

Acts

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

Pentecost

July 17th, 2022

Acts 2:1-13

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of Acts, chapter 2.

As I sat down to write this sermon, I felt like a kid who was about to roll out of his bed on Christmas morning! All of God's Word is good – to be sure – but THIS passage represents one of the top three transformative events in the history of creation! If by God's grace, we can be helped to understand and to BELIEVE what we find here in these 13 verses, then our families, our workplaces and our cities will never be the same!

“That seems like a bit of an exaggeration, Pastor...” It's not an exaggeration. I believe that with every fibre of my being! What we are about to read literally changes EVERYTHING!

Look with me now to Acts chapter 2. We're going to read verses 1-13. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that

we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and 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 proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.” (Acts 2:1-13 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In verses 14-39, the Apostle Peter will go on to preach a sermon to the assembled crowd in which he will explain this miraculous scene. It’s a bit strange that we are pulling apart the event from the explanation. A strong argument could be made that we have stopped our reading prematurely. However, as I studied this passage, I felt convicted that both the event and the explanation deserve their own sermon. So, that’s what we’re going to do.

This morning, we’re going to focus in on this world-transforming event. What happened? Why is this such a big deal? First, we will zoom in and consider the *experience* of Pentecost. Then, we will zoom out and consider the *significance* of Pentecost.

So, let’s begin by considering the experience of Pentecost.

The Experience of Pentecost

Every year in December, we retell the story of the Incarnation. Why is that? It’s not as if everyone in the congregation has somehow forgotten the details of Christmas. When Mary and Joseph are told that there is no room in the inn, it’s not as if a collective gasp is heard in the room. “What will they do now?!” Yet, we retell that story because it was a WORLD TRANSFORMING event! Year after year, we return to Bethlehem, and we marvel at the manger. We do the same for Good Friday, and for Easter – and rightfully so!

Well, in the same way, we ought to be – and I intend to be – just as intentional about revisiting this scene at Pentecost. This is the day that is often referred to as “the birthday of the Church”! In fact, if you look at the structure of Luke’s gospel and compare it to the structure of Acts, you can see that he has intentionally positioned this story in Acts 2 of the birth of the church to correspond with Luke 2 and the birth of Jesus. He means for us to see that this IS a birth story! Here, the

church of Christ was born, and the world was changed forever! So, let's consider this experience. What happened? The first thing we find is:

1. A people filled

At the close of chapter 1, the church was huddled together in an upper room united in prayer. They were waiting. Waiting in faith. Waiting for the fulfillment of a promise. Waiting because of what Jesus had said before he left:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait for the promise of the Father**, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but **you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-5 ESV)

The group that was gathered in that upper room was incapable of saving even a single convert – let alone the world! They were powerless! And they knew it! We know that they knew it, because we find here in the upper room eagerly pleading for power because Jesus had promised:

you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts 1:8a ESV)

At the risk of being overly speculative, I imagine that I would have a hard time waiting for ten days for something that I had never seen before. How do you recognize something that you've never witnessed? For example, I wonder if, after the sixth day, or the seventh day, some of the members of the church weren't asking, “How do we know that we're not filled with the Spirit now? I feel a little more powerful than I did yesterday. What about you, Matthias? Don't you feel a little more powerful? Maybe this is it! Maybe we're ready now!”

But the promise wasn't fulfilled until the tenth day – the day of Pentecost. And when the Holy Spirit came, everyone in the room knew! Luke tells us:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4 ESV)

Imagine this scene! 120 men and women were praying together in that upper room. They had already prayed together for nine days, and they were carrying on for the tenth day when suddenly a sound like a hurricane fills the room! At this point, everyone looks up in shock and amazement, and their amazement only grows because the room is filled with fire! 120 tongues of fire dancing like candles on the heads of every man and woman in the church!

The God who led his people out of Egypt with a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire – the God who sent a hurricane wind and fire to the prophet Elijah – the God who called out to Moses from the burning bush – was revealing Himself to His church again! This was a theophany – a visible manifestation of God Himself!

But this was unlike any theophany that had ever come before. In the past, when God appeared He was separate – He was distant. The fire was on the burning bush, but it wasn't on Moses. It COULDN'T be on Moses because Moses was a sinner and God is holy. In the Old Testament, there was always a separation between God and man.

