

Acts 2:1-21

1: When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

Pentecost - meaning: the fiftieth day - was an Old Testament holiday. So the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the Passover they would celebrate. But, as we know, the disciples, gathered together in Jerusalem, were about to see how God would change this Old Testament holiday into a New Testament one.

2-3: And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each of them.

Notice the events are described as “like wind” and “as of fire.” There was the sound of wind but no movement, and stuff like fire. It’s clearly miraculous, it’s impossible to describe perfectly.

But, nevertheless, it appears God is at work here giving, as he often did in the apostolic age, a sign or miracle whenever something new happens to remind the Church, “Yes this is from God and God pleasing.” So when the gentiles are first baptized: a miracle, when the apostles go out with the Word of God: miracles. And here, before they are sent out, when the word of God is about to be proclaimed in a host of languages and the Spirit of God poured out on the New Testament Church: a miracle.

4: And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Did the disciples not have the Spirit before? 1 Cor. 12:3b “no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.” And they had seen the Risen Lord, they have believed in Him and his promises. So yes, they had the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit’s presence is not a zero-sum game – you can always have more. And so here they receive the Spirit in a special way and for a

special reason: to share the word of God in other languages. For us, the encouragement is abounding in this passage. We, who have the Spirit to confess Christ, who have the Spirit, as Peter will explain in this very chapter, through baptism, we have a Spirit, a Helper, who can and will come to us even more in time of need. How do Christians stand up under persecution? How do they stand fast in the midst of chronic pain, addiction, and sin? How do they bear together and work to forgive one another? The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who comes in time of need. There is always room for more of Him. In time of need, pray for more of the Spirit.

5-6: Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

So why were all these foreigners in the city? To celebrate the Passover and the subsequent feasts, like Pentecost. People faithful to the true God would come from all over the world, pilgrimaging to Jerusalem for the Holy Days. But now they would hear in their own language the fulfillment of the promise of the Old Testament. They would hear who the true Messiah, long foretold, was: Jesus who, 50 days before, was killed and rose again.

7-8: And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?”

Some of our Pentecostal neighbors would say to speak in tongues is to speak in the “tongues of angels.” Which is nothing we can understand. And if you ever hear it, well, it sounds like babbling and gibberish. Is that what is going on here on the first New Testament Pentecost? Not at all! The languages spoken are real languages that people can really understand. And so the Word of God, who is here at Pentecost in a real way, goes out in all languages. And as we see at

the end of this chapter, the Word does not return empty and this Word of God, spoken in different languages, brings many to faith.

9-11: These are the verses every reader goes over in great fear. “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes (converts), Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Tongue twisters aside, these places are all over. And now all these regions have the word of God spoken directly to them, in their language. It’s one thing for the word of God to go out, it is a whole other thing for it to come to you, specifically. And so around the world the Bible is translated so this letter from God can be read by His people, so the voice of the Shepherd can be heard. Folks, let us not take this for granted. The Bible wasn’t written in English. But it has come to our ears and before our eyes. Thank God for that, and for the people of God who made that happen.

But even more monumental than these facts, than the languages, is the content. They weren’t just chatting about the weather in different languages. They were speaking the Word of God, even more specifically – “the mighty works of God.” And which works might these be? What events might these people still be discussing around Jerusalem? God’s Work in Jesus, and his death and resurrection? Where the sky was darkened, and the earth quaked and death is defeated? I think so. And so on Pentecost the Spirit comes and does what? Ensures and enlivens the proclamation of Jesus to the world.

12-13: And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But not all believed. Others mocked and explained it away, still others were confused at the significance. So Peter starts his sermon, not with a proclamation of Jesus crucified and risen, but make no mistake he gets there, but he starts his sermon with some explanation.

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. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on 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 on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”

It’s five o’clock somewhere! But not in Jerusalem that morning. So what is to account for this phenomenon? Not alcohol, but the Holy Spirit who Jesus promised to send them in Jerusalem, and who Joel, long before, promised would come in the last days, the New Testament days. And now it is fulfilled. The Spirit of God dwells with his people, for the purpose of dancing with snakes? Or being sowers of disorder? No, for the purpose of getting the Good News of Jesus out. And so in this apostolic age we have just that, visions, dreams, giving testimony to the work of Jesus and the eyewitness testimony of the apostles.

We may wonder then about our dreams, and visions, and miracles or lack thereof. Is this just fairy tale language? I wouldn’t go there, even I have seen a puzzled doctor or two in my ministry. God is still God and can do whatever he wants. But certainly, there is no promise that

such Pentecost miracles would continue. So, as Paul urges us, with our dreams and visions or “Five Minutes in Heaven” books: test them against the scriptures. The eyewitness testimony of the Apostles is the foundation on which we build, for it is the truth of who Jesus is, what he has promised, and the vehicle through which the Spirit has promised to work. So we lift up the Word of God, we don’t worship it, we worship God, but here is where we can find the sure testimony of who that One True God, revealed in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is.

19-21: And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

As Christ dies the skies goes dark, the earth quakes as he dies and again when the tomb opens. Some people track blood moons, was there one on Pentecost? I don’t know. The point is, and Joel and Peter’s point – is the that Spirit will come to God’s people and it will happen before the end. And Jesus’ death and resurrection, the first-fruits of death dying and life eternal, how is that not a glimpse of the last day? So there should be no surprise there were signs in the skies above and below. Signs that will happen again on the last day. Do we need to cower in fear at every blood moon? No, the end will still come like a thief in the night. More important for the Christian on Pentecost, is to rejoice that once again a promise of God is kept, and the Spirit of God does come to his people. He keeps all of his promises.

And I pray that gives you comfort in this broken world. Pandemics, riots, a man murdered on the asphalt – these are broken times. Where can we find hope? In the same place it was found on Pentecost, in the Spirit of God that works through the content, the message, of Jesus crucified and risen for you. Hope found in the One who has overcome the world, kept every promise, and

who is with us and works in us to give us forgiveness, hope, and life everlasting. Let us abide in that word and pray the Spirit would be with us more and more and in every time of need that we might be brave and share the mighty works of God with others, until the last day when, once more, he keeps another promise, and brings us, who have called upon his name for mercy, for help, for live, he brings us forgiven to his kingdom that has no end. What joy is ours in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.