

Out of the Closet
From the Bible: Acts 2: 5-11

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Bedford, NY
September 25, 2016

According to the latest polls...

God is doing okay.

Churches. Organized religion. What we do here each and every Sunday morning. Not so good. Depending on which poll you read, between 75% and 85% of Americans continue to believe in God. But, here is the challenging news...

- In the five mile radius around Bedford Village roughly 40% of the population has no connection to any organized faith community.
- In addition, more and more people, especially those the age of my children, are identifying themselves as *Nones*. As in no religious affiliation. Now, at 25% of the population (and growing) that makes them the largest "faith" group in the United States. Larger than Catholics at 21% and more than white evangelicals at 16%.
- And, if that was not enough to give you pause, nearly 40% of the population has a negative view of Christianity seeing Christians as judgmental, hypocritical and anti-intellectual.

A couple of years ago, I had a very honest conversation with a member of our church. It went something like this:

I love our congregation.

I love who we are and what we do and what we stand for.

But, I don't talk about it.

I don't tell my friends I am a member of a church.

They would not understand.

A similar conversation took place just a couple weeks ago.

I was in a meeting with a several people I had not met before. We were discussing emerging needs in our community and how we might respond. At the end of the meeting, one of the individuals with whom I was meeting came up to me to shake my hand and, with an obvious sense of relief, to say she appreciated getting to know me. Then, she said, "With your being a pastor, I wasn't sure what to expect."

I get that.

I really do.

And, yet here you are. Here I am..

In church. Talking about God.

Doing our best to figure out what it means to follow Jesus.

At the risk of overstepping boundaries, let me project some of my own perceptions on you.
You are here because there is something about Bedford Presbyterian Church which you value.
Something which you find meaningful.
A place for your family.
A place for your children.
A place to be reminded of values important to you. Values to which you aspire.
A place in which to be involved which makes a difference in the communities in which we live.
A place where it is okay to ask your questions.
I may be biased, but I think Bedford Presbyterian is a great congregation.
I think you are a great congregation.
From baptisms to funerals...
From food pantries to work trips...
This congregation...
You...
Make a difference.
Adding what goodness you can into the world that needs all that and more.
So, if I am even partially right, what do we do with all that?
When who we are and what we believe stands counter to perceptions.
A hundred different responses to that question can be given, but for this morning this...

The reading from the Bible this morning was a part of the story about what happened to the disciples following the death of Jesus. You may remember or can reread how the story is told. The Sunday morning sermon version is this. Loud wind. Tongues of flames dancing above the heads of the disciples. The followers of Jesus overwhelmed and overcome by the presence and Spirit of God. After listing all the different peoples and nationalities gathered in Jerusalem for the festival the author of the book of Acts includes this wonderful sentence. *"In our own languages, we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."*

Which leads to the question, "Assuming we agree that BPC is not some type of private club with secret handshake and that something of who we are and what we value and what we do is important and meaningful and that acknowledging the witness of the Gospel is good news not just for us, but for all, then given the demographics and dynamics around us, what is the language we need to be speaking today?"

When many of us were growing up the "language" of the church was organ and choir and preaching and liturgy and open doors. While still meaningful to many of us, that is not the language of today. Or, the primary language of today. The language of today is, in part, online platforms. Social media. Facebook. Twitter. Pinterest. Snapchat. You Tube.
Before you shake your head, consider this.

- After the shooting death of Terence Crutcher in Tulsa earlier this week, Megan Hansen posted an article about race on our congregation's Facebook page which when I last checked had reached more than 1000 people.

- The picture of middle school youth and high school youth at their fall kick-off event reached which Kathy posted reached more than 250 people.
- The sermon I preached last Sunday reached as many people online as were here last Sunday..

And some of those people...

Maybe many of those people...

Are never going to walk in the doors of our church.

And they may not even live within a reasonable distance of the church.

And, yet they are touched and connected to the witness and ministry and mission of Bedford Presbyterian Church.

Is that a part of who we are?

A part of what we are to be doing?

A part of the language we are to speak?

I think so.

Particularly because I value and believe in who we are and what we are doing.

So, here is the opportunity and the invitation.

As a part of our connection with BPC, learn the language of the day.

Like.

Share.

Post.

Comment.

Retweet.

If you are on social media and see something that strikes you or makes you think or represents what Bedford Presbyterian means to you, add a comment and pass it along. In our own way we will share the good news we know and the signs of hope we see and those people and places who are making a difference and doing what they can to bring God's Kingdom close.