However, when God revealed Himself to the church at Pentecost, the separation was gone! The flame that had previously shone at a distance now flickered over every believer! The Spirit of God has now taken up residence in His people! We're going to talk more about that later.

The amazement continued as the Holy Spirit performed His first work in the church. He loosened their tongues and caused them to praise Jesus in languages that they had never learned! The roar of a rushing wind gave way to the roar of a people of praise! That room would have felt like a foretaste of Revelation 7:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, **from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
(Revelation 7:9-10 ESV)

The upper room had been transformed into the throne room! The people of God had become the temple of God! It was magnificent! It was unlike anything that had ever happened in the history of the world! It was Pentecost! And it changed EVERYTHING!

This multi-lingual worship service bled out into the streets and that leads us to the second scene we discover in the Pentecost experience:

2. A crowd gathered

Pentecost was one of the three Jewish pilgrimage festivals. Some scholars estimate that one million pilgrims visited Jerusalem for this celebration.¹ The city would have been bursting at the seams! In verse 5, Luke tells us:

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. (Acts 2:5 ESV)

Who were these Jews from every nation under heaven? Well, when Assyria overran Northern Israel around 700 BC, it scattered ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. The survivors who didn't flee south to Jerusalem fled out to the nations and became refugees. So, for 700 years, there would have been a small Jewish remnant living in Egypt, and in Rome, and in Mesopotamia. This group of scattered exiles came to be known as the Diaspora. That's who we find here. Jews from across the Mediterranean world were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

But the festivities of the day were interrupted by the sound of a mighty hurricane! A crowd rushed to the scene, and they were shocked by what they saw next. We read in verses 6-11:

And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and 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 proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—**we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.**" (Acts 2:6-11 ESV)

¹ See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 116.

This bewildering spectacle had a polarizing effect on the crowd. In their amazement, some leaned in close to try to discern the mystery that was unfolding. Others folded their arms and dismissed the event altogether. Luke tells us:

And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.” (Acts 2:12-13 ESV)

Pause here. This isn't the main point, but let's note this lesson: We should not be surprised when we receive mixed responses to our evangelism.

Obviously, we try to be compelling when we share the gospel. We ask for the Lord's help and we give it our best. But even our best pales in comparison to what we find here. The sound of a mighty hurricane has RATTLED the whole city! 120 men and women are flooding into the streets praising God in foreign languages that they've never learned before! And yet, there are STILL bystanders folding their arms saying, “Looks like SOMEONE had too much to drink!”

The good news will always be polarizing. The sooner we accept that, the more uninhibited our witness will become. In any crowd, there will be soft hearts and hard hearts. We can't do anything about that. Heart transformation is entirely beyond our paygrade. We are, however, responsible to open our mouths and to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

And, let's also observe the effect of the Holy Spirit on the church. The unbelieving crowd accused them of drunkenness! The Apostle Paul picks up that analogy in Ephesians 5 when he writes:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but **be filled with the Spirit** (Ephesians 5:18 ESV)

Why is it that being filled with the Spirit is equated with drunkenness twice in the New Testament? I would suggest that it is because, in the same way that an drunk man has clearly surrendered his faculties to his drink, so it should be obvious that the Christian has surrendered their faculties to the Holy Spirit. It should be evident that someone else is at the helm of your life.

G. Campbell Morgan pastored in London, England in the early 1900's. He mentored and then handed over his ministry to the great Martyn Lloyd-Jones as the pastor of Westminster Chapel. I share that background information because I want you to know that this following quote is coming from an orthodox, suit and tie, British pastor. In his sermon on this passage, he lamented:

O God, how seldom men have thought us drunk. We lack the flashing eye, and the pulsating song, and the tremendous enthusiasm of an overwhelming conviction.²

When the Holy Spirit fell upon the church at Pentecost, He took hold of the steering wheel. He immediately launched them out of their gathering and into the streets. The joy of the Lord overflowed from the church and into the neighbourhood! The praise spilled out from the assembly and into the highways and byways! This pattern is one that is to be repeated in the Christian life. We RECIEVE from God, and then we OVERFLOW to the world!

