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Imagine you were one of the followers of Jesus 2000 years ago—maybe Peter who had denied knowing Jesus once Jesus had been captured by the Roman guards; Mary Magdalene who watched him die on the cross; or Thomas who had doubted that Jesus had been raised to life. You had experienced the risen Jesus, but now you face persecution if you told others about him, for officials believed he was a trouble maker and wanted you to be quiet.

It's been fifty days since you have seen Jesus; you're secluded in a room with the rest of Jesus' followers as crowds of people gather outside for the annual harvest festival known as Pentecost. You have an opportunity to tell this crowd about what happened to Jesus, but you also know you could get into big trouble. What do you do? Stay in inside where it's safe? Go outside and tell the travelers who had arrived in town? In hindsight we know what happened, but what if the followers of Jesus had remained in that room, never stepping outside into that crowd?

Erasmus may have wondered the same thing about 1500 years later. He was a theologian who saw things about the church that needed changing, and he spoke out against unjust practices. Some suggest today that his ideas helped spark the Protestant Reformation, for Luther also agreed that the church needed change. Erasmus tried to hold a middle ground, not wanting to go as far as Luther, but knowing changes needed to happen. It's been said that Erasmus told a story:

Jesus returns to heaven after his time on earth. The angels gather around him to learn all that happened during his days on earth. Jesus tells them of the miracles, his teachings, his death on the cross, and his resurrection.

When he finishes his story, Michael the Archangel asks Jesus, "But what happens now?"

Jesus answers, "I have left behind eleven faithful disciples and a handful of men and women who have faithfully followed me. They

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will declare my message and express my love. These faithful people will build my church.”

“But,” responds Michael, “What if these people fail? What then is your other plan?”

And Jesus answers, “I have no other plan!”<sup>1</sup>

Erasmus may have wondered what kind of backup plan Jesus had for his own day as he watched the confusion in the church 1500 years after Jesus. He was concerned that the church needed to change and yet not sure whether Luther had the right idea. Change was in the air, yet Erasmus had no idea what was soon to come. The movement that emerged sparked a huge shift in the church as groups broke away from the established church and began to form new movements we now call Lutheran, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Methodist, and eventually hundreds of years later even our movement of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

What if Erasmus had not spoken out? What if Luther had not recognized the need for change?

What if the disciples 1500 years earlier had never left the room during the Pentecost festival to tell the crowd about Jesus? As Luke in the book of Acts narrates the story, the followers of Jesus were gathered in a room, when suddenly something like the wind began to move among them. They recalled the promise made by Jesus: he would always be with them, and the Spirit would come and give them courage. They recalled the ancient scriptures that envisioned a time when God’s Spirit would encourage sons and daughters to speak inspiring words, when young adults and the elderly would see things so clearly that they would understand what God was doing.

Peter changed from one who had avoided persecution by saying he didn’t know Jesus to one who began to boldly tell others out in the streets about what had happened to Jesus: how Jesus had been killed but how God has raised him up as a sign of hope for all of them. Many in the crowd were so inspired that Luke suggests thousands joined the

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movement that day, an event that we view as the birth of the church.

The Spirit that moved on that Pentecost day is the same Spirit that moves among us today, helping us to grow and change, to do something different, to take risks when we would rather stay in our comfort zones.

Those comfort zones feel so...well, comfortable, don't they? I would much rather do the things that I know will work, such as stay here in this congregation with the friendships I have developed over the past 21 years and continue teaching the same courses I have taught at McKendree the past five years. I felt the same way when I served as an editor at Christian Board of Publication—comfortable doing a job that I enjoyed. I recall feeling the same way in seminary, not wanting to leave the congregation where I served as a student. I recall feeling the same way when I taught young children as a Head Start teacher. I didn't want to leave, didn't want to change. And yet, something

prompted those changes. If I had resisted, I never would have had the opportunity to get to know each one of you, and I am grateful for the many years we've had together.

Change is not easy, and sometimes we may wonder if the Spirit is really moving among us. "Where is the Spirit?" we may ask, feeling like the little fish that swam near the surface of the water and overheard two fishermen talking to another.

One fisherman said, "Have you ever thought about how important water is to all of life? Without water, every living thing would die."

The fish heard this and became frightened. "I need to find this thing called water, or I will die." And the fish went swimming to look for water. But where should he go to find it? He didn't know.

He asked other fish in the lake, but they didn't know either. He swam up the river, but no fish there could tell him where to find it—they'd never heard of it, either. He kept

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swimming until he found the deepest place in the sea. There he found an old and wise fish. The little fish said, “Where can I find water? I must find it or I will die!”

The old fish chuckled and said, “Water? You’re in water right now. You were in it back home, in the lake. You’ve never been out of water since the day you were born—it’s all around you!”<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes I think our sense of God’s Spirit is like that little fish’s search for water—we may be so used to God’s presence in our lives that we don’t recognize the Spirit. We may become so comfortable with the way things are that we resist the movement of the Spirit to try something different. And then the Spirit moves. Shakes us up. Nudges to try something new, maybe even

uncomfortable. Maybe even challenging. Maybe even something that helps us grow out of our comfort zone into a time of growth.

The Spirit has been moving in this congregation for 125 years—all the way back to 1888. (Did you know this year is our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation? I think that calls for a party.) What if those people who gathered at Mary Daniel’s home in East St. Louis in 1888 had never been inspired to begin something new?

I am grateful the Spirit moved the followers of Jesus 2000 years ago into the streets, Erasmus and Luther 500 years ago into the Reformation, the Christians in East St. Louis 125 years ago to begin a church, and each of us today. The Spirit’s moving! Things are changing! God is with us!

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<sup>1</sup> eSermons.com

<sup>2</sup> [www.rockwoodumc.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=207:acts-11-13-john-148-1725-27&catid=1:sermons&Itemid=7](http://www.rockwoodumc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=207:acts-11-13-john-148-1725-27&catid=1:sermons&Itemid=7)