

Pregnancy, the series, #7: The Baby is Born – Now What? – Acts 2:1-12; Ezekiel _____
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – Pentecost Sunday (May 19) 2013

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested^a on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

On Easter the baby was conceived. In the weeks since, we have been preparing for the birth – through focus on what the baby sees, feels, learns, on what the nursery will look like, and on how the midwifery and coaching will proceed. But all that's behind us now.

Today is the BIRTH – day.

Those of you who have been there for the birth process know that it is a day that, along with a few others in life, can never be forgotten. It is one of the most transformative days in all of life – and that's not even about the one being born.

I'll never forget how the day my firstborn came into the world, my parents' IQ jumped 25 points, in my mind.

The birth we are talking about today, is that of THE CHURCH.

That's not always appreciated, in today's "What have you done lately for me" way of thinking. But, perhaps, it is just the Church being received as a Baby that REQUIRES promises and commitments, just like Jess, Tim, Miranda, and Billy made today, in order to take us to a different place.

In his latest book, *Falling Upward*, Richard Rohr describes this culture in which we live, like this:

"In the western world, it seems that we cannot build prisons fast enough, or have enough recovery groups, or therapists, or re-parenting classes for all the walking wounded in this very educated, religious and sophisticated society, which has little respect for limitations and a huge sense of entitlement."

The church, like a baby born in our midst, REQUIRES OUR COMMITMENTS, in order to make it.

But, alas, the church, like a baby born in our midst, REQUIRES OUR COMMITMENTS, in order to **FOR US** to make it.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Before we look deeply into what this baby is going to require, we need to go to the hospital and take a look.

Want to see the baby? Come on.

Now, when I go in to see a newborn and his/her parents at the hospital, I am allowed in, because I wear this badge. [pin on clergy ID badge.]

You will need a security wrist band in order to get in, however. It's not the way it was 15 years ago, where any Joe-Blow off the street could wander in to look through the glass window at the babies in the layette, like going to a Kiddy-Zoo.

I'll ask the ushers to pass out the security bracelets/wrist bands.

[Each person receives a silicone bracelet that says: Beloved child of God, Precious, Beautiful to Behold.]

That's your ticket in to see the baby.

Beyond our metaphor, that's your admission into the Church, as well. It's the sign of your Baptism, the name of your identity. We remind you of that in the bulletin every Sunday.

It's important to remember that.

It's important to remember who you are, and Whose you are.

Your worth, your value are not based on what the world gives, are not based on what you accomplish.

This Church is filled with a bunch of people whom God has marked in their baptism as Beloved Children of God.

That's not always easy to accept, because the world is every day telling you that your worth is based on the world's standards, based on who you know, or what you have accomplished.

Changes are hard to make.

I read this past week about

“a man [who] took his hunting dog out on a trial hunt. Presently he shot a duck that fell into the lake. The dog walked on top of the water across the lake, picked up the duck, and walked back to his master, laying the duck at his feet. The man

was flabbergasted! He shot another duck. Once again, the dog walked over the water and retrieved the duck.

“Hardly able to believe what he had seen, the man returned home and called a friend, inviting him to go out for a duck hunt on the following day. Once again, each time he or his companion hit a bird, the dog would walk across on top of the water and bring the bird in. The man said nothing. Neither did his friend. Finally, unable to contain himself any longer, the dog’s owner blurted out: ‘Don’t you notice anything strange about my dog?’

“The neighbor rubbed his chin thoughtfully, ‘Yes,’ he finally said. ‘Now that you mention it, I do. I didn’t want to insult you, but your dog can’t swim.’”¹

Change is sometimes hard for us.

It takes something special to get us to change.

The birth of the Church is about Change.

Look at our scriptures today.

The Church is born in the coming of the Holy Spirit. And like a bunch of dry bones, that come together, rattling like a skeleton, the life comes about from the Spirit.

It brings about change.

Change in the Church is NOT merely about us being entertained or educated or having fellowship – although at some level, at some time, it probably has done any or all of those things for a time.