The God of the universe drew a crowd. The King of kings empowered the witness of his church. The Spirit of prophecy commandeered their tongues! The great commission had begun! And on day one, God demonstrated that He is the One who will build His church! And that leads to the third and final scene on the day of Pentecost:

3. An explanation given

We don't have time to do justice to Peter's address today, so I've chosen to set that aside for next time when we will study verses 14-29.

Suffice it to say for now that the crowd that God had gathered was not left in bewilderment. The Apostle Peter boldly took this opportunity to explain to the confused assembly that what they were seeing was the fulfilment of the prophecies of old. Peter pointed to the scenes that were unfolding before the crowd and declared, and then he drew their attention to the prophecy of Joel and he declared, "This is that! God is keeping His promise!" He then declared the gospel with authority, and 3,000 people were added to the church that day!

I made a claim earlier, and I want to restate it now: If by God's grace, we can be helped to understand and to BELIEVE what we see here, then our families, our workplaces and our cities will never be the same!

² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 42.

Do you believe that? Let me show you why you should. With the time that we have left, I want to zoom out and show you the significance of Pentecost.

The Significance of Pentecost

When Jesus was still ministering with his disciples in the flesh, he told them:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: **it is to your advantage that I go away**, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7 ESV)

Can you imagine that? A few chapters earlier, Jesus had called a dead man out of his tomb! The disciples were accompanying a teacher who could literally bring dead people to life! How could it *possibly* be to their advantage that he go away? The disciples didn't understand it at the time, and they certainly didn't believe it. "We don't want the Helper, Jesus! We want you!"

Quite frankly, I don't think we understand it or believe it either. Let me ask you an honest question: If you were offered the opportunity to trade the indwelling Holy Spirit in the church so that Jesus could minister in the flesh right here in Orillia, would you do it? If we're being honest, many of us would! And that just proves that we don't understand, or we don't believe what was accomplished at Pentecost.

So, what was accomplished? What changed? How is it to our advantage that Christ ascended to heaven and sent us the Holy Spirit? We don't have enough time left to answer this question comprehensively, but we do have time to highlight three significant reasons why Pentecost changed everything. First, Pentecost ushered in:

1. A new covenant

We often forget that Pentecost was part of the Jewish worship calendar. It was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover. Every year, they stopped to remember that God had given them the land, and that God had provided the harvest.

But over the years, the Jewish celebration of Pentecost expanded in its emphasis. It was widely believed that the fiftieth day after the Passover was also the day that Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. Pentecost, then, also became a day to celebrate the Mosaic Covenant and the giving of the Law.

Now, is it a coincidence that Jesus chose *this* day – this celebration of the OLD covenant – as the day in which he would inaugurate the NEW covenant? As one commentator observes:

Just as Moses climbed Mount Sinai and received God's law, which he passed on to Israel, accompanied by visible signs of God's presence, Jesus ascended to God's right hand and poured out the gift of God's spirit on the people of the new covenant.³

Jesus chose to send the Holy Spirit during Pentecost because he was making a statement! The Old Covenant has been fulfilled! The age of the New Covenant is upon us!

The Old Covenant was predicated upon law. The problem with the Law was that it was external. It was like a fence that kept us from wandering too far. The fence was good, but it didn't address the deeper problem – the problem that we had hearts that wanted to jump the fence! The Scribes and the Pharisees thought that the solution was simply to make the fence taller, and to add barbed wire to the top of it. They thought the solution was to make the Law more stringent.

But what we really needed was a new heart – a heart that didn't want to jump the fence anymore – a heart that loves the center. We needed the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36 where God promised:

And I will give you a new heart, and **a new spirit I will put within you**. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And **I will put my Spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26-27 ESV)

The New Covenant means a new heart with new affections because of the presence of the Holy Spirit inside each and every one of us. And that leads us to the second reason why Pentecost changed everything. Pentecost ushered in:

³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 123.

2. A new relationship

Each Christmas, we celebrate the awe-inspiring miracle that Jesus – the Son of God – came to earth and lived as a human being. The Creator came as a creature. He experienced the frailty of humanity even to the point of death on a cross.

