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THE "C" WORD

Today is Pentecost and from the number of folks wearing red, I see that you know this, that it is the birthday of the Christian Church.

- Pentecost is the third great festival of the church after Christmas and Easter, and it marks the launch of the Christian mission in the world.
  - From that day forward, the early disciples were united by the HOLY SPIRIT for one purpose: to make disciples of all nations.

But in a very real sense, Pentecost is about the "C" word...the big "C"...the word most of us don't want to talk about or even think about: CHANGE.

- Pentecost is about CHANGE. Don't you see it?

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Here are the disciples gathered together, in one place, probably the upper room where they had eaten with JESUS HIS last supper.

- JESUS had ascended into heaven and left them with some guidance about their future mission in the world.
  - Perhaps they were discussing it, talking about how to go about doing this "making disciples of all nations" JESUS had commanded.
- But suddenly, the sound of a violent wind comes from heaven.
- And a flame appears that separates into smaller tongues that move above each of their heads.
- And all of them began to speak in other tongues as the SPIRIT moved them to.
- And people begin to surround the building, and the disciples go outside (going outside is a good thing to do if you want to make new disciples), and their words lead 3,000 to become baptized Christians.

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Wouldn't it be great to have 3,000 people join our church?

- To reach 3,000 people? In one day? Wouldn't that be great?
  - Or would it?

Think about how different things would be if we added 3,000 members.

- Do you think things would change? A lot?

Maybe that's why some churches don't do much inviting.

- They don't want to change.
- But, you see, sharing the gospel is about inviting change.

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On that Pentecost so long ago, Peter shared the good news about JESUS.

- We, too, are called to share that message...to live that message daily.

But it's important to understand what we're doing.

- As Christians, we are inviting things to change.
- In fact, it is vital that we recognize that being Christian is all about change.

No one who has ever encountered GOD has remained the same.

- Abraham, Moses, Elijah, the disciples, Paul, even us.
  - How would your life be different if you weren't a believer?
- When we declare ourselves to be Christians, we are also inviting GOD to change us.

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So, why then are we doing this? Why are we inviting this change?

- Well, because frankly, we know we need to change.
- When we honestly look at our lives, we see why we need GOD to change us.
  - Sin, lack of purpose, self-centeredness—all of these interfere in our lives.
- And the world that surrounds us needs to change as well.
  - Decaying values, discontent, isolation, uncertainty, fear.
- We need change, don't we?
- We need the power that GOD sends in the HOLY SPIRIT.
  - And when we claim the Christian life, we admit this and open ourselves to GOD'S power to change.
    - And with that power comes faith, hope, and mission.

But what does it really mean when we seek that GOD-given power?

- It means that things are not going to stay the same.
  - Every time we invite someone to come to our church, we should expect that our church will change.
  - Every time a new person enters into our fellowship, we become different.
    - That person brings new gifts, new needs, new ideas, new challenges, new possibilities.
    - Anyone who has gotten married or had a child knows that when another person enters your life, things are not going to be the same.

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Sometimes I think it is in our nature to fight change.

How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb?

- 1) Change? What's that?
- 2) Three: one to change the bulb and two to say they like the old one better.
- 3) Never mind. I'll just sit here in the dark.

We fight change and the more change there is around us, the more we try to keep what we can the same.

- Or perhaps it's just unplanned change we dislike.
  - If it's something that we set goals for, like a new job, a new home, or the like, we accept that change.
  - But if it's something we didn't choose or something we didn't expect, we resist.

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The truth of the matter is that constant change is here to stay.

Scientists say that each generation will see 10 times the number of technological innovations as the previous generation.

- The first commercial cell phones became available 40 years ago.
  - They had no cameras nor internet.
  - They were just for making phone calls.
- The cell phone in your pocket has 100,000 times the processing power of the computer that landed human beings on the Moon just over 50 years ago.
- Just the iPhone 6's clock is 32,600 times faster than the best Apollo era computers and can perform instructions 120,000,000 times faster.

Some changes we embrace. Others we resist.

- And when the world's changes come so quickly, we begin to look for what we can do to control and keep things the same.
  - Or even try to go back to what we knew in the past.
- The first place we may try to exert control is our home.
- And the second place we might seek to maintain the status quo is our church.

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A few years ago, I pastored a church that saw membership growth of 8% each year.

- A small group of people became increasingly critical of my ministry even as the church grew.
- After I left the congregation and they began meeting with the bishop to look for a new pastor, they talked about what they wanted in the future.
  - They told the bishop that the problem was that I was bringing in too many new people and that was changing the church.
  - They liked each other and they liked the church just the way it was and wanted a new pastor who wasn't going to change anything.
    - They bishop pointed out to me how sad it is that some churches just want to be a country club.

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But what many people fail to recognize is that it is not *our* church.

- Often, we talk about "my church."
  - I frequently hear even pastors say, "My church."
  - It may be a minor point, but I try to say "the church I serve," because it's not my church. It's GOD'S church.

Even the way we talk about GOD reflects our understanding of this.

- Too often, we make GOD the object of our sentences.
  - We talk about St. Andrew's ministry for GOD?
  - Or there's Morning Stars' ministry for GOD.
  - Or Calvary Chapel's ministry for GOD.
    - And we're sort of in a competition to see who has the best ministry for GOD.
- But if GOD is the subject of our sentences, things change.  
If it is GOD'S ministry through St. Andrew, or Morning Star, or Calvary Chapel, we're in partnership with each other to carry out GOD'S vision for GOD'S Church.

When we become comfortable in a congregation, we begin to think about it as our own.

- But it's not our church. It's GOD'S church. GOD is in control.

And when it comes to change in our church, the question we need to ask is, "Who's in charge?"

- Is it the pastor? Or the council? Or the members? Or is it GOD?

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When GOD released the HOLY SPIRIT on Pentecost, things changed.

- The church of a few dozen became a church of thousands.
- When we acknowledge and even insist that GOD is in control, we can allow the HOLY SPIRIT to do great things—massive things in our lives and in the lives of others who are not yet here.
- Yes, that means things *will* change, but they will change according to GOD'S vision for the Church.

Instead of fighting change, we need to learn to delight in it.

- We need to invite the SPIRIT to come and be loosed to act.
- We need to look to see what it is that GOD is doing in this time and place.
- And we need to celebrate any change whenever they happen, recognizing that they are from GOD.

Change is never bad when it comes from GOD

- And we still DO have control.
  - We can choose how we will respond whenever GOD brings the big "C."