

“Called to be the Church”

Acts 1: 1-14

This past week, at our Elders’ and Deacons’ meeting, we took another look at the Pentecost story and how it was such a transforming moment for the early church. We took a look at how the Spirit of God moved among the early disciples and shook them out of their comfort zones. We took a look at how the Spirit of God challenged them to carry on and be the church here on earth. All of which lead us to have a conversation about our own church. We spent most of our time on Tuesday night talking about where we had seen the Spirit of God moving among our community of faith and how the Spirit continues to challenge us to come out of our comfort zones. We shared stories about how our Community dinners have become such a great ministry opportunity for us as a community of faith. As disciples, because we are people of the table, it seemed like such a natural thing to do to expand our table and invite our community to gather around the table with us. When we first started the dinners, we knew we would experience the presence of God but never did we imagine we would get such a great response. We shared how surprised we were that we started out the community dinners in hopes that maybe it would help those in our community who were on a fixed income, never realizing that the dinners would meet a need that we weren’t even aware of that existed in our community, a need for relationship. We talked about how we see

new faces at each dinner, faces that we didn't even realize were a part of our community, faces that light up because there is someone to share a meal with, faces that want to be recognized and seen as friends. As elders and deacons, we shared how it seemed like the Spirit of God was calling us to expand the table in new and different ways once more, but how?

Then the conversation shifted when someone brought up the possibility of exploring an even bigger partnership with Northside Elementary. There was genuine excitement surrounding the idea of starting an afternoon homework help program but how? And then what about our connection with Girls on the Run? We started out small this year, collecting snacks, a few members volunteered, and Disciples Women hosted an end of the year banquet for the girls after their race but it seems like the Spirit of God is calling us to expand this partnership but how?

That seemed to be the question of the night. Everyone agreed that the Spirit of God is transforming us and pushing us beyond our doors but how. Everyone agreed that the winds of Pentecost are still blowing, giving new life, reviving us once more, calling us to become the people God created us to be but how? Everyone agreed that the Spirit of God is calling us to be the church for our community but how?

However, the funny thing about our conversation on Tuesday is that this is not a new question for us as a community of faith. We, as Midway Christian

Church, have been intentionally asking ourselves this same question for over a year now as part of the Surfing the Edge process. We have spent time dwelling in the Word. We have spent time in conversation. We have spent time in prayer. And it has always come back to one question: We know that God's Spirit is moving among us but how? And to be honest, I feel like we are closer to answering this question now than we were a year ago, even 6 months ago. I say this partly because I think on the whole we are more aware of God's Spirit among us. I see people getting excited as they discover the ways God is already working in our community and is inviting them to join in. It seems like as a community of faith our eyes are more open and we are listening to our neighbors more intently. It seems like as a church we are more aware that there is world beyond our doors.

I also think one of the reasons that we are closer to answering this question now than we were a year ago is because we are having a different kind of conversation than we were having a year ago. A year ago, the questions we seemed to be constantly asking were how can we go back and become that church we were once more? How can we go back and be that church we remember? All of our conversations seemed to be focusing on going back, not moving forward. A year ago, it seemed like we were asking questions that never would be answered, questions that never seemed to bring new life. We were asking questions that brought more frustration than gave energy.

And now, through the Surfing the Edge process, it seems like we are asking a different set of questions. Now we are asking how we can proclaim the Kingdom of God. Now we are asking how can we be a church that does not have a mission but is a mission for God's people? Now we are asking how can we be the church for a world that is need of some good news. Now it seems like we are asking questions that are bringing new life, questions that are bring energy, questions that are challenging us to rethink what it means for us to be the church here and now. Now it seems like we are asking the questions that bring us closer to experiencing the Kingdom of God in our midst that is happening right now all around us.

As I was reflecting on our journey with the Surfing the Edge process this past year, I came to the realization that the experiences we are having now and the "but how" questions that we are asking now are not new questions or experiences. As I mentioned earlier, we as a community of faith have been asking these questions over the past year but we were not the first.

