

“DOES IT MATTER WHO OPENS OUR HEARTS?”

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27

**Market Square Presbyterian Church in the City of
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**

The Reverend Thomas A. Sweet

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The Sacrament of Holy Communion**

Does it matter who or what opens our hearts?

You likely can deduce, since you are thoughtful people, that I would not be asking the question if I believed the answer to be “no!” “No” would make a very brief sermon. So, just to make it official, my answer to the question is an unqualified “yes!” It matters who opens our hearts.

And because it is Pentecost, it probably is obvious to you my choice to open our hearts. Right again! You’re on a roll! The Holy Spirit of God!

Beloveds, it matters who or what opens our hearts. If we allow hatred to open our hearts, we are going to be angry people filled with animosity and emotional pain. If we allow prejudice to open our hearts, we are going to be racists. If we allow greed to open our heart, we are going to be selfish and insufferable. If we allow jealousy to open our heart, we are going to be suspicious and distrustful. If we allow Fox News to open our heart, we are going to walk around tilting to the right and, if MSNBC, leaning to our left and neither posture is conducive to a healthy, well-aligned body. It matters who opens our hearts.

Every week in this place we call one another to worship with the words: “Come! Now is the time to give our hearts.”¹ We come to worship to give our hearts *to the Lord*, to have them opened again and again by the Spirit of God to a gospel and a way of life that St. Paul calls “the more excellent way.”²

¹ This is the response to the call, “Come! Now is the time to worship!” from a worship song by Brian Doerksen called “Come, Now Is the Time to Worship.”

² 1 Corinthians 12:31

It matters who opens our hearts.

At Christmas, we celebrate the good news that God covets communion with us so much that God took on human flesh. We call it incarnation. In Jesus of Nazareth, we see not only the attributes and the ways of God but also the qualities of true and full humanity in its highest form.

At Easter, we exult that the ways of God embodied in Jesus and his followers cannot finally be defeated. Not even death has any ultimate power, but only God. What was dead is raised again to life. We call it resurrection. We call it vindication. We call it hope.

But it is at Pentecost that we are given the presence and power of the Spirit of God so we may find courage and strength to do and be what the Lord calls us to do and be. It is through the agency and energy of the Holy Spirit that the wisdom and wonderment, the power and promises, of God are conveyed to us. It is how we are formed and shaped as the saints of God. It is called sanctification.

The incarnation and resurrection, of course, are deeply important chapters in our Christian story but it is Pentecost that makes them real in our lives. Pentecost makes us players in God's story, participants in the life and ministry of God, people who embrace the justice, generosity, and hospitality of the Lord toward a renewed and flourishing world.

It matters who opens our hearts.

Without Pentecost, without the pouring out of God's Spirit on us and in us, we remain closed up and closed off not only from God but also from others who are different from us. We remain tribal and parochial and in a world in which there are many hues and stripes of people and peoples, that is a sin. But the wind of God's Spirit blows down barriers and the tongues of God's fire burn through walls that separate people by culture, class, religion, race, nation, sexual orientation, gender expression, language, politics, and every other worldly condition. The Spirit Wind and Holy Fire make it possible for people to be "of one accord" even with our many differences. As the song has it, "We are one in the Spirit."³

It matters who opens our heart.

³ "We Are One in the Spirit," text and music by Peter Scholtes, #300 in [Glory to God](#) hymnal

Either the Spirit of the living God will open our hearts or some lesser spirit who cannot possibly deliver the fullness of life God offers.

When we allow the Spirit of God to open our hearts, we will be - and I have seen it happen when a way appeared where there seemed to be no way...when the power of love transformed a diaspora of disparate people into a community...when previously avowed enemies became friends - when we allow the Spirit of the living God to open our hearts we will be as pleasantly amazed, delightfully perplexed, and wonderfully surprised at all of the good and righteous possibilities that come into play as the Medes, Elamites, and Parthians were on that first Pentecost!

It matters who opens our hearts.

Pentecost precludes our hearts from losing hope. In times of trial and tumult both in our own lives and in the world, there is always more going on than meets the eye because the Spirit of God is at large and on the loose. God is working even when we cannot immediately see it.

The Spirit of God cannot be silenced or sequestered. So, when we allow that Spirit to open our hearts and not the spirit of the age or the spirit of the world or the spirit of doom or the spirit of gloom, we are enabled and ennobled to live in the world as children of the Light for whom kindness, mercy, justice, and compassion are our north stars.

Listen again to our great text from St. Paul: *“Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and so we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, we are confident even in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has (opened)⁴ our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”⁵*

Without Pentecost, there would be no Christian church. Without Pentecost, there would be no body of Christ filled with the Spirit of God empowered, commissioned, and equipped to continue courageously and prophetically the work of the Lord in the world. Without Pentecost, the power of God is something we could read about, hear about, and admire from afar but could not experience in our own lives because our hearts would remain unopened by the Spirit to invigorate and inspire us.

⁴ NRSV text says “has been poured into” but the effect is the same as “to open”

⁵ Romans 5:1-5

But communities like this one who allow the Holy Spirit to open their hearts offer profound witness in Christ's name to the power of Pentecost to gather diverse peoples to learn a new vocabulary and a common language suitable to the needs and challenges of our time; to cart away the rubble of once-formidable institutions and traditions and to build⁶ in their place new ways of living and relating in tune with twenty-first century realities and opportunities; to obey the Spirit's call to pluck up⁷ from our society the evil weeds of racism and bigotry and to plant in their places mutual respect and oneness; to face down the grinding cruelties of poverty and to lift up every voice to call for an economy just and equitable for everyone.

Pentecost is not, as some would have it, so much about the birthday of the church in which we blow out some candles and then go on with life as usual. Pentecost is the defining event of our lives and it happens today as surely as it did on that day we read about in the Book of Acts. It is about welcoming the Spirit of God as she opens our hearts. It is about going into the world in the power of the Spirit to bring peace, to relieve misery, to build the Beloved Community, and to "cause God joy."⁸

It matters who opens our hearts. May it be for us, always, the Spirit of the living God.

Amen.

⁶ Jeremiah 1:10

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ I first heard this phrase in connection with the Providence Presbyterian Church in Hilton Head, SC, that uses it as its mission statement. I never have forgotten it.