

## Acts 2:1-21 - PENTECOST

Today, we are celebrating the birthday of the church. On the day of Pentecost over 2,000 years ago, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples, and through the Holy Spirit the church was born. It is a time when the church traditionally concentrates on the gift of the Holy Spirit and the ways in which it strengthens the church. It is a time to consider how the Spirit has created and sustained faith in our lives. It is a time to explore how the Spirit empowers our witness so that others might have faith.

The power of the Holy Spirit ignited the disciples. Peter was ignited and gave one of the most powerful sermons in history. It included both the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy and a strong rebuke/accusation. The affect was remarkable. The message pierced the hearts of the people, and as a result more than 3,000 people were baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. When these new converts returned home, they spread the message, and thus the church was born.

This would not have been possible without the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not an impersonal force. It is a person. It possesses the mind of God, emotions and will - because it is God. It performs the actions of God. It has the attributes of God.

As a result of the Holy Spirit, the church opened its hearts to fellowship. It opened its hands to care for each and every member. Members opened their homes to each other, especially for worship. They devoted themselves to prayer. As a result of all of this, the church grew and found favour with other people-both inside and outside the church.

The term "Spirit" describes wind or breath. The Pentecost wind is no wind of destruction. It blows where it will and fires up people with faith and spiritual power. The church did not come alive until after God breathed the Holy Spirit. The wind was an outward sign of what was happening within the disciples. The Holy Spirit came like a rushing wind on the first Pentecost, and it still comes like a rushing wind today. We can't control the wind, and we can't control the Holy Spirit no matter how hard we try. We try to control what it tells us to do or who it wants us to allow into our churches. Many Christians want just enough religion to be comfortable, to be respected, to feel good about themselves, but not so much that it shakes up their routines and changes their way of living. Many Christians want the benefits of the Holy Spirit without having to experience much of the Spirit.

Differences can enrich and enliven our worship experiences. Differences force us to reach across what divides us. Differences and diversity force us to rely on the Holy Spirit in order to remain faithful to the Gospel of Jesus in more creative and dynamic mission efforts. We are called on to share the Good News with others and welcome them to find love of each other and the love of God. If we do not share the Good News, it is wasted. The Holy Spirit calls on us to share our gifts and love with those who are different from us.

God gave the disciples supernatural ability to speak the languages of all those who had gathered in Jerusalem from around the known world at that time. The Spirit's presence signified their baptism into the spiritual body of the church. This gift was the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit so the disciples could preach the Gospel to all the people.

God does the same thing today. He speaks through both chosen people and simple people like you and me.

Part of the Jewish liturgy involved reciting one of the great acts of God in their history. When the Holy Spirit came they all worshipped and rehearsed his wonderful works. Bystanders understood them because of the Jewish liturgy. When the Holy Spirit comes to fill a Christian, he/she speaks and acts in ways that weren't possible before. Christians live supernaturally because the Spirit of God within them controls them.

For example, just a few days before Pentecost, Peter was too scared to admit he even knew Jesus. Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, God changed him. In Acts 2:16-21, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-33, which was Joel's prophecy of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the last days. On that first Pentecost, the Spirit came to people in a new, more powerful way that signalled the beginning of the new covenant age, which runs from the time of Christ's death until he returns at some time in the future. These are the last days in that the coming of the Messiah, which was foretold in the Old Testament, have now occurred. His saving death and resurrection have been accomplished, and now the Holy Spirit has to build the church before Christ returns.

Acts 2:1-21 is the marching orders for the church. The coming of the Holy Spirit was an awe-inspiring moment that changed the world. It was a tipping point when history was changed. We have to go with the flow. It asks us to go beyond our comfort zone. God's dream was one where all believers would gather together in unity and faith. Gold calls

on us to love one another. That love changes us. It allows us to show grace to everyone.

Sometimes we wonder if what happened at Pentecost can happen today. We wonder if we can gain a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit and experience its transforming strength. We want to deal with our own feelings of spiritual inadequacy. God answers these questions and other questions people are really asking. People want something more than ordinary, dull religion. They want the power and intimacy of the Holy Spirit. It changes us. We were created for union and communication with the Holy Spirit. The greatest need for both society and the church today is for a contemporary Pentecost. We, like the disciples, must be ready for the miracle of the supernatural endowment of the Holy Spirit's power.

The flames represented the purity and power with which the disciples would speak as they proclaimed what God had done. The fire of the Holy Spirit burns away anything that will keep us from being the people God wants us to be. It convinces us that God loves us unconditionally and that we can love others unconditionally. It gives us the ability to love others deeply. The Holy Spirit releases us so that we can praise others. That praise becomes very effective proclamation. It frees us from self-concern and to Spirit-consciousness. We are free to praise God and to receive what he will do.

When people hear someone preach on a Biblical text with the power of the Holy Spirit, and the people have been prepared by the Holy Spirit, the result is conviction, faith and changed lives. In contrast to the baptism with the Spirit,

which is the one-time act by which God places believers into His body, the filling is a repeated reality of Spirit-controlled behaviour that God commands believers to maintain. The work of the Holy Spirit in the church today is to dwell with believers so they will look like Christ and be empowered to continue his ministry here on earth.

How does the Holy Spirit work in the church today?

He convicts us of our sin, shows us that none of us can live up to the righteousness of Jesus, and reveals to us the judgment that is coming to those who die without faith in Christ.

A life in Christ is God's will for his people. God's plan can't be stopped. Pentecost is a taste of what will happen in God's kingdom when the Spirit is poured out on all people. The Holy Spirit will live in all believers.

The Holy Spirit is more than a tool to help us overcome life's challenges, but much of what we are asked to do is far beyond what we are called to do. On our own, we are never enough. The outpouring of the Spirit is far greater than anyone expects. It will be poured out on all flesh and everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. The Spirit will give us the strength we need to do God's work in our world.

In return, we are called on to be wanderers. We aren't meant to be too settled, rooted or rigid. Our spiritual lives are meant to be a pilgrimage. The dangerous place is the place that gets too comfortable or stagnant. We are to be on the move, and our churches are meant to be on the move as well.

Pentecost is the day when we remember the eruption in which the Church came to birth. It is also the day when we remember the countless ways in which the Holy Spirit shapes the Church as an institution and ourselves as individuals. It is also the day when we are reminded that once we have received the Holy Spirit, we are required and enabled to take a stand for good and against evil in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. The Holy Spirit will teach us to love God and neighbour-and he will reward us by giving us a life worth living. That life won't be easy or trouble-free, but it will be worth living and dying for - and that is the greatest birthday gift of all.

Amen x