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 Pentecost

Holy Wind and Fire
Acts 2:1-21

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were **all together in one place**.² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the **rush of a violent wind**, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ **Divided tongues, as of fire**, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to **speak in other languages**, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*⁵ Now there were devout Jews **from every people under heaven** living in Jerusalem.⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?⁹ Parthians, Medes, 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, both Jews and proselytes,¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them **speaking about God’s deeds of power**.”¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”*

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews^[a] and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*¹⁷ ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
 that I will pour out my Spirit upon **all flesh**,
 and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
 and your young men shall see visions,
 and your old men shall dream dreams.*

*¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, **both men and women**,
 in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
 and they shall prophesy.*

*¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
 and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.*

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
²¹ *Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

Do you know why we call this Sunday ***Pentecost***?

It comes from the Greek word for fifty.

And its roots are from the Jewish feast, known as the Festival of Weeks, or Shavuot in Hebrew.

Why 50? Leviticus 23 instructs people to count “fifty days” from the end of Passover to the beginning of the next feast.

Shavuot was the second great feast for Israel.

It was originally a harvest festival (Exod 23:16),

but, later became a day to remember the giving of the ten ***commandments*** on Mt. Sinai.

This day became special for Christians because,

seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus,

during the Jewish celebration of Pentecost,

the ***Holy Spirit was poured out*** upon the followers of Jesus,

giving them power, and creating the first

church! www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/. It all happened during a time of prayer (Acts 1:14)

120 followers of Jesus gathered in an upper room,

And they ***prayed---and waited*** on Jesus to bring them power,

just as he promised in Acts 1:8.

And then the holy wind and fire came, and they started preaching!

The Book of Acts was ***written by Luke***,

and it is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke.

But Acts is specifically about the early church.

We hear in Acts 2 that a ***mighty wind*** rushed in where the followers of Jesus were gathered in Jerusalem,

and something like ***tongues of fire*** rested on their heads.

Then suddenly they were talking about God's power in all different languages—the languages of people who had all gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost.

You might be wondering, ***what does it all mean, for us today?***

Well, the Holy Spirit is ***God's power***—and when we receive the Holy Spirit, we are ***receiving God's power to do things***, that we cannot do on our own!

And that power comes through prayer!

The people who had little *flames* on their heads,
and who felt a mighty *wind* rushing into the room,
they gained the power of God--
That's why they started *preaching-- ordinary people,*
with extraordinary gifts!

So, *why* do we celebrate Pentecost?
We may not have holy wind and fire here,
helping us speak in foreign languages....
But we do have the *Holy Spirit in us today!*
And Pentecost is the *celebration of that POWER!*

In fact, Pentecost has a lot of meanings.
It was the *birthday* of the church—
Because it was the first time that followers of Jesus were brought together
in *mission and ministry, by the power of God.*

And it's the kick-off to the *Book of Acts*—which is all about the early church!
But Pentecost is *not just* the birthday of an institution known as church.
And it's *not just about God's power in the lives of individual believers,*
although individuals did gain power.

Pentecost is about God's power in *COMMUNITY*—
The group of believers, who became the church.
That holy wind and fire came to them as they were *gathered together,*
not when they were each alone at home.
That's important! And it came while they were praying!

The Holy Spirit does come to us in our hearts and lives,
but perhaps more importantly, it comes to us *as a church,*
as a family of faith, the body of Christ—whenever we gather.
When we receive God's power—it's for a purpose—
and that *purpose involves the whole church,* the whole community.

It's important for us to remember this *communal aspect* of the Spirit.
When Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit as our Counselor, our Advocate,
And the Spirit of Truth, or the one who prays for us when we cannot,
we tend to think of that for us as individuals.

But what if the *Spirit's power is also for all of us---TOGETHER?*

Do you remember what Paul calls the church, in *1 Corinthians 12*?

He says it's the *Body of Christ*.

He says we've all received *gifts from the Holy Spirit*—

To fulfill our calling as different parts of the *one body*.

Just like our bodies have eyes, ears, and toes,

so does the church, the body of Christ.

And it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power

to live out our role in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit enables us to use our gifts and talents

for the good of the whole community.

What gift or talent do you bring to the church family?

That's the *Holy Spirit at work in you!*

This is what we talked about in officer training last week—

That we are all called by God, each of us with God-given gifts and talents,

gifts of the Holy Spirit—to use for the common good!

For our church, and our community.

And did you notice the *big list of nations* who hear the Good News?

When Acts lists the 15 different nationalities who heard people

speaking in their native tongue,

that was like a list of the *known world* at that time!

Luke was saying that the *whole world* could suddenly hear and understand God's Good News!

EVERYONE was hearing about God's power,

All because the Holy Spirit came! All because they prayed!

The church was becoming *universal*, a church for *everyone*,

not just Jews, not just those who had personally known Jesus, but *everyone*.

I was thinking this week about how powerful it is—

that the Good News is for everyone.

But that's not the way we act, is it?

