

Going Viral

Acts 2:1-21 Crossroads Christian Church
John 15:26-27; 16:4-15 June 8, 2014
Pentecost Sunday

You may have heard the phrase “going viral,” or maybe you haven’t. It doesn’t have to do with diseases, but with videos that become overnight sensations in the social media, such as YouTube or Facebook. Word gets out and everybody’s clicking on a new hit song, cute kittens, young adults doing stupid stuff, or goodness knows what—hundreds of thousands or millions of hits pile up as people look to see what all the fuss is about. An old expression for something going out of nowhere and getting to be everywhere is from nuclear weapons—“critical mass.” When radioactive materials reach a critical mass, boom! An explosion happens. When a video goes viral, there’s an explosion of awareness, all around the world.

Here’s a video that hasn’t gone viral, but it should, at least in churches—and it’s right on theme for today.

(view “it’s Pentecost”)

I got so excited about that about a week ago, that I wanted all sorts of people to see it, including you. It does such a great job of telling what Pentecost is all about, and what the church is all about, that I would like to see it go viral. Of course that’s what Pentecost is all about, the church going viral—going from a few dozen followers of Jesus to thousands in just one day, and that was just the beginning of it. Now billions of people around the world call themselves Christian.

Today we celebrate that first Pentecost. We affirm and wonder at the mystery of God’s life-giving Spirit, the one that brooded over the face of darkness at creation; the one who inspired David to dance in front of the ark; the one that descended on Jesus at the time of

his baptism; the one that Jesus promised to the disciples as he prepared them for his own death; it was that Spirit which created something new in Jerusalem. The Pentecost festival—literally, the fifty-day festival, was a Spring harvest festival for the Jewish people, fifty days after Passover, and Jews from the known world came each year to Jerusalem to celebrate. On this year, some of that crowd were trying to find out about Jesus, and gathered to hear his disciples speak. Then the Spirit came and rushed in the wind and played in the flame and danced in the hearts and played tricks on the ears so that people from the then-known world could hear the good news and believe—that Jesus Christ is the crucified and risen Lord. The Spirit of God gave birth that day to the church. A group of individuals became a community, knit by the Spirit's power. All the believers—not just the disciples—became charged with a sense of mission, to take God's word to the world.

How do people react when mystery plops into their laps, when the Holy Spirit makes an unexpected guest appearance and turns everything upside down and sideways?

Some people probably didn't even admit to themselves that something special was going on—when they saw the great, enthusiastic, confusing crowd they probably just crossed to the other side of the street and turned away at the nearest corner because they didn't want to get involved in something they couldn't understand or control.

Others reacted with scorn so they wouldn't have to get involved—they attributed the excitement and emotion to spirits—the alcoholic kind—not Spirit, the Holy kind.

Others, many of the visitors who were caught up in the event, got caught up in the details without opening

themselves to the wholeness of the Reality—why is it that we’re understanding one another’s languages? They wondered. So Peter interpreted to them what was going on. He quoted a scripture passage from the prophet Joel about the Day of the Lord—what people today might call the End of the World. He told them that this was indeed the end of the old age, and the beginning of the new. God had redefined everything with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then Peter invited them all to be a part of God’s plan, a part of God’s new world, a part of God’s advance team. Its mission was to tell the world about the same Kingdom of God that Jesus had preached about.

Life came into the church that day. Here’s another metaphor for what happened. We all have had the experience on a cold winter’s day of our car not starting—the battery is too weak to turn the engine. So we get out our own jumper cables, or we call the auto club or the garage or a neighbor with a set of jumper cables, and the power from another engine and battery reinforces our own battery—our dead engine purrs to life. It’s a jump start. Pentecost is something like that. Something dead becomes alive; something cold becomes hot; something dormant becomes filled with power. God’s Spirit, which breathed into those lumps of clay at the Creation and brought them to life, now breathed into the church and brought it to life.

It would have been awfully exciting, and yet awfully frightening to be there that day, with that mighty rush of the wind that is God’s Spirit blowing through and transforming everything. And to tell you the truth, I don’t know how I would have reacted. Would I have rejected it because it didn’t fit into my usual frames of reference? I don’t know. Would I have run panic-stricken down the streets of Jerusalem, eager to get away from

all of that intense emotionalism that might have become the start of a riot? I don't know. Would I have stayed and listened to Peter, and sign up on the spot to be baptized, to be part of God's great new work? I hope so, but again, I don't know.

In the weeks before this event, the Risen Christ had told the disciples to wait for the coming of the Spirit. It wasn't something they could schedule; it was not something they could add to their agenda. All they could do was to wait until it happened. We can't force the Spirit's hand. But we can pray to be open to its presence when it does come.

And the Spirit does come--just not always in such big and dramatic ways. The Spirit comes sometimes and nudges us quietly and presents us with opportunities to forgive old hurts and to be reconciled with old enemies, be they in our families, our church, our neighborhood. How do we respond?

The Spirit does come, as our consciences are quickened by the sight of somebody in need, maybe on the streets, maybe in an image on the TV news of the devastation in Joplin or elsewhere, and we wonder what we can do to help, either to give some aid or to fix a broken system. How do we respond?

The Spirit does come, sometimes in our despair, when our lives seem to be falling apart, our dreams shattered, and we're facing a crisis—maybe a crisis of health, of family, of personal identity, or an addiction, or an economic crisis—and then we realize that we can't fix it by ourselves, that we can't do it alone, but we discover that God is there with us, and no matter what happens, nothing can change that. How do we respond?

The Spirit does come and offer hope and trust in those moments of darkness when someone near and dear to us has died, and speaks for us in sighs too deep

for words, and offers us a peace that passes all understanding, not taking our grief away, but helping us realize that no one is lost to God. How do we respond?

The Spirit comes and works in quiet and subtle ways, encouraging and strengthening the church, if the church has enough sense to accept it, and helping it redefine its mission in the world today, calling us to faithfulness, calling us to discipleship. How do we respond?

As it did on the first Pentecost, the Spirit weaves us together, if we let it, into a true community of Christ. It knits us together into the body of Christ in the world. It allows God to make a difference in us and more important through us that God's reign may be revealed. It allows us to be part of the church going viral yet again, with love and joy spreading from person to person. How do we respond? Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon

