

MOVE THE FENCE

Acts 2:1-21

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/move-the-fence/>

Pentecost, 2019! Seven weeks after Passover/Easter, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the church. Here's a mental image to ponder: When Jesus began his earthly ministry at baptism, the Spirit descended (Luke 3:22). Now, as the Risen Christ extends his physical ministry through his body, the church, the Spirit descends. And because of that great outpouring, we see a great leveling effect—"all flesh," v. 17.

Not far from here there is a beautiful country cemetery, Cadet Creek Cemetery, near Bonnots Mill. In the late 1800s, a very unpleasant, mean man in that neighborhood died. The church people did not want him buried in their cemetery. So, they buried him outside the fence. Some time later, Karen Morris' Uncle Jim got to thinking about that. Aren't we all sinners? So, he led the community with a plan. They didn't want to dig up this poor sinner, so they just moved the fence to include him! What if the coming of the Holy Spirit reversed that and moved the fences out to embrace others? "all flesh"

The coming of the Holy Spirit was revolutionary, because at Pentecost, the Spirit didn't just come on one nationality or ethnic group (vv. 9-12). When the Spirit came, the infant church had to move the fence to include others. Simon Peter, preaching this Pentecost sermon, used the prophet Joel as his text. Who is included in God's drenching of the world with His love? Young and old (they moved the fence), rich and poor (they moved the fence), men and women (they moved the fence), v. 18.

It's almost humorous, isn't it? We always assume the originated with us. But the coming of the Spirit keeps pushing the fences out.

As I meet people during the week, they ask me what makes FBCJC tick. How do we do all we do in outreach—evangelism as well as social justice work? There are lots of answers, but one key is that God's Spirit has come on us and continually nudges us out, to move the fences to see what love can do.

God gave us a burden for the people of this community—people lost and empty, needing the Risen Christ, people broken by pain, people left out by others. If there is one common theme among the spiritually lost, the financially destitute and storm-tossed lives, it is the cry for hope.

But did you notice? When the Holy Spirit fell on the people of God, some fences moved within them, too, not just among them. That is, Simon Peter was a different person than he had been when he denied Jesus. He could have given up and said, "I'm dirty. I failed. God can't use me." But instead he started over.

Let me ask you. What fences have moved in your heart, as you open up to more of God's presence? You realize, of course, that Simon Peter was not part of the religiously trained and elite. He was a fisherman and his only qualification was that Jesus had happened to him. And he got filled with the Holy Spirit. And it's time the church got over the notion of God's work being done by super-hired holy men and women, ordained clergy. The church is the work of the people. The fences moved on Pentecost: "all flesh..."

When I first fell in love with Major League Baseball, I was just a kid and the Kansas City team was the A's. As a part of a promotion, on September 8, 1965, Bert Campaneris, a young phenom, became the first player to play every position in a major league game. And to add to the show, when he pitched, he pitched both left- and right-handed! Two observations: That is not the way the game is to be played; it is a team sport and everyone is needed. And the 1965 A's were terrible, losing 103 games that season. One person doing everything is a great show, but it is a terrible model. And so with Christ's church. What is the Spirit nudging you to do? As you open up to a call to serve? If anything good has come from the tornado and even our move to the gym, it has been that everyone is needed. Everyone has a ministry, a task.

As we move the fences within us and open new areas of our lives to the Holy Spirit, God can do some amazing things.