

First Presbyterian Church
The Marks of the Church: Transforming
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Joel 2:23-29; Acts 2:1-13

Some people said it tasted like bubblegum. Others said it tasted like cherry. Some said that it had a mixed berry or perhaps a strawberry flavor. One person described it as “cheap strawberry syrup, but with an aftertaste somewhere between chewing rubber gloves and aspartame.” A recent Reddit post on this stuff garnered 13,000 comments from people who remembered it fondly. It even made BuzzFeed’s list of 90’s nostalgia even though it was invented in 1972. For Cindy, me, and our children we simply referred to it as “the pink stuff.” How many of you remember “the pink stuff?” For those of you unfamiliar with “the pink stuff,” it was the antibiotic Amoxicillin in its pediatric, liquid form. It was the miracle drug for young parents. It could turn our hurting, suffering, children who were hurting from ear and other infections, back into their joyous and loving selves. Though it didn’t work instantaneously, we knew that it would do the trick, and that the children we loved would be restored to us once again. Let me ask this morning, have any of you ever wished that there was an adult spiritual pink stuff that could take angry, hateful people and turn them into loving and joyous people? If you have, you are in luck because there is such a thing...and it is the Spirit of God.

In order to fully understand what I mean by this view of the Spirit, we need to step back and look at the larger picture of what God has been and is doing in the world. We begin with the words of the prophet Joel. Joel is addressing the people of God who have been through two of the most dreaded events in the life of an agrarian culture: drought and a locust invasion. These two events are what often caused starvation and relocation of peoples. Without access to foreign grain or water people found themselves in desperate straits. The word from Joel though is that this is not how God wants God’s people to live. Instead, God desires that people experience the fullness of all that creation can offer them. Thus, God has given early and late rain such that the threshing floors shall be full of grain and the vats overflowing with wine and oil. But God does not stop there with the restoration of creation, but God continues by promising the transformation of humankind; transforming humanity into the people God desires them to be. And God will do this through the giving of the Spirit. *“And I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters will prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. Even on your male and female slaves, in those days I will pour out my Spirit.”* This my friends is God’s promise of universal transformation in which people are intimately connected to their creator.

This idea of God's continual work of transformation lays the foundation for our Pentecost story. But before we make the connection, I want us to be clear that the Spirit of God does not just suddenly appear at Pentecost. The Spirit is integral to the Old Testament. The Spirit was at creation. Moses speaks of the presence of God’s Spirit in the wilderness. The Spirit infused both King Saul and King David. The Spirit gave visions to the prophet Ezekiel. And Zechariah speaks of God’s Spirit empowering other prophets. So, the Spirit has been around. But what we

believe about the Spirit that arrives on the Jewish festival of Pentecost is that this is the moment that the Spirit of God becomes the spiritual pink stuff intended to heal and transform the world; that, as Peter puts it, this is the moment that Joel had been referring to in his ancient prophecy. And we can begin to see this transformation as it takes the fearful and timid disciples, and turns them into fearless and bold proclaimers of the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. And not only does it do those two things, but it shapes them into a community in which all persons (remember Joel's "all flesh") are not only accepted but are embraced and transformed. The spiritual pink stuff of the Spirit has been unleashed into the world.

I wish we could say this morning that this spiritual pink stuff of the Spirit has transformed all persons; transformed all flesh. But looking out at our world...and even at times looking at our own lives, we can see that the transformation is not complete. We can see anger, hatred, jealousy, pride, violence, and perhaps all sorts of other sins loose in the world. This creation has not yet become what God desires it to be. Which is why these Sunday mornings are so important. They are important because here in this place, or online, or if you are watching this later on YouTube, we are taking the next dose of the Spiritual pink stuff. We are taking the spiritual pink stuff in the act of baptism where we profess that the Spirit is present and we make commitments to the children and to God, through which the Spirit can operate in us. We are taking the spiritual pink stuff when we hear the word read and proclaimed, as the Spirit uses these words to transform us. We are taking the spiritual pink stuff when we come to the table and eat the bread and drink from the cup, because we are transformed as we are fed. We are taking the Spiritual pink stuff when we allow the music to transform our hearts and minds. We are taking the spiritual pink stuff when we spend time with others, being transformed by sharing our lives together.

My friends, God desires us to be transformed into the image of God's one and only Son, Jesus of Nazareth. We can do so by being open to the Spirit, and by partaking of the Spiritual pink stuff, such that we are made new each day. My challenge to you then is to ask yourselves, how am I being open to and engaging with the Spirit so that I may be transformed.