

Yes... And

Menno Mennonite Church
April 19, 2026

Purpose: To celebrate the working of God's Spirit that continues yet today.

Message: The working of the early church is not the singular instance of the Spirit's work, but rather the beginning of the life of the Spirit that continues today.

Scripture: Acts 2:14; 36-41 (I will read); Psalm 116:1-4; 12-19 (Please read)

Synopsis: There is a long-held expectation in improv drama that you don't want to shut down the seen. You always want to build on what is going on in front of you by answering "yes, and". In many ways that is how we are invited into the work of the Spirit in the church. As much as we long for the massive impacts of the first movements of the Spirit in Pentecost we are invited into the ongoing working of the Spirit that gives life even beyond our expectations. Resurrection life reminds us that it is the Spirit's work that is bringing life to the church each and every day. We are invited to say yes to what is happening with it.

Acts 2:14 36-41

¹⁴ Peter stood with the other eleven apostles.

He raised his voice and declared,
“Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem!

Know this! Listen carefully to my words!

³⁶ “Therefore, let all Israel know beyond question
that God has made this Jesus,
whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

³⁷ When the crowd heard this, they were deeply troubled.
They said to Peter and the other apostles,
“Brothers, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Change your hearts and lives.

Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of your sins.
Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away—
as many as the Lord our God invites.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he testified to them
and encouraged them, saying,

“Be saved from this perverse generation.”

⁴¹ Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized.

God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day.

I am guessing it will not surprise you that among my activities in High School and college was being a bit of theater nerd. It was part of the geeky value pack; in for a penny, in for a pound. I never landed any lead role in what we were doing, but enjoyed what I did and got into the various trades behind the scenes as well. The highlight for me wasn't necessarily the lasting applause and the final curtain. It was gratifying and all of that. But it also was the all too short end of all the work and fun of pulling together a show. It meant packing away the late nights, generalized fun, inside jokes, and hanging out that went with working together. It was time to take it all apart, stack away the flats, and clean everything up. It was all a bit depressing not because the spotlights were ready to turn off but because the process was now done. Ordinary life, the same old same old of a life that, by comparison, was way too ordinary and boring to be tolerated. A life-long sufferer of fear of missing out (FOMO), I always have been way more about the shiny fun activity than about the ordinary way things are. When we are stuck in the ordinary it is hard not to assume that things are supposed to be exciting and shiny.

I come to this because this is how we most often read this text—the big performance and the spotlight at full brightness. We love these mountain top experiences where the spectacular is on ready display. It is the splash of wind and fire with thousands in attendance being added to their number every day. We read and witness the working of the early church and the amazing story that it all is and then we wonder, almost inevitably, “where can I connect into that?” I mean how can we not? How can we not want to see smoke, wind and fire moving. How do we not want to have the Spirit move in ways that are unambiguously specific and impactful? How can we not want to see thousands added to their number, especially given our love for graphs that do nothing but go up and to the right? It is so easy to understand and know and feel the success, and it is so tempting to somewhat shamefully hang our heads, shuffle our feet, and mumble when we look to the state of affairs in the present North American church. We keep looking for program, recipes and prescriptions to get it all going and get back to the Spiritual intervention that we covet. We suffer the fear of missing the Spirit, and wonder if that work of God in that way just doesn't work in that way or not at least for the likes of us.

Here's the thing about Pentecost that I want you to remember as we get ready for this celebration in the coming weeks: Pentecost is not a historical anniversary that we mark so much as a launching of a whole new way of working with God and the Spirit. The show—the spotlights, big speeches and bigger responses, as wonderful and desirous as they are—are just

that: the initiation of what is about to be, and the launching for the way things now are. This comes to being not for the preaching or the testimony or the special effects of fire and flame or anything that makes the coming of the Spirit special. It is the working of the Spirit in the way and will of God that the Kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven will become to made real as we are enabled by the Spirit of the living God. This is no longer about fire and flame from the holy mountain—the original realization of God’s Spirit that Pentecost speaks to—but the ongoing presence of the Spirit in the every day reality and living of those who would come and participate in what God is going. The miraculous presence did not pack itself away when the show was over between the night of verse 41 and the morning of verse 42. There is no day after the Day of the Holy Spirit. This is the ongoing day-to-day reality of the presence of God with us. This is about the enabling of the Spirit as the persistent norm, no matter what.

