

A PENTECOST FIELD TRIP

(Numbers 11:24-30, Acts 2:1-21)

Opening prayer: God, the source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out on us the spirit of wisdom and understanding, that our hearts and minds might be opened today. Amen.

Didn't you always love school field trips? You got to leave the class room behind for the day, pile into a school bus, and in my case, head for Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello. I learned a lot that day about our his writing the Declaration of Independence, becoming the third United States president and being an all around genius. But I also learned that he owned over 600 enslaved people throughout his lifetime, with around 400 held at Monticello and 200 on other properties. He inherited his first slaves at age fourteen and continued the practice throughout his life, despite his public anti-slavery sentiments. This was largely driven by his massive financial debts and following his death on July 4, 1826, the majority of the enslaved population was sold to pay off his debts, dividing many families. However, something I did not learn about on my school field trip was his relationship with Sally Hemmings. That was not talked about in 1960! By the way, upon his death, Sally Hemmings and her sons were unofficially freed by Jefferson's daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, rather than being emancipated by his will.

Why do I bring this up on Pentecost Sunday? Well, we are going on a Pentecost field trip this morning, so fasten your seat belts. Oh, that's right, your big yellow school bus does not have seat belts! So, pile in and sit still! Our first stop on this field trip is in New York state's Hudson Valley at the Phillipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow. Yes, it is that same Sleepy Hollow that Ichabod Crane had a head or a pumpkin thrown at him! Also, on this field trip, we will stop to visit the nearby Union Church in Pocantico Hills, a simple stone country church designed by Henri Matisse (his last work before his death) and with nine stained glass windows by Marc

Chagall (all paid for by the Rockefeller family). These stained glass windows tell the biblical stories of the likes of Daniel, Ezekiel, Elijah and Joel, with the center pieces being the Good Samaritan and the Crucifixion of Christ. If we are fortunate enough, we might even hear the music of American composer, James Matheson being played. His wonderful work, based on all this stained glass is simply named “Windows.”

But again, our real reason for this field trip is our stop at the Phillipsburg Manor. On this weekend every year, this is where a great celebration of Pentecost takes place. It is called “Pinkster.” “Pinkster” (a shortened word for “Pinksteren,” the Dutch word for Pentecost) was a prime Sunday on the Dutch Reformed calendar in what was then called New Netherland. New Netherland was a 17th century Dutch colony covering parts of modern-day New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Connecticut and Delaware. Its capital was New Amsterdam, that we now know as Manhattan. The Dutch observed Pentecost (“Pinkster”) by attending special church services, holding baptisms and confirmations and visiting one another, with the children dyeing eggs and eating ginger bread.

However, the enslaved population of New Netherland looked on with envy. At this time in our history, slavery was by no means confined to the South. For example, in 1703, 42 per cent of New York City’s households had slaves. Only Charleston, South Carolina had more. The Phillipsburg Manor in Westchester County that we are visiting on our field trip today was a 52,000 acre estate owned by Dutch born Frederick Phillipse, who also owned 120 enslaved men, women, and children. These enslaved people kept the manor owner rich, running an outstanding household, a very famous gristmill, and a large dairy. But somehow the enslaved population maintained family networks, shared their cultural heritage and expressed fundamental humanity in opposition to the inhumane system that bound them. And 23 of them got the idea for their own Pentecost (“Pinkster”) celebration and around 1640, “Pinkster” began at Phillipsburg Manor. Freed from work, they took to the streets to parade, dance, socialize and consume special food and drink. Their masters allowed it all, this Pentecost celebration called “Pinkster,” as a safety valve through which a year’s accumulated grievances could blow,

knowing how they needed the slaves to keep the manor running smoothly. But on our field trip, I do ask some questions: Behind closed doors, what did these religious Dutch Americans really think about this “Black Pinkster?” Did they draw any connections between what they saw on the street (parading and dancing) with what they read from the book of Acts, chapter 2 - perceived crazy people babbling and claiming possession of the Holy Spirit and folks looking at them from the outside and claiming that they were drunk before noon? Was the celebrating on the streets by slaves separable from the perceived craziness of the Galileans in the Upper Room? I wonder! The enslaved population now had their own Pentecost celebration, but even more celebratory! What did it make their masters feel? Were they even a little jealous of their slaves singing and dancing? But we must move on, to several thousand miles away on our field trip and the school bus won’t get us there. We must use our imaginations and now move on to the Upper Room in Jerusalem!

