

Sermon Draft

Text: Acts 2:1–21

Sermon: Pentecost 2021

Today, we celebrate Pentecost, also known as Whitsunday, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples after Jesus' Ascension. It is the 50th day of Easter. Christ, before ascending to heaven, promised his believers that another counselor would come (John 14:16). God kept his oath by sending the Holy Spirit among the believers.

Most can recall images of this incredible day. God the Holy Spirit appearing in the form of fire to the people gathered to celebrate Pentecost.

Acts 2 gives that long list of people gathered in Jerusalem from all over the Roman world. Pentecost also known as "Shavuot" in the Jewish world. A major feast which brought Jewish people from everywhere to Jerusalem. Jews from all over who had been displaced would converge on Jerusalem to worship the Lord during this feast.

It is interesting that Pentecost was the occasion to thank God for the harvest of crops, especially wheat. The point of the feast was to emphasize that the Lord was the one who gave the ability to work (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Additionally, the Jews reminded themselves that it was God who made crops to grow and yield the harvest, that the Lord was responsible for everything. Perhaps the Jews were tempted to view only the physical blessings on Pentecost, but God sent the Holy Spirit to focus on his desire to save the souls of people as well. **“God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”** (see 1 Timothy 2:4). A festival of harvest would now become a festival of God harvesting souls!

So, the Holy Spirit gave to his small band of believers special abilities to speak in different languages. These men of Galilee were able to speak their messages not only in the Greek language, which all those visitors to Jerusalem could already understand, but in the local languages also.

These people from all the various regions of the Roman Empire and beyond could hear and understand. An amazing miracle! It is the part of the Pentecost story many remember best.

Many from Pentecostal church bodies today single out Acts 2 to be very special, fixating on this speaking in tongues.

Unfortunately, they then miss the real importance of Pentecost Day, for two reasons.

One, they overlook that the different “tongues” spoken by the apostles on Pentecost were recognizable languages, clearly understood by the hearers, not ecstatic “tongues” or “prayer language” that fellow worshipers cannot understand, as encouraged by Pentecostals.

Two, the focus should not be on the people speaking in other languages; attention should be given to the One who gave these abilities. It is a common temptation to praise the creation rather than the Creator.

The believers who had gathered on Pentecost were proclaiming the “wonders” of the Lord (v 11). The text gives no details on what these first messages were all about. However, they were surely connected to how the promises given to the Old Testament people were fulfilled in Christ, just the way that Jesus explained to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus.

After hearing these languages, what were the reactions of the people? Some were amazed. But some started to mock that these Galileans were drunk.

Peter, a disciple who had denied Christ three times to save his skin, now stood up courageously and defended these brothers by reminding all those gathered of the words spoken by the prophet Joel.

God made the promise to pour out his Spirit on all people. Pentecost is the time when his promise was fulfilled. The Old Testament believers trusted that the Lord would follow through on what he said.

How is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy relevant to us?

The Holy Spirit continues to bring the gift of faith to people of all nations and continues to preserve people in the faith, just the way he did in the first century, with both Jews and Gentiles, males and females, slaves and free. These faithful people of God then carried out the "Great Commission" themselves; they truly became the witnesses of the love of Christ, and the Gospel of Christ was proclaimed in many places.

We are the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit done by the voices of those faithful Christians. Somehow the Gospel has reached our ears and hearts. We have heard what brought these first few believers together: Jesus—his death on the cross, his rising from the grave, that has taken away our sins.

The Holy Spirit has ever since been announcing Christ crucified. That is the reason we now know Christ as our Savior. God's desire to save started from the beginning of time, and he is still at work.

The Holy Spirit is strengthening our faith through the Gospel and Sacraments. The Word of God is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

That same assurance then energizes us to be the people of Pentecost. As Paul says, ***“We are the jars of clay bearing the treasure”*** (2 Corinthians 4:7). The Lord uses people like us, sinful and weak, to speak the Gospel to others. How can we do this? It is the Holy Spirit living in us who is saving people, and he alone is enabling us to proclaim his Gospel.

Whenever we are disappointed at our frailties and sins, we remember our gracious God, who sacrificed himself for us on the cross. He did not remain dead there but kept his promise by conquering death.

By his conquering power, given to us by the Holy Spirit, our God will accomplish his will through us, just the way those lowly Galileans became the proclaimers of the almighty God on Pentecost.

This will be the mission of the Church until that other day the prophet Joel foresaw, that Peter preached about on Pentecost:

“The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day” (Acts 2:20).

Jesus is coming back again. Our Lord Jesus Christ will come back to judge the living and the dead. Because of his sacrifice and forgiveness, proclaimed to us at Pentecost, proclaimed by us since Pentecost, we and countless others will welcome that Last Day with praises of Christ that will never end.

Amen