

# IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, August 8, 2021

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## **Ephesians 4:25-5:1**

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles brothers what should we do Peter said to them repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the holy spirit for the promise is for you for your children and for all who are far away everyone whom the lord our god calls to him and he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them saying save yourselves from this corrupt generation so those who welcomed his message were baptized and that day about 3 000 people were added they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers all came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles all who believed were together and had all things in common they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need and day by day as they spent much time together in the temple they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts praising god and having the good will of all the people and day by day the lord added to their number those who are being saved.

Beloved, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So, in the response to the proclamation of the good news of God that Peter gives to these people, the response is a question. We don't hear it in the text, but it is asked 'what should we do?'

And the answer is 'be baptized' Peter says. Mark yourselves with this change that you know has happened in the world that we have seen happen, and we have attested to you. Mark yourself with the change the transformation.

The good news that has been proclaimed to them in verse 39 is that the promise of God is for them, but it's not just for them, it's also for their children and indeed it is for everyone near and far. It is the good news for everyone that God calls to God. Do you notice how inclusive that good news is? No one's left out. Everyone's invited. That's the good news that resonates with the people of God in that moment; so that many are baptized; indeed 3 000 are added to their number that day. Everyone whom the Lord has called, and we get a glimpse of that this day.

Then hearing this proclamation from Peter and then being baptized they continue to ask, 'how are we to faithfully respond', and the scripture says that they did a number of things. The first is that they devoted themselves. Do you hear that? They devoted themselves first to the apostles' teachings as the scriptures were opened to them. They decided that learning from holy

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scripture, having it proclaimed to them, was something that they would devote their lives to, but they also devoted themselves to something else, fellowship.

Verse 42 says they devoted themselves first to the apostle's teachings, then to fellowship, to the breaking of bread. They gathered around table together, and then they finally prayed together. They devoted themselves to being a people of prayer and what happens next is inspiring stuff. Verse 43 says that many signs and wonders were done amongst them. Many signs and wonders were done amongst them, and the response to these signs and wonders by the gathered people is that awe came upon everyone.

Now here's the thing, beloved; we don't get the specifics of the signs and the wonders that have taken place, but we do get the collective response of the people of God, and it is awe. There's no need to explain. They simply sit back, and they understand in that moment the awesome power of God at work in their lives and in the world.

Can you imagine being a part of that story, a part of that scene? Can you imagine hearing Peter's sermon and being so inspired that you wanted to be baptized, that you wanted to gather and devote yourself to teaching and to fellowship and to breaking bread together and to prayer. Can you imagine how inspiring that must have been, that awe would fall upon each and every single one of us?

Beloved, when we truly have an experience of God as these people did in Acts 2 all is the right and faithful response. While we don't know exactly what it is that happened amongst the Christ followers, we do know this: that whatever happened was powerful for them, it was transformational for them, and it was awe-inspiring, because of those things beginning to shift; first, within them, and then in the community around them.

Scripture says because of this experience they become more generous; they become more concerned with their community; the community around them. They start spending a lot of time together making fellowship a priority in their calendars amongst all the other things. Can you imagine all the other things they need to do? Yet they make it a priority. They decide they're going to eat meals together. They seem to understand that something happens around the table that can't happen anywhere else.

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Then scripture says this, “They praise God together. They lose themselves in song and in prayer and in meditation.” The Spirit of God which had made itself known on the day of Pentecost started to do something in their community. The Spirit of God, as they start to do all these things, become more generous. They start spending a lot of time together. They start eating meals together. They start praying together and praising God together. As they start doing this Scripture says that people begin to be drawn to them. Something about what they are doing, in the way in which they are being community, is invitational to people outside of that community. The Spirit connects them as a body with people who need the message of the good news.

God did this. The Spirit did this not so that that group might be glorified, but so that all might experience the transformational power of God at work in the world. God did it so that people might experience transformation. The people themselves in that community, but then, so that the community around them might be transformed. God doesn’t give the gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of Pentecost just so that small group of early followers might be transformed, but so that the whole community the whole world might experience it.

As the mystic John O’Donoghue says “the gifts that are given to us as individuals are not usually meant for us alone, but are actually for the community, and to be offered.”

