

Which Hardware Store: *Mark 3:13-19 and Acts 2:1-21*

Norwalk Christian Church, May 15, 2016, Pentecost, Year C

In a month you will have a special opportunity. You may remember when you were in the process of hiring new ministers, our Regional Minister, Bill Spangler-Dunning, came here one Sunday and led a small group conversation, in lieu of worship, called a “World Café”. You moved around the fellowship hall, meeting new people, connecting with people you haven’t talked to in a while, hearing each other’s stories and dreams and visions for the future of this church, and your future ministers. We’ve had many people tell us how much they enjoyed the World Café experience, and wanted to do it again.

Well, if that’s you, you’re in luck! We are going to have another World Café conversations on June 12th. It’s not to talk about new ministers...sorry! I’m not sure if Marti or I are what you envisioned during the last World Café...but we’re what you got and if we have our say, you’ll be stuck with us for a long, long time! ;-)

This conversation is going to be different. It’s going to be about the future of the church, what you dream and vision. On the back of your bulletin is a message from Lance Randolph (wave, Lance), your 2016 church Board Chair. In it, Lance says:

As a board, we do not believe that feedback, the mission of our church or the long-term vision for NCC should be exclusive to any one committee or group. We want your involvement, thoughts and great ideas! On Sunday, June 12, we will be replacing our normal service with a "World Cafe" format. This is a chance for all of us to participate in discussion on a flexible small group basis to address our purpose, discuss opportunities and in general share our thoughts on priorities and vision for NCC, all while getting to know one another better. This discussion will be facilitated by our Regional Minister, Bill Spangler-Dunning, and promises to provide solid direction and ideas moving forward. Thank you in advance for your participation in this exciting opportunity for NCC, and if you have any questions, see a Church Board member!

It’s going to be an exciting day, and I look forward to the visions that come as we dream together about the future of our church. I hope everyone of you will be there. Young and old; whether you’re new to this church or been here your whole life, or somewhere in between; whether you’re active in the church outside of Sunday morning, or if Sunday morning is your primary connection point to this community--we want you there. We want to be overflowing with people, dreams and visions.

This morning, we heard two texts, one from Mark, the Gospel we’ve been exploring together, and the other from Acts, the text that speaks to us about Pentecost, the beginning of the church and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The stories told in these texts are separated by several years, but they have the same characters in them. In Mark, we have the calling of the Disciples, the same group of people gathered together in the upper room when Pentecost begins. Mark tells us that Jesus goes up to a mountain and calls to him “those whom he wanted.” This messed up, confused, doubting, denying and betraying crowd of disciples--ones who, in the Gospel of Mark, never get it and are always fighting over who is the greatest--these disciples who fail to see who Jesus really is until after he rose from the dead--these are the disciples “whom Jesus wanted.” He hand-picked this crowd.

It’s not the crowd I would’ve picked, that’s for sure...but, you know, it’s probably the crowd I would’ve been in. Because, at my best, I’m a lot like these disciples. I doubt and deny. I try hard, but I mess up and don’t get it. I miss Jesus, sometimes when he’s standing right in front of me. And yet, here I am. Here we all are, disciples of Christ. Jesus has chosen those whom he wanted, and that’s us. We are Christ’s Disciples, too.

These same Disciples Jesus chose in Mark are the ones who are gathered in the upper room on Pentecost, when the wind blows and the fire comes and the Holy Spirit arrives. The characters are the same, except Jesus is no longer with them (and also Judas, but that’s another story). A chapter before in Acts, they saw Jesus ascend right up to heaven. Gone, from eyesight, gone from the earth. It’s just them, the ones Jesus called and trained. “But I’m not going to leave you alone,” Jesus told them. “I’m sending you a comforter.” “And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”

For years, when they wanted to know what they should do, they just asked Jesus. He was there. He would tell them. He would cast the vision. But now, Jesus was gone. But he gave them the gift of God’s Spirit, living inside of them. No more would they need to be told the vision. The Spirit would make the vision alive, within them.