What we are witnessing here is not so much a scripted performance of how things are then to proceed. There is no threshold set for the Spirit’s work to be made adequate in order to be effective, no 5 symptoms that specifically need to be exhibited in order to confirm the diagnosis of Spiritual inspiration (any action and inspiration of the creating God of the universe will do). Instead we are seeing a bit of an ongoing improvisational performance of people taking and building on what the Spirit is doing in the world.

I am going to go out on a limb and guess that improvisational theater has not been a terribly common recreational activity for you all. But there is a lot of fun to be had in taking a premise and seeing where it leads as you work with the others in the scene to make it up as you are going along. There is a rule in improv and it is fairly simple: the only response is yes; and. You want to take what ever the person around you and in front of you has given you to deal with, no matter how peculiar and how bizarre and take it in by accepting it and building on it. When you are working with a group and there is someone who is trying to shape things the only one way that they know and they suggest, insisting on things being done their way it is really hard to collaborate and create something together. Sure: there is the whim of whatever inspiration comes before you. You need to accept that. But when you have done that you can go and build into the next thing as you continue from there to something else. Yes And allows the flow and the inspiration to continue even when the final destination does not lay in any script.

The same principle applies to the interplay between the believer and the Spirit. The gathered people who they are speaking to—faithful people there to mark the festival of Pentecost

are being asked to interpret their faith live and on the spot. They are making a shift as the wind blew their course new again. As Willie James Jennings writes in his commentary, “Repentance, forgiveness, and gift are all themes that flow through the streams of Israel’s historical consciousness.” That is the Divine “Yes!” But the stream is taking a new direction at Pentecost. In the question, “what should we do?” Jennings argues that we must hear “the astounding work of the living God who will not be relegated to Israel’s past but will reveal divine faithfulness to ancient promises in the present moment.” Not just “yes” but “yes, and...” God is doing something new both then and now, creating the kingdom of God that has been intended from the very first. That work continues to this very day and this very hour. If we take on our role as responders to the action of God’s good acts, The church isn’t the left overs of what happens after the Holy Spirit showed up once upon a time. The church—all church-- is the direct result of Holy Spirit’s endeavor that still shows up. Where ever people can be inspired beyond themselves to be more like Jesus and less like our earthy selves there too the Spirit is yet moving.

Sometimes we think that the Spirit does not belong to the likes of us somehow. I will be the first to admit that expressions of charisma (meaning the presence of the Spirit, not our ability to charm and be amazing) are not what we would quickly characterize as qualities of Menno. At least if allow the list be defined by the script that other people apply to it. We are not given to outbursts of unplanned worship or unanticipated comment. Even clapping can make us a bit uncomfortable in an unfamiliar song. That is stopping well before the more nuanced of the Spiritual gifts.

But none of that belies the work of the Spirit. From the very beginning this congregation was one of saying yes. Yes to the challenges of carving out a new community in new and challenging land. Yes to finding a way to be together in ways that brought people together that in other times and places may not have seen eye to eye. Yes to putting down roots deep enough to sustain through good times and bad. Yes to sharing and serving beyond this place and time well beyond what seems practical. Yes to simply showing up and doing and being body together, no matter what. Yes to doing things that take time because it is simply what we want to give to the next generation. These are workings of the Spirit, and workings that continue to carry us forward. We could go on and on well past the time allotted. The Spirit is alive and well here, and that will not change.

Because the Spirit is not a reality beyond and outside of us. It is a part of us. It is a part of us claimed by our faith and affirmed by our baptism and as we say with our best intentions “yes” and open ourselves to all the ends that come after. We are part of the Pentecostal movement that unleashes the Spirit on all who would claim the Lord and seek his ways. We are fundamentally people of Spirit who are invited time and again to come and be who we were created to be. It is the eternal God coming and making new out of all that can feel so old in ourselves and in the world. It is God taking what we do and what we say and making out of it something that is bigger and broader than what we ourselves can every make it. Yes: we interact with the Spirit and the Spirit responds and guides u, not just our need to either catch the flame or not. God can take that which we do and we don’t do and bring life out of that too.

This season of resurrection invites us to consider that which the Spirit is doing in us and through us, to see what new life comes for us. We are going to be working more with our life in the Spirit in anticipation of Pentecost in May.

As we do so, know this: The Spirit remains. It is not wrong to want more for the church. It is not wrong to desire for numerical success. It is certainly not wrong to hope and pray for Spiritual revival and powerful manifestations in our midst. In fact we might do even more of that. None of this is wrong unless it causes us to overlook the certain fact that the Holy Spirit is present already because it never left in the first place. We must remember that as we each bring our own yest, and...