

# The Church as the Exclamation Point!

BY MICHELLE SHRADER

When I think of the Pentecost story, I am reminded of how much more beautiful it becomes when read together with the resurrection story. Pentecost is what I call the exclamation point at the end of the resurrection.

After the resurrection, the disciples begin to truly believe that Jesus is Lord. Yet, when Jesus ascends into the heavens, they are left clinging to the promise of something more to come. Hoping Jesus had come to rebuild the temple and give them a place of glory, they are left feeling perplexed. But this was never the plan. Jesus tells them to wait for something more.

The story of Pentecost is a beautiful continuation of the resurrection story because, with it, the promise of something more is fulfilled and the church is born! The church today is still called to live into this Pentecost spirit, still called to be the exclamation point that follows the resurrection. How can we embody this spirit within the walls of our churches?

There is an old story that might shed some light for us. It is about a rabbi who asked several students how they could know when darkness had ended and daylight had come. One answered, "Is it when you can see an animal approaching and recognize it as a sheep or a dog?" "No," said the rabbi. The second responded, "Is it when you see a tree in the distance and can tell whether it is a fig or a peach tree?" "No," said the rabbi. "How then?" his students asked. "It is when you can look upon the face of any person and recognize them only as your brother or



**Pentecost, banner by Naomi Aho, United States**

your sister. If you cannot do this, darkness will always be with you." Those gathered at Pentecost received the gift of communication despite the fact that they were quite different from one another. Though they sat in wait as strangers, they left as sisters and brothers.

While working in South Africa, I had the opportunity to worship with a community of people from many different nations. The pastor leading the service asked us to sing "Amazing Grace," each in our own language. The various tongues resonated within my being. We all sang about the same amazing grace that had swept into each of our lives. It was beautiful!

This experience is what I imagine Pentecost to

have been like. The people present during the first Pentecost had been separated by language since the time of the tower of Babel. Yet, as they lifted their voices, each heard and understood what the others were saying!

Is this not a good place to begin? Might we experience a bit of the Pentecost spirit if we simply begin to engage with people who are different from us by looking for the brother or sister in them? If we could do this, then we might actually be for the world the exclamation point on the statement, "Jesus Christ is Lord!" Let us pray this will be so. Amen.

Michelle Shrader is an associate pastor at Wells United Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi. She is currently leading a group of pastors and lay people through a two-year study of race and religion.