Can you imagine being a part of a community like that? The one that that we hear the author of Luke or Acts write about this many years later. Can you imagine being a part of that story a part of a community so vital and vibrant that people are drawn to it. That there is something going on so powerful in the midst of that community that people say I need and want to be a part of that. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be in the neighborhood around that community and to be able to notice things are changing?

There’s something happening there. I haven’t walked through the doors of that place, although I’ve driven past it a thousand times. But I need to go and see what’s happening.

When we started our study of the fruit of the spirit, I told you that I believe that if we could embody these gifts of the Spirit of God not only would we be changed but the community around us could be transformed. I very much believe that to be true. I believe it because our scriptures reflect this story from 2, 000 some odd years ago of a group that when gifted with the Holy Spirit of God began to change and shift in ways that were life-giving not only to them but

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to the community around them. Beloved, I have a spiritual practice for us this morning. I invite you to close your eyes for a minute. If you're sleeping, you're already halfway there. So close your eyes just for a moment.

Imagine with me it is 50 some odd years from now, and you're standing on the other side of Union Avenue, and you're looking at Idlewild Presbyterian Church. What does it look like in your mind's eye? What's the grass look like? What are the stones that make up its foundation? What do they look like?

In your imagining I want you to think about a group of folks gathered in the garth. I want you to walk across Union and walk up those steps and sit with them in a circle on that grass. I want you to imagine that they are doing a study. It's actually a history of Idlewild Presbyterian Church. They're looking back some 50 odd year and start talking about this group of followers of Jesus Christ that God had seen fit to call to the church in 2021.

You sit down next to them, and they start talking about us. They say this group they were navigating a pandemic; they were figuring out what it meant to be community both virtually and incarnational-ly with one another. To be honest with you they didn't know what that community was going to look like on the other side of the pandemic, but they did believe that God was at work within them and then they did something.

They devoted themselves to learning together, to studying scripture together. They had a great history of doing that, but some had fallen out of that practice. They devoted themselves once again to this story of God.

They said that there is something deep and abiding in the value of this ancient book of wisdom literature that we can learn from, that can transform us in our community. And then they devoted themselves to fellowship. They made it a priority amongst all the other schedules that vouched for their attention. They made it a priority to show up and to be with each other. They sat around table together in small groups, but also on Sunday mornings. They shared meals at their homes and at restaurants and then they did something else. Something that some of them were really comfortable with and some was brand new to them; they started praying together. Some of them felt very comfortable in praying. Others had to learn their particular practice, but

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they communed with the divine in prayer first on their own and then with their families and people that they loved and then with the greater church community.

You can go ahead and open your eyes if you haven't already. They continue teaching though.

The teacher in the garth that day says some people were excited for this journey. They jumped right at it. They were ready. They've been waiting for a long time, but others were skeptical. They kept repeating the worn-out line, but we are the frozen chosen until by God's grace they realized that that old mantra was a big fat lie meant only to dull their experience of the divine, abdicate their responsibility to their community, and lessen their expectations that god might actually do something within them and around them.

So, they thawed out and they started bearing love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and generosity and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. And here's the crazy thing. Something started happening. Signs and wonders started happening amongst them. Some could be explained. They were rather cause and effect, but still others were beyond expectation and explanation. Regardless, everyone was amazed by what took place. Awe fell upon everyone in that year and they realized that the promise was for them, but not just for them; it was for their children and for everyone to whom the Lord God had called.

What does this place look like in 50 years?

In your mind's eye has it changed?

Has it been transformed?

Beloved, can you imagine being a part of the story that is told some 50 odd years from now? Because you can be.

It's the invitation of the Spirit of God to you and to me this day. It's the invitation of that Spirit rushing in like the rush of a violent wind. It is the invitation of hearing different voices but hearing them clearly. It's the invitation of a preacher emboldened from having seen resurrection happen; emboldened to call for people to be transformed, and then to mark themselves as transformed. It is the invitation for you. It's the invitation for your family. it's the invitation of our church community. Can you imagine being a part of that story?

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It's the invitation of the very Spirit of God at work within us to recognize first that love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and generosity and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control live within us, and we are called to bear them out into the world.

Can you imagine the change that would happen in a community, within our community, when we commit to believing and bearing these fruits in the world?

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; one God, mother of us all.  
Amen.