

Sermon for May 28, 2023 - Pentecost

Acts 2:1–21 (EHV)

Theme: Pentecost reveals how the Holy Spirit works.

- 1) He fills the Church with his presence and gifts.
- 2) He draws people to hear the Gospel.
- 3) He prepares people for the Last Day.

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. ⁴ They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently. ⁵ Now there were godly Jewish men from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When this sound was heard, a crowd came together and was confused, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ They were completely baffled and said to each other, “Look, are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them speaking in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, and of Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.” ¹² They were all amazed and perplexed. They kept saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocked them and said, “They are full of new wine.” ¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and spoke loudly and clearly to them: “Men of Judea, and all you residents of Jerusalem, understand this, and listen closely to my words. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ On the contrary, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ This is what God says will happen in the last days: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your 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 sky above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a rising cloud 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 this will happen: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Electricity is both amazing and essential for modern life. And yet, because it is invisible, we often take electricity for granted until hit by a power outage. The same can be said about the Holy Spirit. He is utterly amazing and powerful – affecting our lives in many important ways. But because He is invisible, we often forget He is there. Just as most modern devices cannot fulfill the purposes for which they were designed unless electricity flows through them, we (both as individuals and collectively as a Church) cannot fulfill the purpose for which we were saved unless filled by the Holy Spirit.

Let us, therefore, take a closer look at the account of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 and apply it to ourselves under the theme: **Pentecost reveals how the Holy Spirit works.** 1) He fills the Church with his presence and gifts. 2) He draws people to hear the Gospel. 3) He prepares people for the Last Day.

Part One: He fills the Church with his presence and gifts.

Our sermon text takes place only ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven. He told his disciples that, even though they would be his witnesses in the world, they needed to wait until He gave them the tremendous gift they needed to carry out that work. So, in joyful obedience and hope, these first Christians waited for Jesus to fulfill his promise – meeting every day in the temple courts to praise and glorify God.ⁱ

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

The sound of the rushing wind reminds me of what Jesus once told Nicodemus: *“The wind blows where it pleases. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*ⁱⁱ

But the sound of the wind was not the only way the invisible Spirit made his presence known to these first Christians. ³ *They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them.*

That happened to fulfill John the Baptist’s prophecy: *[The Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*ⁱⁱⁱ

But why would the Holy Spirit place tongues that looked like fire over these first Christians? To reveal God’s presence among his people! You see, during significant events in Old Testament history, the LORD often chose to take the form of a cloud or fire to proclaim his presence.^{iv} The Holy Spirit did the same thing here. He physically revealed his presence with both the church collectively and each believer individually so that we might always have hope and joy in knowing that he is with us.

But the Holy Spirit did not just make his presence known with the sound of wind and fire. He also gave believers something more intimate and personal. We read: ⁴ *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently.*

As the Holy Spirit gave himself to those first disciples, he continues to provide the gift of himself today. The Bible is clear: when we were baptized, the Holy Spirit was poured into our hearts for the forgiveness of sins.^v We have become his temple.^{vi}

And just as the Holy Spirit blessed each believer in Jerusalem with the ability to speak a unique language to make his Gospel known, so the LORD has awakened a special spiritual gift in each of us so that we might do the same. What gift has been given to you? The ability to speak another language? Perhaps. But it could also be the ability to show compassion, the gift of administration, the ability to teach others, a generous heart, the ability to pray, the means to help others in need . . . The list can go on and on. My point is that the Holy Spirit has uniquely gifted each of us for a purpose, just as he gave each disciple at Pentecost the ability to speak a particular foreign language fluently. And, as each disciple praised God in the unique language the Holy Spirit gave them, many different people in Jerusalem heard it and were touched individually by God's grace.

Similarly, God has uniquely gifted us with different talents to be used in service of his Gospel.^{vii} Each of our unique roles is important – tailored to reach specific people that God has in mind for us to reach.

Part Two: He draws people to hear the Gospel.

