

The Holy Spirit and Pentecost

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Scripture: Acts 2:1-22 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."

SERMON – The Holy Spirit and Pentecost

Introduction

Today we celebrate one of the most vitally important events in our history: Pentecost!

- A. In Judaism, Pentecost was a harvest festival celebrating the harvest of wheat, falling fifty days after Passover. It is called "*Shavuot*" in Hebrew and is frequently referred to as the Festival of Weeks, as Shavuot means "weeks." By the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, if not much earlier, this holiday was also identified with God giving the Torah to Moses.
- B. It was expected that faithful Jews throughout the known world would gather in Jerusalem for the festival. They would have learned the languages of the various countries where they settled, and these are the languages in which they heard the Pentecost message.

- C. So far, in the book of Acts, these are the things that have happened:
- Luke has written a prologue describing his purpose and method in writing this history.
 - There is a description of Jesus' actions between the time of his resurrection and his ascension into heaven.
 - Jesus' ascension is described.
 - A large group of Jesus' followers gather in an upper room. Matthias is selected to fill the vacancy left by Judas' betrayal of Jesus and his death by suicide. And that brings us to today's text.

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit! Rain upon our dry and dusty lives.
Wash away our sin and heal our wounded spirits.
Kindle us with the fire of your love to burn away our apathy.
With your warmth bend our rigidity and
guide our wandering feet. Amen.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

The Text

- A. (v. 1–4) When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
1. (v. 2) And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. *[As you may already know, the Hebrew word ruach and the Greek word pneuma both can be variously translated as breath, wind, or Spirit. How appropriate that the coming of the Holy Spirit is announced with the sound of wind.]*
 2. (v. 3) Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. *[This is the reason that the liturgical color for Pentecost is red.]*
 3. (v. 4) All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
- B. (v. 5–13) Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. *[They had gathered there for the Festival of Weeks.]*
1. (v. 6) And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

2. (v. 7–11) Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? *[Remember that Galilee wasn’t held in high regard. These men would have been regarded a little like we sometimes think of hillbillies.]*

a. (v. 8) And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

b. (v. 9–11a) Parthians, Medes, Elamites *[These were from the area of Persia or Iran, as it is now named]*, and residents of Mesopotamia *[modern Iraq]*, Judea *[Modern Israel]* and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia *[These are in modern Turkey]*, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—

c. (v. 11b) In our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

3. (v. 12–13) All were amazed and perplexed,

a. (v. 12b) saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

b. (v. 13) But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

C. (v. 14–22) But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them,

1. (v. 14b–16) “Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you,

a. (v. 14) and listen to what I say.

b. (v. 15) Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

c. (v. 16) No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:
[quoting here from Joel 2:28–32]

2. (v. 17–21) ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

3. (v. 22) *[Peter then continues with his sermon] "Fellow Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—" [And at this point Peter goes on to remind them that Jesus was crucified as a result of the actions of the Jewish leadership and that Jesus was raised from the dead by God Almighty. About three thousand of those present believed and came into relationship with Jesus that day.]*

IV. What can we take away from this passage this morning?

The Holy Spirit is not a what, but a who. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force, but rather a person, with self-awareness, volition, and power. We struggle with this. Some people feel that to be a person, it's necessary to have a physical body. This is a reasonable position to take, even if it's mistaken. We have physical bodies, and the only persons we are aware of in our regular lives have physical bodies. So, how do we accept and relate to a person who does not have a physical body?

Here's one answer. We worship God, who is absolutely a person. And yet, most of us don't understand God to have a body like we have. When Scripture tells us that we are created in the image of God, most of our sisters and brothers understand this to refer to spiritual attributes, rather than physical ones. So, then, God is a person, but without a physical body. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit (*and I'm trying to teach myself to stop using the word "the" in this construction*) is a person. So, what does the Holy Spirit do?

The Holy Spirit comes upon the church. The church receives its life and its power through the Holy Spirit. In the account we read today, the disciples of Jesus were able to preach the gospel in a way that people from throughout the known world were able to understand and respond, and three thousand were transformed into followers of Jesus.

In 252 AD, there was a plague, probably measles, that overwhelmed the Roman Empire. Many who were able to run away to safer areas did so, but the Christians in the community stayed to nurse the sick and to bury the dead, many dying from the disease themselves.

Again in 312 and 313 in Caesarea, and in 541 throughout the Mediterranean area, plagues (probably bubonic plagues) killed millions. And again, Christians chose to stay and serve the sick despite the risk to themselves, rather than to run away.

In the plague in Geneva in the 16th century and in many instances since, the church has been willing to stay and serve and, if necessary, die. What accounts for this? What accounts for the fact that the church was willing to live in such a counter-cultural way? And why is the church willing to stand for that which is right and correct today? What accounts for the fact that the Christian church today is taking a profound stand against racism and the destructive impulses of white supremacy? I argue to you that this is the work of the Holy Spirit, and I'd argue that whenever the church is authentically being the church, the power of the Holy Spirit is at work.

Of course, we aren't only the collective church. We're also individual followers of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit is the force that drives us to follow Jesus faithfully. And what might that look like? One of you might make sandwiches for Casa Maria. Another might visit someone who has difficulty coming to church. Another might serve as an usher, greeting worshippers as they arrive. Another might sing in the choir. Another might intentionally pray for those in need. Another might volunteer with children who need tutoring. And the list goes on and on and on.

Sisters and brothers, the Holy Spirit is alive and at work and on the move in you. What are you being led to do? What needs are you being equipped to meet? The Holy Spirit calls each of us and leads each of us and equips each of us to play our part in the kingdom of God. Are you listening? Are you willing?

May it be so. Amen

Sermon Art: "*Pentecost Dove*" by Todd Pick (2008), [Word Made Image Liturgical Art](#)

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