited with 75 passing yards. Interesting how that works, isn't it? Well, keep that in mind – I'll get back to it later. But first, let's talk about today's Scripture lesson and the Holy Spirit.

In verse one of the Scripture we read, "When the day of Pentecost came, they... they, were all together in one place." Now the "they" the Scripture talks about in the first verse were the disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus had explicitly told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father, that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, empowering them, guiding them, helping them in all that they would be doing. And as they were gathered, the Holy Spirit came down upon them with a forceful wind and tongues of fire. And what transpired there was so remarkable and powerful that in verse seven we read that they... they were astonished and amazed. Now here, the "they" referred to, were those devout Jews that had come from various far-away places to celebrate the feast called Shavout, commemorating when God gave the Torah, or Law, to Moses on Mt. Sinai. And they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit when they heard the disciples speaking about God in their own languages. Now reading a little further in Acts, we learn that Peter then uses this as an opportunity to talk to them about Jesus. And guess what happens? The Bible says about three thousand of these other "theys" repented of their sins, converted and were baptized. Together they broke bread, they prayed with each other, they were filled with great joy, and they spread God's goodwill.

They all spread God's goodwill. You know, that sounds to me a little like the John Wesley United Methodist Church community, doesn't it? Think for a moment of how this church has become a fulfillment of that incredible moment two thousand years ago. Spreading the good news of Jesus Christ through our worship – even now during this pandemic, with livestreaming, our fellowship – ways we are connecting with each other, our outreach, our goodwill. And I wonder if the people in Falmouth who came to the plant sale, or have shopped at our rummage sale or Christmas Fair, or attend our AA meetings, or sing in the chorale, or were taught English here, or shared a meal at Falmouth Eats, or listened to us on the beach, or came to the Easter Egg Hunt or Trunk or Treat events, or who have just driven past and seen Allison's sign on the playground fence, which said, "Faith, hope and love," and now says, "Peace be with you" ... I wonder, if those people ever refer to us as "they." "They" do a lot there at John Wesley. "They" always seem so busy – the parking is always filled. "They" do such good things for our community. Based on today's Scripture, I sure hope they say that.

Yes, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended with a mighty wind and tongues of fire on the disciples, and they changed the world. And as we reflect on the word, "they," let's think about another word that we've heard a lot lately: "contagious" - as it pertains to the virus. It's something that get into one's system, takes hold, is given to others and can easily spread. But let's think about his word in a new way. Because isn't that what happened with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? The Holy Spirit got into the disciples, took hold of them, they gave it to others, and it spread quickly – 3,000 people in one day were affected. That's contagious Christianity. And that's what will define us as individuals, and as a church, as a "they." They who spread God's goodwill. Because here's another word for you - "enthusiasm," which comes from a Greek word that means 'inspired by the God within,' "*en theo*." Christian author Mark Hart says, "Enthusiasm is contagious – so is a lack of it. Joyless Christians are a greater assault on the Gospel than atheism." Our world today, needs for you and I to be contagious Christians – filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, you know, one thing about COVID 19 is that some people are asymptomatic – they don't show any signs or symptoms of having it. But as Christians we have to show signs and symptoms of having the Holy Spirit in us. Filling us, empowering us, energizing us to spread the good news, to spread God's goodwill.

And so what are the symptoms that indicate if we have the Holy Spirit in us? Well, St. Paul lists them out for us as fruits of the Spirit. He said they are, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Now because these are symptoms that give us life, I'm going

to say them again. And ask yourself, how many of these symptoms do you have? Here goes: love... joy... peace... patience... kindness... generosity... faithfulness... gentleness... and self-control. Now not to stray off the subject, but imagine if all the people involved in the George Floyd incident had just a few of these symptoms, how different things might be.

But back to you - how many symptoms do you have? Because now it's time to get back to my football analogy. As I mentioned, Brady throws a 5 yard pass to Edelman who runs 70 yards for the touchdown, and Brady is credited with a 75 yard passing play. That doesn't seem quite fair, so they have another statistic which qualifies the play somewhat called "Y-A-C", or the yards gained after the catch. Now that makes sense, don't you think? Because this way you not only get an idea of what the quarterback did to create a play, but you also get an idea as to the importance of the receiver who caught the ball and how far he ran to complete the play and get to the goal. And this same thinking is important as it applies to the Holy Spirit and us. Because we might like to think we've caught the Holy Spirit, but the question that really matters is: how far will you run after catching the Spirit? Will you reach the goal? Will you be just as loving tomorrow, Monday as you are today after hearing these words? Will you carry an attitude of joy through Tuesday? Will peace and patience define your character on Wednesday? Can you still be kind and generous on Thursday? Can you remain faithful on Friday as this pandemic tries to get the best of you? Will you be gentle and under control all through the week including Saturday? How far will you run?

I want to close by reminding you of the last verse in today's scripture reading. Do you recall it? It goes like this. "But others... others, sneered (at what was happening), and said, 'They are just drunk, that's all'" Effectively dismissing the significance of what was happening. So as we go forward, let us show the signs and symptoms of having the Holy Spirit in us. Because I think we all want to be referred to the, "they's," and not the "others." Amen.