And with thunder and a mighty wind, the comforter arrives; the Holy Spirit fills these unlikely Disciples of Christ, and the world is forever changed.

Wouldn’t that be something? Changing the world for Christ! We have a lot in common with those first Disciples, that is for sure. But still we long for the moment when it clicks, when the Spirit fills us up and sends us out to change the world.

When you did that last World Café, in preparation to hire new ministers, one of the things mentioned throughout the conversation that you wanted to become a church that was known for something more than being the “church next to the Hardware store.” The other day in the Church Board meeting, someone jokingly (I think??) suggested we make new church T-shirts that say on the front, “Norwalk Christian Church”, and on the back, “The Church beside the Hardware Store.”

It’s a good idea, except there’s one problem. *Which Hardware Store?* Because as of a few weeks ago, Norwalk now has two Hardware Stores. Of course, our church was

meeting on this piece of earth before there was a Hardware store. And though we were the second Church to arrive in this community when Disciples showed up in 1869, now there are 8 churches in town. I noticed the other day that at least three different churches in town had “All Are Welcome” on their church sign, just like we do.

Who are we, when there’s more than one Hardware Store in town? There’s a lot that we’ve been as a church, a lot that we’ve done. Great things! Things worthy of celebration. But what’s next? Where do we go from here?

I imagine that was the question on the minds of the Disciples that morning. They had given up everything, left their families and old lives, to follow after Jesus. Now what? Where do we go from here?

What they didn’t realize was that their story was only beginning. All that had happened before was prelude--training--for what was ahead. For the Spirit was about to arrive, and fill them with power. Power, that would lead them from that room in Jerusalem to the very ends of the Earth, sharing the Good News of Christ.

The power that filled them that day, fills us, this day. The only difference maybe that they were more keenly aware of it. They were expecting it. Today, we don’t expect such things, and so we miss them.

But on this Pentecost, the message is still the same. Whether we expect it or not, when the church gathers together, God’s Spirit fills them up. And through the Spirit, great things can happen.

It wasn’t just Peter that filled by the Spirit that Pentecost. It was all of the Disciples--everyone of them had a part to play in that great revival. They all spoke in languages that anyone could understand. They all shared the Good News of God.

And that is Church. Church is not a worship program that a few people put on for the masses, a vendor of religious goods and services. Church is us--all of us--filled with the Holy Spirit, being led from this place into the world, changing the world with the Good News of Christ. What we do in here is only prelude for what we can do out there, in the world. Here we are filled up, renewed and then sent out to a fragmented world hungry for God’s Good News of Wholeness.

No longer do we have to look outward for some expert to tell us what to do. God has made God’s dwelling within us. The vision for who we are and should be as church in this place is right here, within us.

That’s why we’re having our World Café on June 12th. Because your leaders believe that the Spirit moves mightily when we gather together seeking God’s vision for this community of Disciples. And you--every one of you--has a part to play. You have a voice

and a role and a vision for what God can do through you and through us all, as we join together to change our community and this world for the sake of Christ.

What's next? Who knows what's next! We've had a lot of great days, but our best days are in front of us.

We're the church beside *one* of the hardware stores in town, yes...but we are so much more--we always have been. And if we open up to the Spirit, feel the rush of wind and hear the thunder, then who knows where God may send us.

Amen? Amen.

Our song of invitation will be 259. Christ offers us the invitation to join with him at the Table. But also, today, we offer another invitation. If you want to identify your life with the life of this church, and officially become a part of this community of Christ that is walking together the journey of discipleship, then Pentecost is a good day to do this. You can come to the front of the sanctuary during this song. Or, if you'd rather, talk to Pastor Marti or I after worship and tell us you want to join. Pentecost is a great day to join a church. Let us all sing together, now, 259, Spirit of the Living God.