

## The Coming of the Holy Spirit

**2** When <sup>f</sup>the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like <sup>g</sup>a mighty rushing wind, and <sup>h</sup>it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues <sup>i</sup>as of fire appeared to them and rested<sup>1</sup> on each one of them. **4** And they were all <sup>j</sup>filled with the Holy Spirit and began <sup>k</sup>to speak in other tongues <sup>l</sup>as the Spirit gave them utterance.

**5** Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And <sup>m</sup>at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **7** And <sup>n</sup>they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking <sup>o</sup>Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and <sup>p</sup>Medes and <sup>q</sup>Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and <sup>r</sup>proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” **12** And <sup>s</sup>all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” **13** But others <sup>t</sup>mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

## Peter’s Sermon at Pentecost

**14** But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. **15** For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, <sup>u</sup>since it is only the third hour of the day.<sup>2</sup> **16** But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

**17** <sup>v</sup> “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, <sup>w</sup>that I will pour out my Spirit <sup>x</sup>on all flesh,

and your sons and <sup>y</sup>your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;

**18** even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and <sup>z</sup>they shall prophesy.

**19** And I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

**20** <sup>a</sup>the sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before <sup>b</sup>the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

**21** And it shall come to pass that <sup>c</sup>everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord  
shall be saved.'

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we remember the Apostles being filled with the holy spirit, and a new chapter in the church beginning. The word Pentecost simply means fiftieth, and it references the Jewish festival of weeks, also called the feast of harvest, which was celebrated fifty days after Passover.

Given the celebration, it is no surprise that the apostles were in one place. Jews from all over would come to Jerusalem for the festival as pilgrims. The festival was a harvest festival, where observant Jews made offerings of grain. Our modern Jewish friends still celebrate this holiday, but there are no specific Biblical instructions on how, exactly, to celebrate it, making it a bit of an oddball. Some

Jewish traditions hold that this festival is when the Torah was given, ordaining the Jewish people as a nation, and others propose it is connected to the covenant made with Noah, and thus the instruction to replenish the Earth.

These symbols mix together in perfect harmony for this particular Pentecost recounted in the Book of Acts. Here were the first fruits of the Church, the first sermon of the Christian Church is a wild success. Here, the apostles receive the holy spirit and become a people together, the Christian church. Here begins the work to go forth and spread the gospel, filling the earth with new life.

Today, churches around the world will be celebrating Pentecost. Many will wear red, or fill the sanctuary with red flowers. Some brave pastors will be having Pentecost fire, an intimidating concoction of Epsom salts and rubbing alcohol passed around clergy Facebook groups, and which I decided I did not wish to try my luck with. Most churches will read this passage from acts, with or without the Pentecost fire, and will remember that miraculous event so long ago.

Soon, though, our churches will settle into the long months of ordinary time, and the banners will change to green. The proportion of the congregation in red will dramatically decrease on future Sundays, and my red stole will return to the forgotten corner of the closet until next year.

But Pentecost is not meant to be a single event, locked in time millennia ago. In fact, no Christian holiday is meant to be merely a remembrance of a one and

done event. When we celebrate the Christian holidays we join in a spiritual way with our faith ancestors, and we continue the work which they begun. Pentecost is no exception to this.

Pentecost marks the beginning of the Christian Church, of being empowered by the spirit and sent out to do the work of the church. Pentecost may be the day where it all started, but it certainly was not intended to end on that day. We are meant to continue this work of the church every day since the spirit appeared as tongues of fire, and every day in the future. We are not meant to merely celebrate Pentecost by remembering and splashing red about once a year. We are meant to live Pentecost every single day.

On that first Pentecost, the apostles received the spirit in a dramatic and visible way. They immediately set about the work, with Peter giving the inaugural sermon of the Christian Church. He shares the Gospel with those gathered, and later on in Acts we find out that his message was well received, with many being baptized, and about 3000 people being added to the church. That first day was dramatic, but it was far from the only success. From Pentecost on, new believers joined the church daily, Scripture tells us. Eventually Paul would carry the Gospel to Rome, and effectively, to the ends of the world. I am so thankful that the Apostles did not consider Pentecost a onetime event. Instead, it was merely the

beginning of the great work before them. The apostles never grew comfortable or stagnate. Instead, they took up the great work anew each and every day.

