Sunday 05/19/24 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: "Happy Birthday to the Christian Church"

New Testament Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

New Testament Scripture: Romans 8:22-27

Gospel Scripture: John 14:26

New Testament Scripture: Galatians 4:6

New Testament Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:17

New Testament Scripture: Romans 15:13

(Slide 1 – Pentecost Fire Picture)

Many people have told me that when they have entered this church for the first time that they have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Many people have told me how loved they have felt here, and how they have deeply connected to Jesus Christ and to each other in this place. I believe that this church and the people in it are a gift to Panama and to many. Even so, the Christian Church has existed for nearly two-thousand years though. Christianity did not hit the shores of what is now the United States until the Spanish brought the faith to what is now Florida in the mid-1500's.

This means that five-hundred years ago, there was no New York State, no United States, and the Christian faith had yet to come to much of North American continent. Yet, on this day, the day of Pentecost, the Christian Church was born nearly two-thousand years ago. It then took another fifteen-hundred years, as I said, for Christianity to reach the shores of what is now this country. In fact, I was talking to a British man once on an airplane about churches, and I told him about a church in our country that I read about that was built all the way back in the 1,600's. I said, I could not believe how old it was! He jokingly commented, "1,600's, that's cute!" He then told me that the oldest church in England was built in the 500's. The point is, is that we have an ancient and a historic faith, and on this nearly day two-thousand years ago, the Christian Church was born in Jerusalem. It was born of holy fire, courage, and faith. It was born of regular men and women like us, who desired to see lives changed, people come to Christ, and communities and the world be transformed. So, what happened on this day? Let's see it through video and then through the scripture.

(Slide 2 – Pentecost Video)

This video gives a good overview of this day, the day of Pentecost. It is amazing to think that this day propelled the disciples of Jesus Christ to unleash a movement that today encompasses about one-third of the world's population. That's right, what started with Jesus and his twelve disciples is a movement that

has reached billions of people, has saved countless souls, and even continues today to transform the world. The Christian movement has built schools, taught people how to read, pulled people out of poverty, fed, clothed, provided fresh water, built hospitals, universities, and done more that we can imagine. It has brought countless people to salvation on Christ.

Since the first Pentecost there have been many revivals and spiritual awakenings, and last year at Asbury College/Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky there was a big revival. There have been instances of these sort of Pentecost moments through the centuries. I have been reading, watching, and hearing about these "bursts" of the Holy Spirit, and I am praying for another great revival/great awakening to happen soon. Let me read to you the Pentecost story that we just heard about in the video we watched.

(Slides 3-5 – Acts 2:1-21)

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. [2] And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [3] Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. [5] Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. [6] And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. [7] Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? [9] Parthians, Medes, 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, both Jews and proselytes, [11] Cretans and Arabs—in our own

languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' [12] All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' [13] But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.' [14] But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. [15] Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. [16] No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: [17] "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. [18] Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. [19] And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. [20] The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. [21] Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:1-21, NRSV).

These twelve disciples, minus Judas Iscariot, who was replaced by Matthias, went forth this day, and two-thousand years later, here we are. Since the first Pentecost, as I said, we have had other powerful movements of the Holy Spirit, and I believe this whole country is due for another revival or great awakening. I am praying for it, and for the next Jesus movement to flood Panama and far beyond. I believe that God will bless our faithfulness to his word, and our faithfulness to Christ.

(Slide 6 – Romans 8:22-27)

We hear of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:22-27, where it says:

[22] We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; [23] and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For

who hopes for what is seen? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. [26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. [27] And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:22-27, NRSV).

After the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, humanity was groaning until Christ. We can now be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and we can experience the power of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can have hope, a hope we cannot always see, but the Holy Spirit will guide us. The Apostle Paul tells is that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with "sighs too deep for words." God searches our hearts, and the Holy Spirit intercedes fills us according to the will of God.

Friends, where have seen the Holy Spirit in our lives in the past week? The past month? Where have seen the Holy Spirit be present in our church, in our family, and in our community?

(Slide 6 – Jonh 14:26)

We here in the gospel of John 14:26:

[26] But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (Jn. 14:26, NRSV).

Without the Holy Spirit we have no day of Pentecost, we have no revival, we have no great spiritual awakenings, and we and the church cannot continue to

be changed and transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we are like a car engine with no gas, a light socket with no lightbulb, and cup a coffee with no coffee. Only through the Spirit of God can we be transformed.

When Melissa and I, Pastor Steve and Stacy Taylor, and others were at our recent convening Northeast Global Methodist Church General Conference, Global Methodist Church Bishop Emeritus Young Jin Cho, talked about churches that don't seem to have the Holy Spirit present in them. Bishop Cho talked about a "Biune God," versus a "Triune God." In this example, Bishop Cho said that he had been in churches that talked about God the Father, and Jesus Christ, but it was as if the Holy Spirit was never present in the church. He was talking about the need to seek the Holy Spirit and to invite the Holy Spirit into our worship, and our daily lives. Further, how are we living this out together? Are willing to consider soon being in a weekly small group, or connecting with each other more, so that we can grow in our faith. As we here in Proverbs 27:17, "Iron sharpens iron." For our Christian faiths to grow, to be strong, to flourish, and to flourish as a church, we need to be with each other more than just Sunday morning. We need to be together to pray, to fellowship, and share our faith so that this church through the power of the Holy Spirit will go to the next level.

