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There's something about a balloon that catches our eyes, especially for children. Maybe because helium balloons dance in the air, prompting children to joyfully dance down the street. Or maybe it's because they have such bright colors, oftentimes printed with special greetings or words of celebration. Or maybe because when we let go of the string they get blown away, sending our imagination soaring as we watch them become smaller and smaller.

I doubt that Michael Faraday ever imagined in 1824 the popularity of his discovery 193 later as we see balloons suspended in our sanctuary this morning. He was experimenting with hydrogen at the Royal Institute in London.

“The [material] is exceedingly elastic,” he wrote in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* the same year. “Bags made of it...have been expanded by having air forced into them, until the [material] was quite transparent, and when expanded by hydrogen they were so light as to form balloons with considerable ascending power....” Faraday

made his balloons by cutting round two sheets of rubber laid together and pressing the edges together. The tacky rubber welded automatically, and the inside of the balloon was rubbed with flour to prevent the opposing surfaces joining together.¹

Although we may take them for granted today, I imagine those who first saw balloons were blown away, amazed at a round sphere of rubber filled with hydrogen floating in the sky. But even more amazing, I imagine Jesus' disciples were blown away—surprised, startled, amazed—for on Pentecost they found themselves filled—not with hydrogen—but God's Spirit. Jesus had died and had left his followers alone, though he had promised them that God's Spirit would give them courage to continue bringing hope to the world.

The disciples were gathered together during the Pentecost festival, a Jewish celebration today called Shavuot, which is the celebration of the harvest and the gift of God's teachings in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). The festival occurs 50 days

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after Passover, hence the name Pentecost, meaning “fiftieth day.”

The disciples were blown away by something entirely unexpected. In the Book of Acts, the writer Luke tells us that “Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind. It filled the house where they were meeting.” It might have sounded like a giant balloon being inflated (*blow up balloon*).

Something so amazing happened that the writer had a hard time explaining what they experienced: it was not only like the wind blowing through the house, but it was also like “fiery tongues moving in all directions,” with one flame settling on each person in the room. It was like the wind, but it was also like fire. Whatever happened, they were blown away (*release balloon*).

They went out into the streets and began speaking to the people who had gathered for the Pentecost festival—people who had traveled from distant places and spoke many languages. Somehow in the midst of all those languages, they

could understand one another, as one family, immigrants and visitors from many countries united together by God’s Spirit.

Peter spoke to the crowd, reminding them that the prophet Joel had said a day would come when God’s Spirit would inspire sons and daughters, a time when the young would see visions and when elders would dream dreams.

So many people responded and became part of the church that we often consider Pentecost the church’s birthday, a celebration complete with wind and fire—and of course, balloons.

Decades later when the apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, he reminded them of God’s Spirit that had brought them together as one family.

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (4:6)

As a result of God’s Spirit, our lives are changed, for Paul wrote:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control....If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. (5:22, 25)

He was trying to tell those churches who read his letter than when the Spirit fills our lives, we have a new way of living—kind, generous, peaceful, loving, patient. But that’s not always easy to live, is it?

We may not always be loving and joyful, for the stresses of life sometimes get us grouchy and mean. We try to be generous, but sometimes we clutch to our resources for fear of running out. And we try to be patient, but sometimes we get in such a hurry that we just can’t seem to wait, as was the case with a little girl who had gone to the park with her mother. The girl had played on the playground for quite some time, and she was getting tired and hungry. Her mother sensed that her little girl might be a bit grouchy, so she asked her daughter, “Would you like to get an ice cream sundae?” Her daughter

replied, “I don’t want to wait until Sunday. I want ice cream now.”²

In addition to patience being difficult, sometimes even kindness is hard to live, especially for those who fear the unknown and those who are different from themselves. Our nation seems to be struggling with whether to welcome those from other nations or to restrict them. On the one hand, we want safety and security, but on the other hand our nation was formed with immigrants who came from other countries.

Our church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), was formed with the influence of Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander, both immigrants from Ireland. We might not be here worshiping today if they had not immigrated to this country. They brought radical ideas about welcoming everyone to the communion table, ideas that got Thomas kicked out of the established church. What if political leaders 200 years ago had said, “I’m sorry, but you’re upsetting the way we do things in

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this country. You need to go back home.” What would have happened to the idea of an open table?

This summer at our Disciples General Assembly delegates will discuss a resolution that encourages churches to become immigrant welcoming congregations, recognizing the millions of children and families living in this nation who have uncertain statuses, who fear being sent elsewhere. Even in our own city we’ve heard about fathers sent away while their children are left here with their mothers. The resolution we face this summer reminds us of our commitment to serving all God’s children as we become immigrant welcoming through prayer, learning about the situation, supporting families facing separation, and consider offering sanctuary protections as we “continue to strive to respect and affirm the dignity of every child of God and to

advocate for the fair and just treatment of immigrants and immigrant families in the United States and Canada.”³

I am sure there will be voices on both sides of this issue during our discussion, but it will be good to have this conversation among our churches as we discern how the Spirit nudges us to be kind, patient, gentle, filled with peace and love—how to live by the Spirit. Some have turned the discussion into a political issue, with opinions lining up on both sides, but I think the issue goes beyond that, back to the beginning of the church as the Spirit brought people of many languages and cultures together. They were blown away by what God was doing, and I hope we may find ourselves just as blown away today with God’s amazing movement in the world.

¹ *The Book of Firsts* by Patrick Robertson, Bramhall House, NY, 1978 quoted at www.balloonhq.com/faq/history.html#rubber .

² Adapted from *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking*, Michael Hodgin, #219.

³ <http://ga.disciples.org/resolutions/2017/ga-1723/>