

John 7:37-39

7:37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,

7:38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

7:39 Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, for as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Sermon: Good News

Every month, I meet for lunch with a group of ministers in the Raleigh area. The group is called the Wranglers, because we wrangle with theological topics, and learn from one another about shared ministry experiences. The food is good. The company is even better. And sometimes, we stay on topic. Other times, not so much!

This past week, our topic centered around evangelism, or more specifically, how, we, as the body of Christ, share the good news of God's inbreaking kingdom with those around us. It was an interesting conversation, because, for starters, *evangelism* is a loaded word in 2026.

Mainly, I believe that's because we rarely focus on the word's core meaning: *good news*. Instead, we think about a process, or a methodology for conversion. The sharing of good news becomes inseparable from its receipt, and its form. How many people did we reach and through what medium(a)? And how is this good news

expressed? Does it meet our own exacting standards of reverence and relevance? Is due credit given to the messenger or herald? And have we any guarantee that newly evangelized neophytes will do something productive or pleasing with the good news we share?

How do we evangelize without coming across as manipulative? We live in a post-post-modern world. How do we share about our faith in ways that do not offend or intrude upon the beliefs of our neighbors? Is evangelism one conversation? Or a series of conversations? Is evangelism intended to be transactional or relational?

So basically, should we go fishing? And if yes, where? And what do we use for bait? And does it matter if the fish are biting? And if we do catch something, what do we do with it? And is the fishing really about fishing, or is it some activity that leads us to a more transcendental plane?

SO many questions. Spoiler alert. We Wranglers did not come to a consensus in 40 minutes. I'm afraid we'll need a few more gallons of sweet tea and dozens more biscuits to get at the heart of the evangelism question. Thankfully, we stopped short of forming a committee!

Still, there was one comment that hit me square between the eyes. "Gospel," a colleague said, "is good news. Jesus loves me this I know!"

He said, "I get shivers every time I hear that phrase, and yet there are not many Sundays a year where are our churches are intentional about saying to the congregation, 'wait a minute, stop right there, before you leave today, if you haven't heard it yet, if you are not sure, here's the good news you need to be reminded of, you need to hear...in order that

you might go into the week ahead and be emboldened to let that goodness be manifested in your comings and goings with others.” In other words, a measure of evaluation for the gathered church ought to be: Did we hear good news? What news, what works, what aspect of our loving Creator, when considered in awesome wonder, can we scarce take in?

Objectively, I believe we do report good news here at Millbrook. Regularly, we share Christ’s peace, we share words of assurance, we seek to express as directly as possible the depth of God’s love and its absolute lack of disclaimers and exclusions. But we could certainly do more of it. Because there is no shortage of good news.

In just this Easter season, we’ve discovered the depth of resurrection – God’s cosmic and enduring yea, over and above the world’s fleeting no. We’ve learned that people like Mary, and Peter, and Thomas have known the fullness of God in hearing their names spoken aloud, in seeing, touching, and embracing the resurrected Jesus, and in the breaking and blessing of bread. Better still, we’ve learned that even those who have not yet seen will come to believe. We’ve learned that even though Jesus is transitioning to a new realm, entering into a new phase of being, he does not abandon us. Quite the opposite he’s leaving with us an advocate that will help us to accomplish even greater works than his in the future. And as Becky mentioned last week, Jesus ascends upward and outward, ensuring that we know, see, feel, and emulate his presence, not with our heads awkwardly pointing upward to the clouds, mouths wide open, and gawking like Peanuts characters seeking to catch a glimpse of some far-off wonder. But rather, we look out, and around, yonder, knowing, seeing, feeling, and emulating the love and work of Jesus, experiencing his presence, in the neighbors around us.

And the good news continues this week. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit arrives, and with a clamor! There is fire, and a mighty wind, and a thousand voices, each spoken and received in their native, flaming tongues. The humming of the Spirit, indwelling in the multitudes, is so powerful, so profound, it feels like an earthquake.

I would tell you the good news of Pentecost is twofold. I believe it's good news that something so spectacular happened we're talking about it two millennia later. It's such a spectacular, memorable story that I've preached more than a dozen sermons about it, and I still find new details each year. I get so excited when I think about the depth, the accessibility, the universality, the wildness of the Spirit revealed that day. But here's the second, perhaps even better piece of good news.

The spectacle of Pentecost has not ceased. The aftershocks are still sending reverberations into the future. I was walking around the campus of Millbrook this week, and I realized there are so many voices sharing good news in so many unique ways.

Here's what I'm getting at: on that first Pentecost they got to hear 1,000 different languages of past, present, and future all telling the story of God's goodness. And yes, wow it was pronounced! It's rare that I'm somewhere I hear more than three or four languages at the same time: an airport, a museum, I suppose the Hurricanes games this weekend with anthems in English and French, and simulcast in Spanish. But as I thought about it, I hear hundreds of different expressions of the Spirit each day I'm present in this community.

Is not our labyrinth a spirited proclaimer of good news? The azaleas, the hydrangeas, Mary and Claude's pomegranate tree, the wind chimes, the

swaying pines, benches lending shade and rest all have something to report of the glory of God.

Look on any entrance table in the church, and you'll find our budgeting documents. The numbers tell a story of purpose, collaboration, and vision.

See busy bags for our kiddos hanging on hooks, filled with markers that will draw new creations, fidgets that will channel new energy, little stories that will pique curiosity and imagination.

Walk through the kitchen and you'll see ladles, pots, pans, cutting boards, and all sorts of utensils – how many of us have known and experienced the love of God in one of Angie's casseroles, Jim's cheesecakes, or Barry's BBQ, or a feast prepared by our bereavement team?

Look in the Fellowship Hall and see tables, and chairs, and place settings, and tablescapes, and bulletin boards all offering a word of welcome and hospitality.

The miracle of Pentecost was that the Spirit arrived, and it filled everyone there, and it was expressed, received, and understood by each in their own tongue. The miracle of Millbrook Baptist Church, and indeed the miracle of the Church Universal, is that two thousand years later, the Spirit is still accessible and pronounced today. And when we are filled with the Spirit, we are empowered to express, share, receive, and understand both our own giftedness, and the giftedness of our neighbors, just as we are created. We've got the Spirit, Millbrook, and it can be spoken and received in any form we choose.

Good News
Bob Stillerman
Pentecost Sunday, 5/24/2026
John 7:37-39



When the choir sings, when the people smile, when the peace is passed, when the ushers and greeters offer hugs, when Dorcas completes another quilt, or Gerald files another of Gloria's treasures into the library catalog, or Ellen flies by us like a hummingbird seeking to beautify the next thing that needs tending on the grounds, or we hear crockpots clanking at the potluck supper, the Spirit has new voice, new expression, new language. The winds blow at our backs, the flame warms our hearts, the ground shakes beneath us. Easter, and Ascension, and Pentecost are as new as ever.

Good news, Millbrook, the Spirit has arrived, the Church has been born. It's our birthday! We can celebrate in every language, every day of the year.

May we speak this good news this day and every day. Amen.