

Acts 2:1-8, 12

The expression, "This is not rocket science," is used when somebody has made something much more complicated than it needs to be, or for some reason, fails to comprehend what is relatively simple to understand. The reason I know this is because that phrase has been addressed to me on more than one occasion, "Dave, this is not rocket science!"

Today's message is not about "rocket science!" It's about a party—a birthday party! We all understand parties. They are celebrations. Today we celebrate Pentecost, the birthday of the Christian Church. It's a simple and fascinating story that some people make too complicated.

Pentecost originally referred to a Jewish festival commemorating the giving of the Law to Moses and also giving thanks for the crops. Jews from all nations traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday. In our scripture from Acts, Dr. Luke says the Jewish believers in Christ, who were not yet referred to as Christians, were gathered together for this celebration.

Although the Holy Spirit had been a part of Jewish history for generations, at this Pentecost festival, God sent the Spirit to be powerfully present in these believers in a new way. Luke describes it this way: a sound like a mighty rush of wind was heard and then tongue-like flames of fire settled over the head of each believer, bringing the suggestion that this message should be entitled, "Great Balls of Fire!" The Spirit then gave them the power to speak in different languages that all present might understand the message of Christ.

We Christians now celebrate Pentecost 50 days after Easter because of what happened that first festival after the resurrection. But we, like the observers who were amazed and perplexed then, ask, "What does this mean?"

There is much confusion surrounding the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not an "It" but a "Person" and part of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit didn't come into existence at Pentecost. The Spirit is mentioned many times in the Old Testament and the Gospels, but at Pentecost, the Spirit came to the disciples in a special way, for a special purpose: to further the cause of Jesus Christ.

In simple terms, from that moment on, the Holy Spirit became the dominant reality in the life of the early church. The group of believers became a Spirit-guided, Spirit-empowered community with a simple message about God's love in Christ that could reach every heart. They weren't perfect people, but because of the work of the Holy Spirit, that handful of believers grew to be the Christian Church, from a world-wide organization to you and me here today.

While I've been with you we've welcomed both adults and new confirmands into our church membership. It occurred to me that anyone who belongs to a church ought to understand and celebrate why the Church is here and why they belong to it. Again, the answer to those questions isn't "rocket science!"

Children often offer great insight when considering questions like this. One little girl and her mother were looking at a magazine when the girl saw a picture of Jesus. Her mother, seeing an opportunity for a lesson, said, "Do you know who that is?" The little girl answered, "Yes, Mommy, He goes to our church."

If people “see Jesus” in our church, then we are doing the work of Christ. At this Pentecost celebration, I want to say it simply: We, as the Church, are here to see Jesus and then to show him to others because we believe he makes a difference. “Seeing Jesus” is accomplished by being empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a witness, a disciple, and a servant. So what does that mean? Let’s look at each one.

**First**, empowered to be a witness refers to being “one who has personal knowledge or experience of something.” To see Jesus here in church and to witness to who we are in him, we need to get the “big picture.” Our identity as Christians is determined both by the present and the past. Jesus is the center of our faith, but not the beginning of our faith.

The beginning of our faith goes back four thousand years to the Hebrew nomad, Abraham. Before Abraham, everybody in the world believed the gods were separated and indifferent to us. People thought they had to appease the gods so these gods would look favorably upon them. They had to DO something, sometimes something as drastic as human sacrifice.

But Abraham proclaimed a new idea of religion based on one God. This God was the creator of the universe, but more surprising and shocking was that this God offered a personal relationship, not because the people were so good, but because of God’s own grace and love.

Through Abraham, it was revealed we don’t need to appease God, we need to trust God. God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, promising to keep a special relationship with them. All they had to do was remain faithful. Jewish history is filled with the successes and failures of these people trusting God, of keeping and breaking the covenant.

But God had a bigger plan. “God so loved the world that he gave us his Son.” Jesus came not only to teach us anew about trusting and relying on the love of God, but also to lay down his life as a final sacrifice for our sins, securing our eternal forgiveness and place with God. This was the new covenant God made with the people. At Easter we retell the Good News story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sealing this new covenant.

So Abraham and Jesus are the cornerstones of our faith. But there are many others who are a part of our heritage as well. There are prophets, apostles, saints, and ordinary people who have gone before us and stand with us today who witness to us of God’s love and faithfulness. By the power of the Holy Spirit they encourage us on our personal spiritual journey, building up the body of believers, the Church. We, in turn then, are empowered by the Spirit to witness to others as well.