That is a profound and powerful mystery! And it paved the way for something that is even more mysterious. Now – because of all that Jesus accomplished – a way has been made for God to do the unthinkable!

God now lives in us!

That should be impossible! God is holy, and I am not. It's one thing that my holy God hasn't sent a lightning bolt from heaven to destroy me for all the ways that I sin against Him. That in ITSELF is a merciful miracle! But He has gone further still! He lives in me!! The Holy Spirit – the third Person of the Trinity – lives inside me! And He lives inside you! *If* you have placed your trust in Christ – if you are a child of God – then you are indwelt by His Spirit. Paul writes:

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6 ESV)

How could that be? We are all guilty of terrible sin! Has God lost His holiness? Has He changed?

No, God hasn't changed. This new relationship has been made possible because Jesus has fundamentally changed US! At the cross, Jesus took our sin upon himself – the sin that separates us from God – and he removed it from us as far as the east is from the west. In 1 John, we read:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)

Because of Jesus, we have been cleansed from our sin! It is GONE! And it is gone for good! He has imputed his holiness and his righteousness into us. And that means, we have become temples of the living God.

God lives in you.

This was unimaginable for the believers living under the Old Covenant. God's presence was restricted to a room in the temple called the Holy of Holies. The high priest was the ONLY one who was ever allowed to enter into that room, and He could only enter once a year! The presence of God was off-limits before Pentecost.

But on Pentecost, tongues of fire were over EVERY head, because every single person in that room – young, old, male, female, apostles, servants – ALL OF THEM were filled with the Spirit of God! ALL OF THEM experienced the presence of God in a way that surpassed anything that the high priest had ever experienced!

Do you understand how significant this is, Christian?

YOU are now the temple!

YOU are now the burning bush!

YOU are now the place where God makes His presence known in the world!

The God of the universe lives in you! When you understand and believe that it changes everything! Finally, Pentecost changed everything because it gave us:

3. A new power

Before Jesus ascended, he gave this impossible assignment:

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8b ESV)

If I were in that group, in my mind I would be objecting, “How are 120 people going to reach the whole world? There are 10,000 reasons why this is impossible! For starters, do you know how LONG it takes to learn a new language? And then, how are we going to spread out to reach all

these people groups? I don't have any contacts in Rome! I don't have any contacts in Asia! I have a hard enough time mustering up the courage to talk to my neighbour!"

They were powerless for this assignment. And, in our own strength, so are we.

But they sought the Lord. They believed His promise. They prayed earnestly for power.

And they received it! The Holy Spirit came upon them and immediately everything changed!

He filled them with boldness and drove them out into the streets! He equipped them with languages they had never learned! He drew a crowd from across the Mediterranean world and he exposed them to the glory of the gospel!

Suddenly, in an instant, the impossible became possible.

The church became unstoppable.

The great commission began in all caps with an exclamation mark! Those men and women were no longer mere mortals – they had become instruments in the hands of our powerful God! I love the way that G. Campbell Morgan explains it:

Were they no longer His servants? Surely His servants, but no longer sent from Him, but the very instruments of His own going. Their hands became His hands to touch men tenderly; their feet, His feet to run on swift errands of God's love; their eyes His eyes, to flame with His tenderness; themselves part of Himself.⁴

I hope and pray that each and every one of us will come away from our time in the book of Acts with a healthy awareness of the power that is in us. I pray that we will believe what Jesus said – that is to our benefit that he has gone! 100 people filled with the Holy Spirit is BETTER for the city of Orillia than if Jesus were ministering here in the flesh. Jesus said that! Do we believe him? Do we believe what he said in John 14:12?

⁴ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 32.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; **and greater works than these will he do**, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12 ESV)

We have been entrusted with the powerful presence of God! O that we would understand! O that we would believe! O that we would ask Him each and every day to fill us afresh with His powerful anointing! O that we would trust in His ability to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh! O that we would put to death all of the sin and the silliness that grieves and hinders the work of the Spirit in our midst! O that we would lay aside our fears and take hold of our mission and experience the miracle of the Spirit of God using us as instruments to glorify the Son!

God, help our unbelief! God, mobilize your church! God, help us to understand the mystery and the GLORY of Pentecost! To that end, let's pray together.