

Preach Boldly, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. PE050515
1 Corinthians 12:4-13, Acts 2:1-21
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 15 May, 2005

Today is Pentecost Sunday, when we celebrate the birthday of the church. Today we also celebrate the ministry among us of the Rev. Dian Griffin Jackson who will be moving on to a new calling. Dian has brought to Elon Community Church a taste of diversity. She and her family have enriched the fellowship of this congregation. Dian has stretched our thinking about how God is worshiped. She has helped us to contemplate the meaning of spirituality.

What is Pentecost, but the coming of the Holy Spirit? Luke wrote that “they” were all together in one place, and suddenly they were filled with the Holy Spirit. To be honest, we are not sure who “they” were! “They” could refer to the twelve apostles named in Acts 1:25, but “They” could also refer to the one hundred twenty believers who were mentioned in Acts 1:15. “They” were all gathered in one place, a house, but many scholars claim that a house could contain the small body of one hundred twenty believers.

While “they” were together, “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.”¹ That Spirit came violently. Tongues as of fire rested on each of them. It must have been a frightening event!

What is Pentecost, but the diversification of the church? “Diversity” is a word used a lot these days, and it’s an important word. Some call it a “Politically Correct” word. Now when people call something “politically correct,” they often mean it in a disparaging way. They imply that there is an underlying political reason for using a term, so as not to offend.

I do not use the word “diversity” out of political correctness. I use it out of my most basic convictions about the Christian faith. Jesus Christ came to save all people, not just European white men. God is the God of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, as Paul teaches us in Galatians 3:28. The church, the body of Jesus Christ, is diverse.

A person once inquired, “What version of the Bible do you use at Elon Community Church?” I responded, “The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.”

That person replied, “Oh, that’s the Politically Correct” version, right?”

I said, “No, it is the inclusive language Bible, the one that includes women, as well as men.”

In the introduction to the NRSV, you will read, “The mandate [for the translators] specified that, in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture.”² For instance, Genesis 1:26 reads, “Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image...” instead of the New International Version’s, “Let us make man in our image.”³ “Humankind” is more inclusive to the ear of a woman than is “man.” God loves women as well as men.

The NRSV does not go to extremes of inclusivity. For instance, Jesus still prays, “Our Father in heaven” in Matthew 6:9. Many evangelical Christians disparaged the NRSV when it was first published in 1989 and promoted instead, the New International Version, published in 1978. Well,

¹Acts 2:2

²“To the Reader,” an introduction to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha

³*New International Version* © 1978, the International Bible Society

lo and behold, in February, 2005 the International Bible Society came out with its Today's New International Version that boasts "Generic language where the meaning of the text was intended to include both men and women."⁴ Genesis 1:26 reads, "Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image.'"⁵ Evangelicals have become more inclusive seventeen years later!

Inclusive language is not politically correct, it is the way of God who loves all people.

Pentecost is the diversification of the church. Sometimes God has to speak to us violently as at Pentecost, in order to get us to be more inclusive. Our tendency is to stick to our own kind. The breakup of Yugoslavia meant Serbs sticking with their own kind, Croats sticking to their own kind, and Bosnians sticking to their own kind, and each of them killing the others. Anti-Miscegenation laws outlawed racial mixing. African-American Christians tend to have their unique worship style, White European American Christians tend to have their unique worship style, and Hispanic Christians, don't even worship in our language!

Diversity is difficult for us. We would recede into simply our families if we had a choice, and even then, in the relative comfort of our own families, we might exclude a certain strange aunt or weird brother-in-law. The Pentecost experience stretches us beyond our normal comfortable bounds. It is the birth of the church of Jesus Christ that includes believers all around the world.

Look at that early band of believers—those one hundred twenty gathered in that house. They were all Galileans. They came from the hinterlands up north. They were comfortable with each other. They had known each other back home, and now they were in Jerusalem. They were devout Jews and spoke a common language. They were inclined to sit in that house in their comfort with each other, and talk about the good old days when Jesus was around and how dull and boring it was now without him. If they were in any way like us, they would have been saying, "Don't make our group any bigger, I'm comfortable with who is here. I know them all!"

The Holy Spirit had a different idea. All of a sudden, these devout Christians began speaking in diverse languages—languages other than their own native tongue—languages they didn't even know! The Holy Spirit broke out of their box and forced the Good News of Jesus Christ into the hearing of Parthians, Medes, and even those Cappadocians!

Peter boldly preached to them all, explaining what was happening. He quoted the prophet Joel, "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."⁶ In Acts 2:41, Luke says that there were three thousand persons added to that number of twelve or one hundred twenty!

If you are not afraid of the Holy Spirit, you ought to be. It could change you. It could change your church!

Preach boldly: that is what Peter did. That is what we are called to do. That is what Dian is called to do. Preach the good news. Preach that the church of Jesus Christ includes diverse people with diverse practices. Sometimes we have to tell people what they may not be comfortable hearing. Preach boldly anyway. God is love, and God loves all people.

⁴From the website of the International Bible Society: www.tniv.info/qanda.php

⁵www.tniv.info/bible/sample_resultsingle.php?rowid=35

⁶Acts 2:17