

## Your Button

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell



*Acts 2:1-13; Romans 12:1-13*

At the beginning of this week the baseball world spent probably too much time discussing, analyzing and replaying over and over again an incident that took place between the Washington Nationals and the San Francisco Giants. The pitcher for the Giants, Hunter Strickland, was facing the superstar hitter from the Nationals – Bryce Harper. The last time the two players faced each other had been in a playoff game three years before when Bryce Harper launched a homerun off of pitcher Strickland. There was something about that homerun, it's timing and perhaps Harper's admiration and celebration of it that stuck in pitcher Strickland's craw. It pushed his button. And he never forgot. So the next time the two faced each other – three years later – Hunter Strickland made sure that Bryce Harper knew that he hadn't forgotten – so he drilled the hitter with a 98 mph fastball. Something about that 98 mph fastball drilled into his right hip pushed Bryce Harper's button – and before he knew it he was charging the mound, throwing his helmet and engaging a slugfest with the pitcher. Benches cleared and we had ourselves a good old donnybrook. A time honored baseball tradition.

There is nothing like getting your button pushed.

We all have a button, don't we? And probably more than one. We all have that spot, that nerve, that peeve in our psyche that all it takes is for someone to put their finger on it and watch out. Not that we're a slugfest waiting to happen, but we all are vulnerable to those little things that a person can do that send us into orbit – or into a rage – or into a silent brooding that can last years. Some of us have particular people who have earned an advanced degree in pushing our buttons. "I don't know what it is about that guy, but

he really pushes my buttons." Sometimes it takes a particular person doing a particular thing that pushes that particular button and our blood pressure rises and it takes days for it to come back down again.

If you've listened to me preach for any length of time you know how much I loved and admired my father. But he also had a way of pushing my buttons. And there was no better place for this to happen than on the golf course. Now I am a pretty bad golfer and if there was anyone as bad or worse than me it was my father. I came by my golf game honestly. But it never failed that when we played together he felt it was his fatherly duty to give me some golf tips. Little suggestions on how to improve my game or why I just hit the ball in the water. Talk about the blind leading the blind! And of course every little tip made me madder and madder which made me play worse and worse. And of course it never dawned on me that this was his whole strategy from the start – it was his best chance of winning. And it usually worked. "You know, you might want to adjust your grip a bit, let me show you. You might want to check your stance, here look how I stand." Thanks Dad!! He knew exactly where my button was and he pushed it. Repeatedly.

So we have these little raw nerves scattered about our souls and psyches and for reasons far beyond our ability to understand – they can, when touched, set us off into directions and behaviors of which we are seldom proud.

Set this reality then against the words I just read to you from the apostle Paul –

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**“Pentecost was the birth of a new community of souls who were being shaped and healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit to become people who were less enslaved by their baggage...and instead were freed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to become a new way of life for a world hungering for a new way of life.”**

Now when I think of the buttons I have and when I think of how they can send me into my own little donnybrooks with myself and with others – when I think how easy it is for me to write people off, or seethe with anger, or grow impatient with this person who has their finger square on my little button and then hear from the apostle about this life that Jesus calls me into – this life of blessing, not cursing, living in harmony, not claiming to be wiser than I am, not repaying anyone evil for evil, not avenging, living peaceably with all – I feel this need to throw up my hands and say, “Not going to happen. Too many buttons. Too many unresolved issues. Too many pet peeves. Too many blind spots. Too short of a temper. Too many insecurities.” And I wonder if maybe you might feel the same? How is this going to work? I've got too much stuff, Lord!

And I wonder if that isn't where Pentecost comes in. We've got this day in the Christian year that we celebrate just around the time when people are checking out for the summer – and it is this strange day when the disciples – no strangers to unresolved issues and buttons themselves – who were together

in one place and someone called the Holy Spirit filled their room and filled their souls – and miraculously changed them such that they were able to become different people with different attitudes and different ways of engaging and different ways of relating and different ways of dealing with their stuff. This Holy Spirit didn't make them into perfect people by any stretch of the imagination – but she was a Spirit who seeped into the cracks of their souls and brought healing to some of their raw nerves and empowered them to live less under the control of their buttons and led them to speak in a new way to the world. Pentecost was the birth of a new community of souls who were being shaped and healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit to become people who were less enslaved by their baggage, their stuff, their buttons, their emotions, their anger, their unresolved issues -- and instead were freed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to become a new way of life for a world hungering for a new way of life. Do not judge. Forgive 70x7. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Live peaceably with all. Do not claim to be wiser than you are. And Pentecost is here to say that we cannot do this. We cannot do this. We cannot do this except by

the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot do this except by the daily indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives whose work it is to heal the raw nerves, sort through the baggage, temper the unbridled and unhealthy emotion, wipe clean the guilt and freeing us from the tightly held anger and bitterness. This is how God heals the world – he heals his people. He heals you and me so that we can begin healing the world by living like healed people.