We read:⁵ *Now there were godly Jewish men from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.*
⁶ *When this sound was heard, a crowd came together and was confused, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.*

We often spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to engage our community with the Gospel. Amazingly, the Spirit often provides the most effective opportunities himself – attracting people to hear his Word as believers use the gifts God has given them to praise his holy name! This is what happened at Pentecost. As the first Christians used the Holy Spirit's gifts to praise the LORD, God made sure people took notice. The same is true for us: as we use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, God will make sure people notice. They will try to figure us out.

We read:⁷ *They were completely baffled and said to each other, "Look, are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"*⁸ *Then how is it that each of us hears them speaking in his own native language?... declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God."*¹² *They were all amazed and perplexed. They kept saying to one another, "What does this mean?"*¹³ *But others mocked them and said, "They are full of new wine."*

It is interesting to note that, even though each person heard the Gospel in their unique language, they still did not understand it. They were confused and perplexed - some even going as far as to mock the disciples. Why? Because, as the Bible says: *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*^{viii}

What happened at Pentecost is a picture of what often happens to us. People certainly notice when we use God's gifts in service of his Gospel. The problem is that they do not understand. Why do Christians condemn things as sins that society accepts as ok? Why do Christians pray for their

enemies – forgiving people who hurt them deeply? Why do Christians claim to eat the body and blood of a person who lived thousands of years ago? If scientists widely accept the theory of macroevolution, why do Christians say it is wrong? The list could go on and on as to how our message confuses and perplexes the people around us to the point that they even begin to mock it. This happened at Pentecost, and it still happens today. How should we respond? The same way Peter and the disciples did on the first Pentecost: by simply proclaiming God’s Word and showing how it points to Christ.

Part Three: He prepares people for the Last Day.

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and spoke loudly and clearly to them: “Men of Judea, and all you residents of Jerusalem, understand this, and listen closely to my words. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ On the contrary, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ This is what God says will happen in the last days: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your 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 sky above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a rising cloud 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 this will happen: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Wow, there is a lot to learn from what Peter said: enough to fill many sermons. For today, however, let me state that Peter’s main point was that God was fulfilling his promises on Pentecost. Judgment day is coming. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit that they witnessed testified to this fact. But the outpouring of the Holy Spirit did more than that. God poured out His Spirit on all believers – regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or position in life – so they might know Jesus and the salvation He won for them. He gave unique gifts to the people of his Church so that they might build each other up. And even though the gifts of dreams and visions seem primarily given to believers in the early Church, God nevertheless allows us to see in the pages of Scripture the same visions and dreams they saw. Through the Bible, He reveals himself to us – telling us what to expect as judgement day approaches. More importantly, he tells us how he saved us through Jesus.

Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit instructs us – leading us to repent of all sins and trust in Christ alone for salvation. And, having received salvation through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit equips us to tell others about Him. He uses our simple confession of His Word to call others to repentance and faith.

And here is the amazing thing: as we make our simple confession of Christ - using the unique gifts God has given us to His glory - guess what happens? The Holy Spirit works through us. Like electricity flowing through a smartphone’s display, the Holy Spirit is the unseen power making our light shine^{ix} – allowing people to see God through us, learn about his love, and move them to repentance and faith for salvation.

Remember this whenever you are tempted to give up your witness of Christ or feel bad because you are not like another Christian to whom different gifts have been given. The Holy Spirit is with you. He has given you the exact gift he wants you to have to glorify his name. He will lead the very people to you that he intends to touch through your confession of Christ. And even though people will look at you confused and perplexed – not understanding why you believe what you do – continue to share the Gospel as the Holy Spirit has revealed it to you. Using the Word you witness, he will work repentance and faith in the hearts of those who listen so that they, too, might call on the LORD and be saved.

Yes, as the account of Pentecost teaches, the Holy Spirit is with you. Rejoice in the knowledge of his presence. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Luke 24:53

ⁱⁱ John 3:8 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 1:6 EHV

^{iv} E.g., God's covenant with Abram – (Genesis 15:17), Moses and the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2ff), the Exodus (Exodus 13:21-22), Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:20), Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), etc...

^v Cf. Act 2:38-39

^{vi} 1 Corinthians 3:14

^{vii} 1 Corinthians 12:4ff

^{viii} 1 Corinthians 2:14 NIV84

^{ix} Cf Matthew 5:16