

Pentecost Sunday

Space, an audio-visual reflection by Nancy S. Taylor, Senior Minister presented virtually. The **(red)** indicates video clips.

Based on Acts 2. 1012

PRELIMINARIES

Today, May 31, 2020, on this Pentecost Sunday, we had planned to celebrate the conclusion of our 350th Anniversary Year. Three hundred and fifty years! We had hoped it might feel like this: **(350th Anniversary trumpet fanfare w/ confetti)**. Instead, it feels a little more like this: **(taking down the 350th flag with taps)**.

PRAYER

Will you pray with me? Gracious God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God our strength and our redeemer.

SERMON

The opening sentence of the reading for this day (a sentence I have memorized, not intentionally, but by the pure repetition of reading this story over so many decades) goes like this: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." (Acts 2.) **("When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.")** That's how, when, why the magic happened. **(Holy Spirit window)** the Spirit swooshing in, raising the roof, literally igniting the followers of Jesus. **(Pentecost window)** The church catches fire that day.

(Pentecost window ...details of flames) Pentecost is to the church, the slap on the back of newborn babe. It's the breath surging in, filling lungs and hearts, pumping in air, getting the church's systems going, bringing the church to life.

They were all together in one place. That gathering, that togetherness, well, we've always understood it as the necessary precondition to the event we celebrate today: Pentecost, the church's birthday. The precondition: being together in one place.

Or, was it a necessary precondition? Is not God able to make a way where we can see no way? What if we were to take that word, PLACE **(PLACE)** and edit it a bit, to SPACE **(SPACE)** ...same route. Place being a particular part of space. We can say of ourselves, of you and me, of all of us: we are all together in one SPACE, the space of worship, the space of holy attentiveness to the presence of the divine, the space of prayer, the space of community, Christian community. This is an ethical SPACE; a SPACE in which those gathered attend to the heart of God.

We know the church is not the building, it's the people. **(images of OSC building, first outside the building, then in the sanctuary and chapel)** But when your own particular pile of rocks is so

distinct and immense, its dimensions and proportions evoking majesty and divinity—in ways that our homes and apartments cannot – well, you get to thinking the church *is* the building.

Or at the least, you get to thinking that the building sure does help in our efforts at being the church. The building with its scale and appointments, its instruments and sacred furniture is evocative of divinity and sublimity and eternity, of majesty in ways our homes, condos, and apartments cannot be. We get to thinking that gathering together in a sacred place is how to be and do church.

And yet, here is what we have learned these past few months: that we can do almost everything (not everything, but almost everything) we did in and from one place, in this new space. Almost everything. Small groups? Check. Church school? Check. Community hour? Check. Fellowship Hour? Mission and outreach? Youth Group? Book Groups? Bible Study? Pastoral Care? Prayer? Teaching? Check. Check. Check. Check.

Ask Amo Ngoepe (**Amo Ngoepe**), Pastoral Resident, if she is learning in this Year of the Novel Coronavirus. Ask Martha Schick (**Martha Schick**) who, just last week was formally admitted as a Member in Discernment for ordination with the UCC. Ask our youth group who, under normal circumstances would be taking a summer break, but who have agreed to keep meeting, remotely, through the summer.

Ask Rory Razon (**Rory Razon**) who has just been nominated to represent Old South Church on the Committee on Ministry of the Boston Metropolitan Association of the UCC. Just ask and Deb Washington (**Deb Washington**) who has been elected to serve as the Vice Moderator the Boston Metropolitan Association of the UCC. Ask Ralph Watson (**Ralph Watson**) who is laboring away at our partnership with Snowden High School. Ask Karin Wetmore who is delivering Old South Karin Wetmore (**Karin holding an OSC onsie**) to babies who had the temerity to be born in a season of virus. Ask Lisa Loveland (**Lisa Loveland**), chair of our Operations Committee, who is deep in preparations for repairs to our Tower.

Ask Shayna Gleason, Harry Hanson and Annie Hollingsworth, Carl Sciortino, Esther Seguin, Ellen and Matt Simmons, Katherine and Dante Spurlock, (Ahn) Duy Nguyen, and Beth Young (**images with names of each**) who are soon to join as members of Old South Church. Across the years, we have occasionally taken in new members *in absentia*. This is not what we are doing today. These persons are not absent. They will be received remotely, with the whole church watching and leaning in.

Ask the Tell the Story Task Force of the 350th Anniversary Committee who have been laboring away at our (**images of the Encyclopedia: front matter, table of contents, entries**) Concise Encyclopedia: Theological, Historical and Whimsical by our Members, Ministers and Friends on the occasion of our 350th Anniversary. It is this close to going to the printer, weighing in at 460 pages with 100 unique authors and 400 entries.

We are being church and doing church, in this space, in almost every way we were church in one place.

(Map of worship attendance) And, there are some advantages to meeting in this space rather than at one place (not that I am advocating this forever). As it turns out, our weekly worship attendance is better than it used to be, pre-Covid-19. Pre-Covid-19 we had three congregations gathering in three services across the week, while today our church is assembled together in one all-church worship service. Add to that, many of you are worshipping alongside distant family members, worshipping together for the first time in years. How sweet is that!

In addition, we've collected three congregations who have jumped aboard with us for this ride. **(Old South Church in Boston, First Congregational Church of Wareham, MA, Chatterton Hill Church, White Plains, NY, Smith Mills Christian Congregational Church, Dartmouth MA)** Today, in this space, we are not one church but four; four congregations worshipping together.

As to our boards, committees and task forces: these are ongoing, their work on-going. By the way, attendance is up. Boards, committees, task forces, and small groups are all reporting a nearly 100% attendance. In addition, obviously, there is even a little magic to be had with the aid of virtual technologies. **(clip from a Children's Message)**

Pentecost is the day the church was gathered in one place and the spirit swooshed in, raising the roof, literally igniting the followers of Jesus. The church came to life that day. Caught fire that day. Turns out, however, place isn't everything. Here we are, church, all together in this space. While our anniversary year may have ended in an inglorious whimper, while we are keeping our distance to keep one another safe, while it's not easy in this space. It is not. It's painful. It's hard. It's scary. We can't see the end. Even so, God is in this space. And, we are being church in this space. I'd say, that's something to celebrate. **(350th Anniversary Trumpet Fanfare)**