And so every day it is this conversation with the Holy Spirit – what is the healing you have for me today, Lord? What must I do to keep those buttons from being pushed? Should I see a therapist? Should I stop drinking? Should I write a letter of apology? Should I balance out my life? Should I live with less stress? Should I take more vacations? Should I let you forgive me? Should I serve the poor? We each have our own buttons and we each have our own wounds. And we all have this sweet person of the Holy Spirit yearning to dwell inside and move us to those healing ways.

For most of his life – and certainly his entire adult life – C.S. Lewis carried with him the unhealed wound, the unresolved bitterness toward a headmaster of the school where he attended as a child. The man was a tyrant – a mentally unstable cruel vindictive headmaster who found it his pleasure to beat, whip and humiliate his students – including the young Lewis. It was a season of his education he never could quite get himself over. But he didn't give up. He knew it meant that the Holy Spirit just had more work to do. And every time he thought he had forgiven the long dead headmaster – he realized he hadn't. So every day – “Holy Spirit dwell within and heal and cause me to forgive.” And it wasn't until the last summer of his life, 50 years later – when he could write a friend and say, “Do you know, only a few weeks ago I realized suddenly that I at last had forgiven the cruel schoolmaster who so darkened my childhood. I'd been trying to do it for years; and like you, each time I thought I'd done it, I found, after a week or so it all had to be attempted over again. But this time I feel sure it is the real thing. And (like learning to swim or

to ride a bicycle) the moment it does happen it seems so easy and you wonder why on earth you didn't do it years ago.”

We all have our buttons don't we? We all have our wounds, our resentments, our bitterness, our raw nerves. Come, Holy Spirit, come, I cannot do this on my own. I cannot heal myself. I cannot change unless you change me.

I've told this story to you before but it was few years ago so I'm going to tell it to you again. A couple of days before my college graduation a few of us soon to be graduates had decided to drive down to Pittsburgh to see the Pirates play. And we had invited to go with us a fellow by the name of Chuck Donley --- who was the custodian for the dormitory where we lived. Chuck had become a good friend to all of us. Sort of like a dad away from home. Chuck himself was a grandfather and we told him to invite along his seven-year-old grandson to join us for this baseball game. We arranged a time that we would pick up he and his grandson to head down for the game. Well, as these things sometimes go --- plans kind of fell through at the last minute --- fewer and fewer people could go – so at the end we bagged the baseball trip. Well, it was my responsibility to tell Chuck. But I didn't. Forgot. And there Chuck sat at home with his eagerly awaiting grandson --- and nobody came. Nobody showed up. The grandson was crushed. Note to self: never crush a grandfather's grandson.

The next day, the day before graduation, I ran into Chuck on the campus --- and he laid into me. Ripped me up one side and down the other. Quite justifiably. I had pushed his button. I had hurt his flesh and blood. He questioned whether I had learned anything decent while in my four years of school. He wondered out loud why I was going into ministry. I have never felt so small. And after Chuck let loose his last invective ... we turned and walked away from each other. I realized that was the last time I was going to see him. And those were the last words I would hear from him. Anger, hurt, bitterness. I was graduating the next day

and that would be it. So the next day came and we graduated and we hugged our friends and we made our way to our rooms and we packed our last things and we got ready to leave. And as I'm packing my last few things --- who knocks on the door --- but Chuck? In his hands a graduation gift. In his eyes ... big tears. “I couldn't live with myself if those were the last words you had heard from me. I will miss you like a son. And I have already forgotten that it happened.”

For some it takes fifty years. For others fifty hours. Every button has its time. Never though, never though without the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

For this is Pentecost.



# Your Button

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Church of the Palms

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