Which brings us to our **second** purpose in being a part of the Church: to “see Jesus” by being a disciple. As we learn more and more, the Holy Spirit empowers us with the wisdom and understanding of what it means to be a Christian disciple. Things start “happening” in our own lives and in the Church.

However, one pastor was rather disappointed that things were not “happening” in his church. So, he asked one of the leading deacons, “What’s wrong with our church? Is it ignorance or apathy?” The deacon responded, “I don’t know, and I don’t care!”

Real disciples do care. Real disciples do want to know more about Jesus and about the Christian faith. That's why we're here. Part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to guide our learning and growing. Whether it be in worship, Bible study, retreats, Sunday School classes, or one on one, we must keep growing if we hope to continue to see Jesus working effectively in and through our lives.

D. L. Moody told a story of a man who was asked by his son, "Daddy, why don't you ever go to church with us?" The father replied, "I don't need to go to church. My faith is established." Later that day the man took his horses out of the barn and hitched them to the buggy. As he and his son rode out of the yard, the horses became mired in a mud hole. The man tried in vain to free them. Finally, the boy remarked, "They're not going anywhere, Daddy. I believe they're established."

If your faith doesn't seem to be "going anywhere," evaluate if you may be stuck in your established ways. Look into some new ways to see Jesus that will allow your faith to come alive not only in church, but also in your daily living. Pray for the Spirit to guide your seeking and your growing as a disciple.

The **third** purpose for the Church and our being a part of it is to learn how to be intentional in helping others see Jesus, too. We call that being a Christian servant.

A church once had a sign in front that said, "JESUS ONLY." One night a storm blew out the first three letters and left just, "US ONLY." If we focus only on our own witness and discipleship growth, that storm-blown sign will describe our outlook, and we'll become ingrown and useless.

When we know Jesus personally, the Holy Spirit empowers us to care about others as much as or more than we care about ourselves. That empowerment means we're a fellowship community in mission and ministry to others in need.

From the beginning, Christians have been called to be the "leaven in the bread," "the light on the hill," the difference in this world. The Spirit came to the Church at Pentecost so the disciples could speak a new language all people could understand. It turned out it was the language of love.

That's why when we get together we pray for one another or help one another whether they are in our church or elsewhere. We are to be a caring fellowship. It's not all about "me" but, like the new Ohio Health ads, it's all about "we."

A famous organist was giving a recital with an organ that was supplied by a hand air pump. A young boy was hired to pump the organ for the concert. All was going along fine when the lad put his head around the side of the organ and whispered: "We're doing pretty good, aren't we?"

"What do you mean 'we'?" snapped the organist. A few minutes later, in the midst of a note, the organ suddenly stopped. Desperately, the organist tried all the stops. No use. Then he saw the head of the boy around the corner again, a broad smile on his face. He said, "Now do you know what I mean by 'we'?"

Friends, we need each other's help. There's no such thing as solitary Christianity. Christianity is a fellowship of caring in which you not only receive, but you are also to give.

Over the years those in the Christian Church have taken the fellowship of caring outside the local church into a ministry of service so that people in all

walks of life can “see Jesus.” The Church has created hospitals, schools, homeless centers and more for those overlooked or rejected by the world.

But some critics will say, if the Christian Church has been here for two thousand years, why isn’t the world a better place? It’s true the Church is a human institution and is certainly imperfect, but I say, the world is a better place because the Church has been here. How has that happened?

The answer is what we’re celebrating. At that first Pentecost the Spirit entered the Church, a stumbling and frail institution, whose behavior in history has often been a disgrace. Yet, the Spirit is still working to renew it. At Pentecost the Spirit entered the lives of ordinary men and women and empowered them to do extraordinary things. God hasn’t finished the story; He’s simple using different people—you and me. The Spirit still works within each one of us to allow us to see Jesus and show Jesus to others as we witness, disciple and serve.

How all this happens in the Church and in us is not “rocket science.” It’s more than that. It’s a MIRACLE! And it’s worth celebrating!! Happy birthday church.

In closing, join me in a prayer that is printed in your bulletin. It’s a simple invitation to be empowered and used by the Spirit in a new way wherever we are, whatever we do:

**Holy Spirit, fill me now;  
In Thy presence I humbly bow.  
Fill me now so that others may see  
Jesus Christ shining out through me.**

**And all of God’s people said: Amen!**