Our world is so *divided* right now. Instead of praying, we argue and hurt one another. In fact, I was thinking about how many years it's been like this,

And how we seem to lack even basic human decency these days.

My brother's colleague lost her son—
 a **high school senior** who had just graduated and was celebrating with friends,
 when he defended a girl who was being catcalled by a group of guys.
 And was shot in the head.
 He was his parent's only son.

We see stories of ***lives lost due to cruelty and hate***, all the time.
 Mass shootings happen every single day, sometimes more than once a day!
 People continued to be profiled.
 Unarmed people are still killed, because of the color of their skin.

Remember the bigotry on a train in **Portland** that inspired 3 men
 to come to the aid of some Muslim women?
 Two of them were stabbed to death for their compassion.

And then there's the constant hatred of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters.
 Nazis and white nationalists protest places where they gather!
 Is this our country?
Books are banned because they talk about the lives of people who are different.
Healthcare is taken away from transgender people because of their identity—
 much of it stemming from an ignorance about who they really are.

Our world is so divided.
The fear of those who are not 'like us'
 has caused a tidal wave of pain and prejudice, suffering, and even death.

I remember a few years ago when Defense Secretary **James Mattis** talked
 About what worried him most in the world:
 He said: [It's] "***The lack of a fundamental friendliness. It seems like an awful lot
 of people in America and around the world feel spiritually and personally
 alienated, whether it be from organized religion or from local community school
 districts or from their own governments.***"

www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/pentecost-something-not-right/

Hasn't **FEAR of the stranger almost crippled us?**
 It's all too easy to buy into the FEAR of those who don't look like us,
 who don't talk like us, who don't love like us, who don't act like us.

But isn't that the **opposite** of our Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit?
 Isn't God's Spirit about bringing people together?

Isn't that the point of holy wind and fire?
 Isn't God's *Good News for EVERYONE*?
 And isn't church a place where EVERYONE is *invited, welcomed and accepted*?

Do you know *which Gospel writer really drives this point home*?
 Which one names the most *women* followers of Jesus?
 Which one is dedicated to a *Gentile*? (Luke 1:1-4)
 Which one *traces Jesus' ancestry* all the way back to Adam? (Luke 3:23-37)
 Where Jesus' preached *good news for Gentiles*? (Luke 4:14-30)
 What writer spoke well of *Samaritans*? (Luke 9:51-55, 10:30-37, and 17:11-19)
 Who counted *women as valuable* followers? (In Luke 8, 10, 18, 21, 23, and 24)
 All of that is found in the *Gospel of Luke*.

Luke wanted us to know that Jesus' message and his ministry
 were for *ALL people*.
 The other Gospels also talk about this *universal love of Jesus* for the world.
 John 3:16 says '*for God so loved THE WORLD that He gave His only Son...*'

But the question is-- *are we living like* the Good News is for EVERYONE?
 Are we truly welcoming?
 Are we seeking to be the church *the Spirit created*?
 Or, can we do a better job of reaching out into the community and world?

If everyone here in church makes us comfortable, we have work to do.
 If everyone understands us, and vice versa, we have work to do.
The church is for everyone.
 We find *unity in diversity*, not in everyone being the same.

Jesus' desire was that the *church would be for EVERYONE*,
 And the *Holy Spirit would come upon ALL people*,
 just Peter says when he quotes the prophet Joel—
that the Spirit would be poured out upon ALL people.

Jesus' desire was, as Paul writes in Galatians 3, that there would
no longer be Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female...

Pentecost is the *birthday of THAT church*—for everyone!
 It is a *new beginning*,
 It is a *new mission*—to open the doors of the Gospel!
 The question is, *are we opening the doors* to our community?

Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to reach everyone with the Good News?
Or, are we content to just *maintain* and be a group of like-minded folks?

Even though our church *building is used to serve our community*,
And our church family is about *loving our neighbors*,
We can always do more.
We can always do better.
We can always be more *welcoming of all people, out of God's grace and love*.
That's the mission of the *Holy Spirit*,
And our *Savior Jesus Christ*.

The truth is, we are *empowered by the Holy Spirit*,
And part of a broader church that is so *diverse*,
with no national boundaries, no official language,
no dress code, no 'one way' to worship!
Which is awesome!
It's a reminder to us to throw open the doors to the church,
And welcome all God's children!

You know, Mark Twain once challenged people to travel, and see the world,
To help understand differences.
Whether we embark on an international trip, or we just go to the grocery store,
these are wise words for us today:
*"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness,
and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.
Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by
vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."*
www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2017/06/01/what-is-pentecost-this/

I agree. We can't just stay in our own corner of the world.
We can't just hang out with those who think like we do.
We can't just be with those we consider 'insiders'.

We need to swing wide the doors of the church, and the Gospel!
That's the purpose of the holy wind and fire---
That's the real *birthday of the church!*
May *we be part of THAT mission and ministry!*
And may all God's children receive the power of the Spirit!
For the gift of the Spirit, all God's people can say, Amen.
Amen.