These are the very same questions that the disciples asked of Jesus after the resurrection. Following that amazing Easter morning, Jesus spent forty days with the disciples, teaching them and inviting them to learn about the Kingdom of God. And at that point, they were starting to think, Now is the time! We are moving in the right direction. Now Jesus is going bring the Kingdom of God here on earth! And then all of sudden, Jesus turns to them and tells them that he is leaving and he

is leaving it up to them to carry on. He is leaving it up to them to keep his teachings alive. He is leaving it up to them to share the Kingdom experience with the world.

In that moment, the disciples started questioning and wondering how it was all going to happen. They remembered that they didn't do so well the first time around. One betrayed Jesus. One denied Jesus. The rest scattered and now, just when things were beginning to get back to a somewhat normal state, Jesus tells them he is leaving and it is up to them to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near.

It was up to the disciples to live out their calling to be the church here on earth but how? It was up to the disciples to spread the Gospel but how? It was up to the disciples to proclaim that the Kingdom of God had come to the world's doorstep but how? The disciples knew the journey was continuing without Jesus but how? How would they navigate the unknown? How would they live out their calling to be the church? How would it all come together? Jesus wasn't going to be around anymore but the good news was that his disciples would be and he wasn't leaving them on their own.

He gave them the promise that the Holy Spirit would come and they would be able to go out and proclaim God's Kingdom. That was it. He didn't give them a copy of Robert's Rules of Order. He didn't give them a how to book on being the

church. He didn't say to his disciples that to be the church they needed to follow these ten easy steps.

No Jesus told his disciples before he left them that to be the church here on earth, all they would need was the Holy Spirit. Jesus told his disciples to wait upon the Lord and they would be able to figure it out. Jesus told his disciples to listen for where God was calling them to go and to not get in the way with the busyness of church.

Jesus told his disciples that to be the church here on earth all they needed to do was share what they had already experienced in their own lives, the life giving and life transforming power of God's Spirit, a Spirit that welcomes, a Spirit that renews, a Spirit that brings new life, a Spirit that brings healing and wholeness to a world that is hurting.

The good news is that as the disciples were wondering how it was going to turn out, they also discovered that it was not all up to them because they were invited to become aware of God was already doing in the world and join in! All they had to do was become vessels for sharing the good news that they had already experienced in their lives. All they had to do was realize that God was in control and then they would know how it would all turn out. All they had to do was realize that the Kingdom of God was already transforming and giving life to God's creation and they were invited to be an active part of the process.

Which is exactly the same invitation that we have as modern day disciples today as we continue our journey Surfing the Edge! The good news for us as modern day disciples is that we can find hope and gain strength for our journey just like the disciples did back then because we know just like them, we will figure it out. Not because we have all the answers but because we have the Holy Spirit pushing us, challenging us to proclaim the good news, and inviting us to join in the amazing work that God is already doing in our midst.

The amazing thing about our calling to be the church is that we know we are in good company. The early disciples figured it out. Sure, they didn't always get it right the first time but they kept trying because the Kingdom of God is too important. And now we as modern day disciples have the same opportunity. We have the chance to live out our calling to be the church for our community and for our world. We may not get it right the first time but we will keep on trying because the Kingdom of God is too important. We have been given a calling to share what we already know is true. We have been given a calling to be the church, to share the good news, to become the place where all are welcomed, where all are seen as God's own, where all can experience the life-giving love of God.

My hope and prayer for us as a community of faith as we continue our journey with the Surfing the Edge process is that we never stop trying to figure out the ways that God is calling us to be the church here and now, that we never stop

trying to figure out the answers to the question how God is challenging us to step out of our comfort zone, that we never stop living out our calling to share what we already know. We have everything we need for the journey. We have the promise of the Holy Spirit and we have the knowledge that God is leading us. What more do we need? The invitation remains the same today as it did all those years ago. We know that Jesus is no longer here and it is up to us as his disciples to keep his teachings alive and to share the good news of God's grace and love. Now by waiting on the Lord, May we live out our calling to be the church for God's people here and now. Amen.