

“Heartbeat”

Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

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Pentecost

Most of you are probably aware that my family and I are going through a fairly major period of transition. Moving to a new state . . . starting a new job . . . finding a new place to live (but let’s not talk about that one) . . . and, sometime in the next few weeks, at a time not of our own choosing, a new arrival in our family. For the past eight and a half months, there has been growing, inside my wife’s body, this new living organism, pulsing with the beat of a tiny little heart.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

We will soon be giving birth to this new little life. No, I should say, *my wife* will be giving birth to this new little life. And in another eight and a half months or so from now, we’ll have something that looks kind of like little Lucy, who was baptized here in this sanctuary just a little earlier this morning . . . a precious little child, pulsing with the beat of a tiny little heart.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

Every time when I really stop to think about it, I find myself amazed at the way in which we get to participate in the creation of new life. Lucy’s tiny little heartbeat didn’t exist seventeen months ago. My baby’s tiny little heartbeat didn’t exist nine months ago. There is this marvelous creative process by which we humans get to participate, with God, in the creation of new life. New heartbeats.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

There is this marvelous creative process in which all the different parts of our bodies come to be formed, created out of nothing more than a little microscopic zygote. Heart, blood, blood vessels, stomach, liver, gall bladder, intestines, thyroid, glands, hormones, skin, hair, nails, lymph nodes, muscles, nerves, brain, lungs, larynx, bones, cartilage, ligaments, tendons, kidneys, and everything else – there’s this marvelous creative process that creates it all, out of practically nothing. We start out like this:

[pause]

and we become this:

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

and this whole thing which we call a “body” takes shape. A system, with a vast multitude of parts, each of which has a particular job to do. Except for those among us who are in the medical professions, I doubt that we could name all the parts of the body, and describe what they do. It is a remarkable system, our body; each part has a role to play. Yes, even your gluteus maximus has a role to play; you’re using it right now! We are a living, breathing organism, pulsing with life.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

So is the church.

The apostle Paul described it like this: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

You know, the body of Christ grew by one this morning.

The church is a body – a living, breathing organism, pulsing with life.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

It was not always so. Once, there was a time when the church was not – except, perhaps, in the mind of God. Just like there was a time nine months ago when my child was not, except perhaps in our minds and in the mind of God, and just like there was a time seventeen months ago when Lucy was not, except perhaps in her parents’ minds and in the mind of God. So too was there a time – one thousand nine hundred and seventy-eight years ago, give or take a few – when the church was not. There was . . . no body. We were not like this:

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

we were like this:

[pause]

until the day of Pentecost, when God created *something*, out of practically *nothing*.

Now, there had been Pentecosts before, and there were Pentecosts after; it was an annual holiday that came around every year. It was a harvest festival, celebrating the gathering of the wheat harvest, the last grain to ripen in the Mediterranean climate of Palestine. It occurred every year fifty days after the festival of the Passover, rain or shine. Year after year, the Jews celebrated the festival of Pentecost. But one year . . . one year was different. One year . . . something was *created* that day . . . out of practically *nothing*.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

A living, breathing organism, pulsing with life, was born. A new . . . body. The body of Christ. The church.

It is a body that has many parts, just as our bodies have many parts. All sorts of different organs, you might say, working together, in cooperative, systematic fashion, to make the body *live*. A living, breathing organism, pulsing with life.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

But instead of heart and kidneys and intestines and muscles and nerves and bones and everything else that our bodies have, *this* body has – well, it has *people*. Folks like you and like me who work together in cooperative, systematic fashion, to make this body *live*. Paul talks about the different gifts people have . . . wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, and so on. He was recognizing something that any psychologist could tell you, and the rest of us kind of know intuitively: we’re not all made the same. We don’t all have the same personality type. We don’t all have the same gifts. Some of us are good at some things; some of us are good at other things. And everybody’s gifts are important. We need the heart and the kidneys and the intestines and the muscles and the nerves and the bones and everything else in our own individual bodies, and in *this* body, in this *larger*, body we need – well, what do we need?

I asked the members of the Pastor Nominating Committee to name for me some of the gifts that people have that they offer for the good of the church . . . some of the different ways that people volunteer of their time, out of their own goodwill or their own sense of how God is calling them to help build up this local version of the body of Christ. There are session members . . . deacons . . . committee members. There are liturgists . . . choir members . . . handbell ringers. There are ushers . . . greeters . . . acolytes. There are nursery helpers . . . Sunday school teachers . . . youth leaders . . . and confirmand mentors. There are praise band members . . . people who plan the contemporary service . . . people who help out with all sorts of technology. There are people who start the coffee pot in the morning . . . people who prepare refreshments . . . people who help serve communion . . . people who clean up afterwards. There are people who cook . . . and who cook . . . and who cook some more. There are people who visit folks who are in the hospital . . . or who go to play bingo with the people who live in nursing homes . . . or who prepare meals for people in need. There are people who make gift baskets . . . people who decorate the church for Christmas . . . people who landscape around the grounds . . . people who redecorate bathrooms. There are people who check off boxes as they come off a moving truck and people who loan the preacher a pair of shoes and a tie because he can’t find his own! There are people who organize rummage sales . . . people who write articles for the newsletter . . . people who proof the bulletin. There are people who organize mission projects . . . people who plan and lead mission trips . . . people who go out of their way to help us all stretch beyond our comfort zones. There are people who teach adults . . . people who fill the pulpit . . . people who prepare special music for us to enjoy. There are people who organize weddings . . . people who assist with funerals . . . people who reach out to help families who have just had a baby. There are people who open the windows in the sanctuary when it is hot . . . and people who check to make sure all the lights are turned off. There are people who sell Fair

Trade items to help less fortunate people around the world . . . there are people who are, right now, this very minute, in Nicaragua, reaching out to our partners who live there. There are people who offer children's sermons . . . people who organize Wednesday night events . . . people who lead small groups. There are people who assist with the web site and people who work the sound system. There are people who write cards . . . there are people who call other people just to check up on them . . . there are people who pray. The list goes on . . . and on . . . and on . . . and I'm quite sure I haven't named them all – maybe not even *half* of them! All sorts of people, offering their gifts for the good of the body, doing their part to help make this place a living, breathing organism, pulsing with life.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

And the heartbeat . . . the heartbeat of it all . . . the rhythm that keeps it all flowing . . . the regular, steady pulse that just keeps on throbbing . . . well, you see, that's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, that breathed life into the church nearly two thousand years ago on the day of Pentecost, and that continually breathes life into the church with each passing day, as we all seek to follow in the footsteps of the One who lived and breathed and died for us.

My prayer for you this day is that you will know that *you* are a vital organ in this body that we call "the church." My prayer is that you will know that *you* have been called by God into service for the building up of the kingdom of God. My prayer is that you will know that *you* have gifts to offer, that *you* have something valuable to contribute, that *you* have a vital part to play for the good of this community, as we, together, seek to serve the world in the name of Jesus Christ. May we, together, as one body, as one living, breathing organism, may we, together, breathe with the rhythm of the Holy Spirit.

boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . . boom boom . . .

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