

5-28-23: The Day of Pentecost Acts 2:1-21 Pastor Priewe

Theme: He Lives to Pour Out His Spirit 1) on the Church 2) and on you.

Do you know what the fastest growing religion in the world is? You might guess Islam or Hinduism, but that would only be true if you were talking about the amount of people who are automatically born into those religions. If you're talking about the group that has the most people converting to it per year, you might be kind of surprised to find out that it is a group or really more of a movement called the *Pentecostals*, with some 644 million people world-wide and estimates as much 35,000 people per day converting to it.

It's a little bit of a hard group to define since "Pentecostal" refers to specific denominations of Christianity, but it's also a charismatic movement that is be found inside of many different Christian denominations. So you might have Pentecostals or the Assemblies of God churches, but you can also have charismatic Catholics or Baptists or even Lutherans. The thing that ties them together into this charismatic or Pentecostal umbrella is an extreme focus or even an insistence, a fanaticism for the outward signs and presence of the Holy Spirit.

If you were a fly on the wall in their worship services, it would look quite a bit different. The music is fast and loud and expressive. The preaching is rousing and eccentric and for the people in the pews, there's really no "bump on a log" sitting. I don't think hardly anybody falls asleep. You might say everybody is up and singing and dancing and "being moved by the Spirit." Some people even appear to be speaking in tongues, in different kinds of heavenly languages. Sometimes there's opportunities for healings to take place during the service. In doing a little video research on YouTube, it's all quite the sight to see. It sort of bombards the senses and emotions, especially if you're used to a worship experience that some might say is on the opposite end of the spectrum.

We can't help but wonder what to make of it all? Is it real? Is that what should be happening here? Are we missing something? Do we downplay the presence of the Holy Spirit? Because aside from the time Pastor Raasch danced in the pulpit to "We are Family," I've never seen any Spirit-filled dancing here or any speaking in tongues. Are the Pentecostals on to something more like what actually happened on the day of Pentecost? Is that why it's catching on so fast.

Today as we look at the real account of the day of Pentecost, we recognize it as the day **Jesus poured out his Spirit 1) on his church.** The main question we want to answer is "for

what purpose?" And after we've seen that, we also want to see how Jesus continues to **pour out his Spirit 2) on you**. That main question we want to answer is, "What does that look like now? What are we to expect? What are the signs of it?"

But first, back to the day itself, the day of Pentecost. Now the word Pentecost is really just the word that means "fiftieth", which is when we celebrate Pentecost, on the fiftieth day after Easter. But the day we refer to as Pentecost wasn't actually the first one. It was a yearly festival from the Old Testament celebrating the spring wheat harvest and offering the firstfruits of that harvest to the Lord. That's why there was a scattering of God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven all gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost.

But God was about to give a new meaning and new focus to the festival. While the disciples, now newly commissioned into apostles, were gathered together in one place, **"Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."** (Acts 2:2-4).

They were miraculously able to speak in real human languages that they had never learned, and many different ones to match the country of origin of all the different Jews who were there. You heard the list before, Parthians, Meds, Elamites, and so on... So much so that everyone was amazed and confused at these suddenly versatile Galilean fisherman!

Now the first thing that must be said is that we believe this really did happen! Maybe before you could pick up on my skepticism about the kind of Pentecost that happens today in the Pentecostal church. It's kind of funny my skepticism is the same way the Jews who heard the raucous and came to investigate reacted. Are these guys drunk? But we know on that day of Pentecost, it was the real thing, because the Holy Scriptures record for us the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit in audible and visible ways. And we don't doubt this in the least because it's exactly what both the Scriptures and Jesus has prophesied and promised.

That's what Peter get's up to tell them, that part of the purpose of this great outpouring was to fulfill those promises, like from book of Joel that he quotes, **"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below."** (Joel 2:28,30).

But it was also to fulfill Jesus' promises that he made to the disciples. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus had promised them, **“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14: 16,26).** And again after his resurrection, Jesus reminded them, **“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49).**

There right at the end of that verse you see what the real purpose of those promises was. **Jesus poured out his Spirit 1) on his fledgling Church to clothe them with power.** Jesus was no longer going to be with them visibly with his presence and power, so now it was the Holy Spirit's turn to be with them in a visible and powerful way, to give their message authority and power. Just as Jesus performed miraculous signs and wonders to confirm he was the Son of God, so now God was giving miraculous signs and wonders through his Spirit to let everybody know they were speaking for God and their message was the real thing!