For here in Jerusalem was the first “Pinkster,” the first Pentecost, the birthday of the church. Here we see discouraged disciples come alive, here a variety of nations are represented, here the first sermon of the church is delivered by Peter, and here 3000 of these folks from a variety of cultures and languages are baptized in one day (the 12 disciples who did the baptizing had to have real stamina). Here the tongues of fire come down (I’ve always wondered what this exactly meant - could you smell the fire too?), and the various nationalities hear the Word of God in their own languages. What a scene? crazier than a “Pinkster” parade of dancing and singing in Phillipsburg! But our field trip has brought us here. So, let’s see what we can learn.

As you probably all know, Pentecost means 50 days after Passover and always occurs on Sunday, the first day of the week. Jewish tradition had it that the first Pentecost coincided with the day God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. So we can say this: just as God appeared to Moses in thunder, fire and wind, so God’s glory filled the Upper Room of 120 followers of Jesus, that then shook all Jerusalem. God summoned the Israelites around Him at Mt. Sinai under Moses’ leadership, and so it seemed like all of Jerusalem flocked around the Upper Room to see what was going on. And as God made a covenant with his people at Mt.

Sinai, so God kept his promise of sending his Spirit to his people in Jerusalem at the festival of Pentecost.

And way back at the first Pentecost, Moses did not do things alone. As we might say today, “it took a village.” As a matter of fact, Moses had become very discouraged about the “children of Israel’s constant whining.” What Moses said to God in the earlier verses before our morning reading today from Numbers really grabbed me and I think will grab you too. He said, “I and not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once.” (Numbers 11:14,15, *NRSV*) So, God gave Moses 70 helpers called elders, on whom He placed his Spirit, so that “they shall bear the burden along with you, so that you will not bear it all by yourself.” (Numbers 11:17, *NRSV*) And likewise, the Spirit came to many in the book of Acts, not to one leader, but to thousands who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost, from almost every nation of the then known world - Parthians, Medes, Elamites, etc. To put these ancient nations in modern language, we would say, “Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Greece, Crete, Israel, Italy and Saudi Arabia.

Although we are visiting the Upper Room in our imaginary field trip today, you could call a travel agency and arrange a visit to this two story building where Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and appeared to them after his resurrection. You could come to the spot where the disciples and the women gathered following Jesus’ ascension, where the election of a new member of the 12, Matthias, took place, following the death of Judas, and of course, where the first Christian Pentecost took place. You could go there!

But it’s time to come back home. Let’s leave our field trips behind and come back to First Presbyterian Church, Las Cruces. And I’m glad we are here! What a celebration we have experienced this morning. We have given a new meaning of “being in the red.” You might even say we have seen the Spirit rise or balloon in our hearts. And let me suggest something else you can do to continue this celebration this week. Find a quiet place and sit down and read our church’s 2025 Annual Report again. Or read it for the first time. If you don’t have one,

I'm sure there are still copies in the office. Let me just say this, we may not be changing the world, but we are doing a pretty good job of being "a place where Christian love is modeled:" from providing Christmas baskets to giving physical and spiritual nourishment at "Salt and Light," from Sunday School to Vacation Bible School, from "Trunk or Treat" to building beds, from sponsoring the Gutierrez family to helping support our own missionaries, Joel and Barbara Trudell, from support groups to fellowship gatherings, We celebrate! And how about our music and worship that lifts our souls every Sunday morning of the year? And Bible Studies and fellowship groups and so much left unsaid? Read about them all again and it will encourage you to celebrate that long train of believers from Moses to the Upper Room, from "Pinkster" to "our place." But we always have work to do, always looking for better ways to serve, never resting on our laurels. So with the song writer we close this celebration of the birthday of the church with this encouraging prayer, as you seek out how to let the Spirit of God move in your lives: "As we are filled with the Spirit's power, with one accord the infant church confessed its risen Lord, O Holy Spirit, in the church today, no less your power of fellowship display. Now with the mind of Christ set us on fire, that unity may be our great desire. Give joy and peace; give faith to hear your call, and readiness in each to work for all. Widen your love, good Spirit, to embrace in your strong care, all those of every race. Like wind and fire with life among us move, till we are known as Christ's, and Christians prove." (J. R. Peacey, Hope Publishing). AMEN!