

Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all 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.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

New International Version

Preaching notes:

I was tempted to start this talk with a rendition of Happy Birthday. A familiar song, especially as we have all been washing our hands to it over the last couple of months. Why happy birthday you might ask, well Pentecost is the Church birthday, and while we are talking about birthdays I don't know about you but I agonise over what presents to get for

birthdays and Christmases but unlike me God knew exactly what gift people needed and still need today. He sent the Holy Spirit, the greatest gift of all.

For just a moment I want you to put yourselves in that room where all the disciples were gathered, how do you think they were feeling? They were quite possibly confused, frightened, emotionally exhausted not really knowing what was going to happen next. They had just been on a roller coaster of a few weeks. They had been with Jesus when he turned over the tables in the temple, they had seen him arrested; they had heard the people baying for his blood. They were there at the agonising death and then they ran away. They heard about the resurrection, then come face to face with Jesus in the flesh and finally the Ascension into heaven. All very emotionally draining! Maybe they now hoped for a period of stability.

So here we find them, gathered together for the major Jewish festival ready to celebrate and to meet with God as they always had done. Pentecost was originally known as the Feast of Weeks and Feast of Harvests and is known as Shavuot in Hebrew. It was the second of three major feasts in the Jewish year. It was originally a harvest festival but in time, also turned into a day to commemorate the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Jews of many nations would gather in Jerusalem to celebrate this important festival.

But things are different now - and God uses this moment to fulfil His promise and send the Holy Spirit upon them. The disciples were together, probably praying, and a wind like a tornado fills the house, tongues of fire rest on each believer, and they begin speaking uncontrollably in tongues. The scene was so bizarre that there could only be one, rational conclusion: the crowds of people around them thought that they were drunk.

But no...Peter assures them all that what they are experiencing is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: the gift of God to the early church – and to us.

When it comes to the Holy Spirit many people are confused and sometimes afraid, afraid because people don't understand or indeed know what the Holy Spirit is. But we do not need to be afraid the Holy Spirit is, in simplistic terms, the presence and power of Jesus. It is the spirit of Jesus; it is how Jesus is with us. God intended that we should have a comforter, a helper and the Spirit of Truth and it is from this Holy Spirit that we can draw courage to be confident and experience God in our lives. It is the Holy Spirit that makes God real to us.

The fact is, if you have asked Jesus into your lives, you have already received the Holy Spirit. Jesus says "here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me. When we open our hearts to Jesus, we open our hearts to His Spirit. But being filled with God's spirit is not a one-off occurrence. In Ephesians Paul instructs the Christians to keep on being filled with the Spirit to go on being filled over and over and over again?

We are blessed to know that every Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit within them. It gives us the power to communicate the gospel and that is what we are called to do. We have to equip ourselves, be intentional and always looking for opportunities. It is also good

to remember that when you may feel your words are falling on barren ground not to worry it is your job and my job to witness and not to judge, you have to leave the results up to God.

As we go through these difficult times, allow God to use you and grow your spiritual gifts. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you the words to say and the actions to go with it. Let's stop telling God what we think He should be doing and allow Him to use us in His power and glory. Mighty things happened on that Day of Pentecost. Mighty things can continue to happen through the power of God.

Conclusion:

God is moving. Are you where you are supposed to be and are you ready to watch Him work? The Church must lift up Jesus Christ during these times so that people are saved, healed, and renewed.

With the Holy Spirit within us, we are the presence of Christ in the world today. We are His hands, His feet, and His eyes. Through us, Christ reaches out and serves the world in love. I can't wait to get back into our building, not because it is comfortable or easier; but because I believe people will want to be there to worship God with one another. However, my pray is that we don't forget all that has happened and all we have learnt over this difficult period, we don't forget how church is and works outside of the building and how our awesome, mighty God is working.

May the power of the Spirit challenge us.

May the peace of the Spirit comfort us

May the presence of the Spirit enable us to live in love and service in the name of Christ.

Happy birthday Church, happy birthday to you.

Amen

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