It's what those disciples needed. Less than two months ago they had closed their mouths and deserted Jesus and now they were going to be the grass roots witnesses of the New Testament Church. Now clothed in power from on high, Peter finds his words and preaches a message of law and gospel to some of the very same Jews who had put Jesus to death and Spirit grew their number that day from 120 to 3,120.

Is that what it's supposed to be like all the time—wonderful outpourings of the Spirit with visible signs and mass conversions? It is actually what Jesus told those first disciples to expect, **“These signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snake with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” (Mark 16:16-18)** For a time, that's how things continued, while they were “getting the ball rolling” so to speak. The last words of Mark's Gospel tells us, **“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.” (Mark 16:19)**

So we see those visible outpourings of the Spirit continue throughout the book of Acts, to validate new groups of believers in Samaria and in the Gentile house of Cornelius. You saw in our second reading from the book of Corinthians how prophecy and speaking in tongues and

healing continued to be miraculous gifts that the Spirit had granted to the Corinthian congregation. But then we come across an interesting verse in 1 Corinthians 13, which many Christians know as the “Love” chapter. Paul, himself who had the gift of speaking in tongues, writes, **“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”** (1 Cor. 13:8-10)

Paul is indicating that these special gifts are temporary and have a temporary purpose that will not always be needed. These Christians had the advantage of these wonderful signs of the Spirit to confirm their faith, but you know what advantage they didn’t have as the Church was getting going. They didn’t have 27 New Testaments books of the Bible nicely bound together with their Old Testament sitting on their bookshelf or in a nice Bible app that they could access on the go. The books were being written at the time, but you know who does have that advantage? We do!

We’ve got the Bible, the completeness of God’s revelation, confirmed for us by the testimony of the Apostles, and passed on to us with the promise of Jesus that **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my Word will never pass away.”** (Matthew 24:35). And since we have that completeness, it seems that God has seen fit to let those special gifts of the Spirit like miraculous healings, and prophecy, and speaking in tongues pass away. What is in part disappears, so that things may look quite different today.

But that doesn’t mean that Jesus has stopped **pouring out his Spirit 1) on his Church and 2) on believers like you.** What did Paul say? **“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit!”** (1 Cor. 12:3) I have never seen one person in my life speak in tongues or prophesy straight from the Spirit, but that in no way, shape, or form, means that the Holy Spirit isn’t with us. He has to be with us in order for us to trust in Jesus, even if it looks different than on Pentecost. That’s how we come to faith.

I say this because there are those in visible Christian churches today who would say that those miraculous gifts of tongues and healing are the true marks of believers and you’re not a believer unless you have them. If that’s the case, do any of us make the cut? No, me either! But I suppose that is a good way to pressure people into faking it and manufacturing those gifts in order to pass the test to be true believer. That’s the kind of thing I saw as I watched the videos of

charismatic services—people manipulating being manipulated under the guise of the Holy Spirit. Maybe you’ve experienced that kind of pressure, maybe you haven’t.

I’ll tell you what kind of pressure I’m betting all of you have faced. It’s one of the devil’s sneakiest lies. It’s the one where you pray for something that the Lord doesn’t appear to be answering, and in desperation, you blurt out one of two things, “If only he would just give me a sign!” We love to look for the easy and the outward, for the Spirit to speak to us straight from heaven. And when we do, we’re implicitly concluding that his written Word to us is not enough. Has Jesus left you as an orphan without an answer? No, of course he hasn’t! Remember what he said, **“The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.” (John 6:63).** You have those words in the Bible.

The other groan of despair that might be heard in our heart is this, “I keep praying, but he’s not listening. The Spirit’s not doing anything in my life. I must not be a believer at all.” Well, were you baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit? Has Christ broken his promise to you? No, of course he hasn’t! When the devil whispers his lies in your ear, you tell him what the Word says, **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** (Acts 2:21). And when a person comes to you wondering where the Spirit is or why they don’t feel like they have him, you tell ‘em what Peter promised to the Jews who believed the gospel that day, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** (Acts 2:38) The Holy Spirit is yours through faith. He’s the one who brought you that faith. He’s yours in baptism. Trust the promise. Trust in his quiet presence in and with the Word, right where he has promised to be. Amen.