But – unless we make the commitment TO THE CHURCH, it’s not going to work FOR US.

Did you hear that – unless we are willing to make a commitment, it’s not going to work FOR US. I’m not talking about working for the Church. If we don’t put something into it, make it a priority, be willing to be formed and reformed by Her, she will not change our lives.

None of the apostles who received the Breath or Wind of the Holy Spirit were able to **“keep on doing the same old same old.”**

- 1. We need to know who we are. (Read your bracelet.)**
- 2. We need to make a commitment.**

¹ Ernest Kurtz & Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* p. 117

But the third thing I want us to keep in mind about this new baby whose birth we celebrate today: It breathes, it laughs, it cries, it will do new things, it will fall down, it will stand up. It will fall down.

This Baby – the Church – is a living, breathing organism.

The Anthem today said it so very well:

Come build a church with soul and spirit, come build a church of flesh and bone. We need no tower rising skyward, no house of wood, or glass, or stone. Come build a church with human frailty. Come build a church of flesh and blood.

The Church is full of saints and sinners. Not two different types of people. One. Maybe it's easier to think of the Church as a Body of saintly sinners and sinning saints. We are both. You and me.

And, that might be, for some people, as hard to accept, as it is for some people to accept the identity written on your wrist bracelet.

And the way that we all grow in the Church is by falling down.

The Church is not a place that throws out the people who fall down. Not just because there'd be nobody left.

But the Church is not a place that throws out the people who fall down, BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT WE ALL MUST DO in order to grow closer to God and to one another.

The skater moves forward by skating left and then right.

We stand up. We fall down. It is in the process of falling and standing that God shapes us – as individuals AND as the Body of Christ – the Church.

“Sooner or later, if you are on any kind of spiritual schedule, some event, person, idea, death, or relationship will enter your life that you simply cannot deal with, using your present skill set, your acquired knowledge, or your own will power. Spiritually speaking, you will be, *you must be*, led to the edge of your own private resources.”² You must fall down.

Until we fall down, we will not really let God change our lives. Until we fall down, we think we are still in charge, and we will never allow a hunting dog to walk on water, never allow the Spirit to really change us, never allow ourselves to really believe that our worth is based on God's giving it instead of what we earn or who we know.

We fall down. We get up. We skate on. Left and then right.

² Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward*

This is how the baby lives and grows.

This is how the Church lives and grows.

1. **We need to know who we are. (Read your bracelet.)**
2. **We need to make a commitment.**
3. **We need to fall down, and get up AND embrace one another in those falls, for this is where God's work is being done.**

There are some folks outside the nursery who do not know the baby.

There are some folks outside the nursery who think that inside the Church, we just stand in judgment, stare down our noses at "others," and only welcome those who think and look like us.

But **we know from the scripture we heard today that the action of God's Spirit on the Birth-day was to break down ALL barriers. In God's Church born on Pentecost, the Spirit's very action demonstrated that ALL ARE INVITED, ALL ARE WELCOME. There was no litmus test. All God's children are made in God's image, are beloved, are precious. "Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:39)**

But there are some folks who just don't know.

Come build a church with soul and spirit, come build a church of flesh and bone. We need no tower rising skyward, no house of wood, or glass, or stone. Come build a church with human frailty. Come build a church of flesh and blood. Jesus shall be its sure foundation. It shall be built by the hand of God.

Wear your ID.

- **To remind yourself who you are, Whose you are.**

Wear your ID

- **To remind yourself of how valuable you are.**

Wear your ID

- **To remember your commitment**

Wear your ID

- **To remember that you have before, and will again, fall down. But that's so you can STAND UP and grow. And you are part of a new spirit filled creation where that is expected and encouraged. And you will be loved.**

Wear your ID

- **And when you see someone who would doesn't understand, who doesn't realize, who is looking, who has fallen, who needs to fall ... give them your ID bracelet as their entrance into the nursery. Then, during the week, stop by the office; or on Sunday morning see Janet or me, and we will replace your bracelet, because you have sent yours on to invite someone else.**

Happy birthday! In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.