Often in the church we can grow comfortable with the way things are. Admittedly, modern life is complicated and so very tiring. From renewing driver's licenses, to jury duty, to paying bills, cooking, working, and so on, it can be daunting to think of the work of the church. The last thing we want to do is add church activities to our already overly busy schedule when what we really want is rest. Sometimes, especially when we are overburdened or wrestling with our own faith, that rest is necessary and good. It's not meant to last forever, though. It is so much easier to coast, to come to church and allow others, especially those we perceive as more experienced or formally trained, to carry on the work. I will tell you, however, as someone who is formally trained, that I still sometimes look for someone with more training, an adultier adult if you will. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, it is assumed that I actually know what I'm doing. In those times the words of Michael Scott come to me: "I knew exactly what to do. But in a much more real sense, I had no idea what to do."

Peter makes it plain, however, that whatever our thoughts of our own abilities, God has poured out God's spirit on all flesh, on both sons and daughters, on both old and young. No Christian is without the power of the Holy Spirit. All Christians are gifted in their own ways for the good of the church, and no one is

unimportant or unable to further the work of the church, not a single person. Often, the best ideas and programs come not from the pastor, but from you sitting in the pews. Still more often, people have incredible ideas or want to serve, but feel that they aren't qualified. But let us remember that Peter never went to seminary. He likely didn't have much formal education at all. Sure, he went to synagogue like any observant Jewish man of his time, and he knew how to fish, but he had never sat through polity classes, or church administration classes, or even preaching classes. Peter's qualifications were the empowerment of the holy spirit, and a willingness to serve God, and that must have been enough considering 3000 were added to the church that day. I can promise you that despite 4 years of Bible college, another five or so spent in seminary, and a year or so of internships, I've never had 3000 people come forward after one of my sermons. I have had a few fall asleep or get up and leave, though.

Pentecost is not the day when the finest preachers took charge. It is the day that God poured out God's spirit on all people. It is the day that the church learned that in Christ, in this church, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. We all share the same spirit. We are all called to serve God and we are all empowered to do so.

When I was in Bible college, we had to take a class on evangelism. I went to a Baptist college, if you can't tell by the statement alone. There is a story that has

always stuck with me from that class, however. A woman came to her preacher talking about a work friend whose soul she was deeply concerned about. She went on and on about how she needed someone to share the gospel with this person and to witness to them. So, she asked her pastor would he please pray for God to send someone to this woman's office to witness to this friend of hers. The pastor said, and I quote, "I absolutely will not."

As you can imagine the woman was dumbstruck and probably mentally preparing complaint letters in her mind about this pastor. When she regained herself she asked why and he explained, because God has already sent someone to witness to this friend, the woman herself.

Like so many of us, this woman felt that she was unqualified, underpowered, insufficient enough to witness to her friend. Surely she celebrated Pentecost each year, but I wonder if she realized that had she been alive on that day, the tongues of fire would have rested on her head as well, and she too has received the spirit, and she too can do wonderful things for God.

God has poured out God's spirit on each and every one of us who have claimed the promises of God and received the good news. My years of seminary training did not earn me extra portions of the holy spirit. In fact, I am daily humbled by those who have little formal theological education, but a fair amount of wisdom and common sense, a statement which could be considered true for

many of the early church leaders. Each one of you here is empowered by the holy spirit and called to ministry, and by the grace of God, that's all we need. God will provide the rest.

Today, I would like us to remember that Pentecost is so much more than history, and that the Holy Spirit empowers us all. We have all been empowered by God to go out and serve God and share the good news. The work began at Pentecost, but it continues today, and each one of us is empowered and called to the great work. Each person here has unique gifts and ideas and I welcome your gifts and ideas as the blessings they are, and as the continuation of the work which began on Pentecost. Today, I invite you to consider your gifts and the ways God might be calling you to serve God's people. And instead of letting fear or doubt argue that you are somehow unqualified or it would be better left to others, live into the reality of Pentecost, into the reality of the spirit which indwells you. I invite you to live into Pentecost by sharing your gifts with your community, and particularly with trinity, and together, we will continue the great work as brothers and sisters, and living each day in the power of the holy spirit.

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