You see, the future of the Panama Methodist Church, and all churches, relies not just on a pastor, or just top leaders, it relies on our ability to seek Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Any growth or increase that God will bless us with in this church, is because we are being faithful to God's word, to Christ, and constantly discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit. Are we welcoming visitors? Are we inviting people to hear about our faith, and praying that people would come to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit? Further, if we want our church to continue to deepen in faith, in hope, in love, and in the power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, are willing to as the body of Christ be even more connected that we are now. Are willing to disciple more, are we willing to get to know each other more, and are willing to be a church that is even more tightly bound than we are now? The stronger we grow together, the stronger our church through the power of the Holy Spirit will be.

Do we see the possibilities of where Panama Methodist Church can go my friends? Do we believe in what God can do in this place? If we do, on this the birthday of the Christian Church, are willing to come together even more, so that this church might see things happen that we cannot even imagine?

Looking in Galatians 4:6 it says:

(Slide 7 – Galatians 4:6)

[6] And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' (Gal. 4:6, NRSV).

Do we feel the Spirit of God among us today Panama? Or maybe we have not felt the Spirit of God in a long time. Maybe we are in a spiritual draught. A church this full of the Holy Spirit, and a church that united in the Lordship of Jesus Christ is a force to be reckoned with. How many of us want to see this church reach new heights? How many of us want to see this church go to places that we have never been before? Even more, how many of us believe that the Holy Spirit can lead us there?

We hear in 2 Corinthians 3:17:

(Slide 8 – 2 Corinthians 3:17)

[17] Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17, NRSV).

Do we feel the freedom of God, in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit today? Or are we heavy laden? Are we burdened? Are we still recovering from the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic? Are we still recovering from the disaffiliation of this church? Are we will still be recovering from the loss of a pastor and his wife, and the transition to a new pastor, and a new pastor's wife? How many of us are ready to move forward? Let me ask that question again. How many of us are ready to move forward?

Let me tell you what my friends. I am looking at this church as the new pastor here with fresh eyes. I see a church full of people that love Jesus Christ, but I also see a church where we might not know everyone in this church. Wouldn't it be nice to spend more time with each other? To get to know each other more? Friends, as a church we need to come together in a new a powerful way, and on this day of Pentecost, the day that the Christian Church was born, do we believe in what God is doing and can do here? Are the teams of this church ready and willing to come together for the sake of the gospel of Jesus? Are willing to grow and to stretch so that all of Panama and the world might know the name Jesus? I know that I am. I know this Melissa is. This is why we came here, and on this day of Holy Fire, I challenge you, the church, and myself to ask ourselves the question, are we willing to come together as a church?

Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, this church is ripe for growth. This church is ripe for a harvest, as hard as I am willing to work, I want to know how many of us are willing to harvest with me. I would love see more people in our ministries throughout the week, I would support and help develop new ministries, and I want to see a church where our children, kids, and young adult flourish. I want to know on this Pentecost Sunday, in we at the Panama Methodist Church want this too. Friends, if can come together in a new and a powerful way, I believe that as strong as this church is now, we will look back soon to see with joy what

our Heavenly Father can do. I believe this so strongly, and I believe in you so strongly, that I believe on this day of Holy Fire, that Holy Spirit is and will continue to move in this place. Further, I came all the way to Panama, NY to see if you believe this too. If we believe that the best days of our church are not behind us, but ahead of us?

We are reminded in Romans 15:13:

(Slide 9 – Romans 15:13)

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13, NRSV).

Through the Holy Spirit you, me, and this church, and world has hope in Jesus Christ. On this day, the day of Pentecost, church what is keeping us from becoming all that God wants us to be? As the praise team begins to make their way forward, what in our lives is keeping from getting closer to Jesus? Church, can we talk about it for a minute? What is in our lives right now, that we need to bring to the throne of Jesus Christ? What is in our lives that keeps up at night? What is in our lives that scares us and worries us? Maybe we haven't felt God's presence in a long time? Maybe we are suffering from a loss or some pain?

Church are we ready to come to the throne of grace, to be renewed in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. If so, won't you come forward. Let us anoint you with oil, pray for you. Maybe we need some healing, some restoration, maybe we need to rededicate our life to Christ. Whatever it is, won't you come,

won’t you come to the altar. Come forward, be anointed, let us pray for you, and we call upon the Holy Spirit for healing, restoration, strength, and faith. Friends won’t you come, as we move forward as individuals, as a church, and as a community. Won’t you come. Happy Pentecost and Amen.