



Inside and Out

TEXT
2 Timothy 1:6–10, 13–14

May 15, 2016 — Pentecost — 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. — Sermon by Rev. Zach Walker

There's a movie that came out in 2004 called *Dodgeball*. It's a comedy, and there is a scene where a team of underdogs is learning the basic rules of the game. They watch a video where they learn the all-important 5 D's of Dodgeball: Dodge, Dip, Duck, Dive and Dodge.

Yeah, Dodge is in there twice. You get the distinct impression that character couldn't think of the fifth D, so he comes back to Dodge. At the risk of philosophizing too much about a joke, I think sometimes we need to come back to where we started. There is something poignant about coming back to the fundamentals, or to your roots. It reminds me of a dance, really: dodge, dip, duck, dive and dodge.

My parents made me take a ballroom dance class when I was in grade school, and in addition to spending awkward time with girls at an awkward age, I did learn that in every dance you come back to the place you started. Learning a dance is learning how to go through the steps, always returning to the start.

When we celebrate Pentecost, there is a sense in which we are doing just that. Pentecost

is the birth of the Church; we celebrate, we go back to, the day when the Holy Spirit showed up inside a room where the apostles were gathered. We didn't read the biblical account of it today, but after Jesus ascended, the apostles had gathered together — for what reason, we don't exactly know. They could have been unsure of what to do next; they might have been afraid; or they could have been gathering for an important capital campaign planning meeting.

But as they were gathered together, a loud wind rushes into the room, and tongues like fire appear above their heads, and they become filled with the Spirit and begin speaking in different languages. Today we call that arrival of the Spirit "Pentecost" because we celebrate it 50 days after Easter. The "tongues of fire" is why you see red cloths adorning the sanctuary, and it is why Len and I are wearing red stoles.

So that's the story of Pentecost — flame, fire, wind, tongues. That's what we celebrate according to the church calendar. Today the Village Church calendar also finds us celebrating Confirmation Sunday. We celebrate the birth of the church, and we celebrate the affirmations of faith of 43 young people in our midst, five

of whom we baptized two weeks ago. Maybe it doesn't seem so obvious, but I think it's appropriate that we're doing both things today.

Since January, the confirmation students have been gathering together to learn about the basics of faith. They talked about the core of our confessions of faith and our religious practice: sacraments, the Trinity, Jesus and the Resurrection, worship, what the church is and what it means to be a member of it — just to name a few. At the end of the class, the students stand before Session, answer membership questions and submit a statement of faith — their faith as they understand it.

That's a tough task to write a statement of faith, and, Confirmands, I know it was difficult. It is hard to use and understand the words of faith. The meanings of some faith words are familiar to many of us in this room — so much so that we can forget that for some, it is still new and takes time and practice to master. It's like learning a new dance altogether.

In fact, let me give you an example.

This year, the class introduced me to the phrase "Dabb on 'em."

Anyone in here know what that means? Yeah, me neither.

From what I do know, in addition to being a sweet dance move, it's also a way of basically saying you have a lot of confidence in your moves. And that probably doesn't get right to the meaning of it, which means I'm not going to casually bring it up in conversations just yet. I need to hear it more, get my head around it more. I need to dance more.

That's the other significant part of the class: allowing students to use the words and share their thoughts with each other in conversation. It's a chance to try out the dance moves of faith. Those conversations are not only with peers, but also with adult volunteers who pass on some of their wisdom and faith experience. For months, they sat together each week in small groups led by adults and had a chance to discuss and wrestle with the material.

In reality, that is what we do when we "do church." Pentecost looks back to the beginning of a community gathered together to figure out what it might look like to be servants of Christ in this world.

When we read today's verses, we hear Paul reminding Timothy of their previous conversations, encouraging Timothy to hold on to what was learned when they were together. He's encouraging Timothy to keep rehearsing the dance.

When Paul and Timothy were together, I can't imagine that it was just a one-way conversation. I imagine over time

Timothy would have asked questions that challenged Paul, and eventually Paul would also learn from his former student.

One of the values of talking about faith is the way we learn from each other. That's the kind of teaching that can only happen in a conversation where two people are listening to each other and honestly seeking to understand one another. Those are the kinds of moments when, if we aren't careful, the Spirit rushes into the room to join us.

Being willing to figure it out together is what church is about. Yet all too often now, I think we are a little anxious when it comes to talking and listening to others. Do you ever get nervous talking to others about faith or life?

It feels like we have figured out ways to speak different languages, all within the English language. We have different perspectives and mindsets, and we come at ideas and solutions in different ways. It is not uncommon in any generation to hear those who are older say the younger generation seems to speak a foreign language. But now we also draw lines of separation in any number of directions that threaten to divide us because of the way we talk about race, or poverty, or government, or faith.

So when Paul tells Timothy to hold onto this faith and that which was taught to him — as I understand it — Paul was saying to keep learning and growing; to risk conversations to discuss what those teachings mean each and every day. To do that requires us to keep returning to the

Pentecost moment — to gather together in the knowledge that the Spirit of God shows up when we do so.

If there is one thing I have learned about my own faith, it is that it is prone to change. And very often those changes are brought about because of experiences and conversations with other people with different life experiences.

It is in those interactions that I return to passages and find new meaning. I return to ideas and concepts that were at one time certain to me, only to find time has shifted my positions. That is the gift and the challenge of being the Body of Christ.

But we do a disservice if we only speak and listen to each other, only to those inside this place. Paul's encouragement to Timothy is that the Spirit is one that bravely seeks to encounter those outside of this place. Don't be afraid to talk about your experience of faith. Dare, at some point this week, to start by simply saying "my church" in a conversation. Talk to people who seem to speak a different cultural language than you do. Allow yourself not to know all the answers and just talk with someone about their faith experience. Invite a conversation with your family or friends, and humbly listen for the Spirit.

We'll take Communion together in a little bit. It will be the first time the confirmation students do so as members of the church.

It is a reminder of the way we — all of us — return to this table, having dodged, dipped, ducked

and dived our way through the week; and before we start all over again, we remember that the Spirit is with us. When we take Communion, it is a symbol of the way we strive to be in the world: We are a people of differences, and we might speak different languages both literal and cultural, but we are called by the Holy Spirit to love and learn from one another as one body of Christ.

The act of taking Communion is the act of many languages becoming one language. It is a time when, no matter what your background, or worldview, or where you are in your faith journey — whether that journey is 50 years long or if that journey is just beginning today — in the face of all that could divide us, we choose to gather together as one to eat of this bread and drink of this cup — together.

And when it is all done, we will go out from this place once again — because the Spirit was never meant to be kept in a room; we were never meant to only share God's grace with each other because God's grace, God's Spirit, is simply too big for this place.

Let us be encouraged by the knowledge that the Spirit which came all those years ago is the very Spirit with us today, with each of you, and with each of the confirmands who now stand as members of Village Church: It is a Spirit of power, self-discipline and love. And it both encourages us and challenges us to share it boldly as we keep learning and rehearsing this dance of faith.

Will you pray with me?

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.