



5/31/2020

“Be Filled and Moved by The Holy Spirit”

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost Sunday

Festival of the Christian Home

Theme: By being filled and moved by the Holy Spirit, our lives, our homes, and our world can and are being changed for the better!

Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? . . . in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these (people) are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh (people), and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.”

Friends, today we once again celebrate one of the most significant days of the Christian year – the Day of Pentecost, but under most unusual circumstances.

The Day of Pentecost in Judaism and Christianity is about a fullness of harvest. In Judaism, Pentecost marked the fiftieth day after Passover, an annual celebration of the spring harvest and an offering to God in the holy Temple of Jerusalem. It is also a celebration of the giving of Torah, God’s Holy Instruction which makes up the first five books of our bible.



For Christians, it is the fiftieth day after Christ's resurrection (Easter). It's also a time for baptism, confirmation, and celebrating the fullness of the Spirit's work in and through us.

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus told his disciples to remain in the city until the Holy Spirit had come upon them. He said, ***"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses"*** to the whole world (Acts 1:8).

† **Can you imagine the significance and amazement** of those who believed in and followed Jesus, as well as other Jews who came to Jerusalem from many countries, some even hundreds of miles away, to celebrate that Feast of Pentecost – when on that day God poured out the Holy Spirit to all the believers gathered there, compelling them to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all in their hearing!

The reading from The Book of Acts for today tells us that "they were all together in one place". "They" refers to the twelve as just mentioned. Or it may even refer to the entire community of believers, about 120, which are also mentioned just previously (Acts 1:15). I remember visiting the traditional site of the Upper Room in Jerusalem, while on a tour of the Holy Land years ago. As the Bible says, it is located above the site believed to be the tomb of King David. I imagined then what it would have been like to witness the experience of both the Last Supper and that day.

As just read, it goes on to tell us that there was a sound like the rush of a mighty wind, and what appeared to be divided tongues of fire rested on each of them, and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter declared the good news, and about three thousand responded with faith, and were added to their numbers through baptism (Acts 2:14-41).

As I read this passage again this year, also considering and discussing the various COVID-19 regulations and restrictions for church gatherings, it occurred to me how different this might be if it were to happen today. So, how does this word of God pertain to our current condition? For while they were all staying at home as directed by Jesus, they were not all of the same household, and certainly not wearing masks or social distancing. And obviously, large crowds coming and gathering from many different countries are still not permitted at all in this pandemic.

Joe Iovino, who works for UMC.org, talks about being "Alone together." He says, "The paradox of Pentecost 2020 is that we're giving up our together time, because we recognize our connectedness. Yes, we're apart. But because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are not alone. Pentecost reminds us of our connection to God and one another.

"Acts 2:47 tells us that the first church "praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone." Online worship and social distancing are a couple of ways we are following their example today.

"Pentecost 2020 reminds us of how good it is when we are "all together in one place." It also highlights that even when being together isn't possible, the Holy Spirit overcomes barriers like language and social distance to connect us with one another.



“While we’re apart, we continue to be the church for one another, because the Holy Spirit is with us wherever we are.” (*Alone together: The 2020 Pentecost paradox; www.umc.org, 5/21/20.*)

So, although we are not all gathered under the same roof this year, and we won’t be celebrating new baptisms and confirmations, we can rejoice and be thankful that the Holy Spirit is still among us and within us! We are still one in the Spirit of God!

† **Have you felt the Holy Spirit come upon you? When? How?**

Wherever you are, may the Holy Spirit come to rest on you right now. May the Holy Spirit fill you with a word for the nations. Are you being commissioned in some way to share that word with a bewildered, anxious world? Maybe it’s right within your own home. Or perhaps through your work, or ways in which you encounter others in this troubled time.

Some who hear you may be amazed, some perplexed, and some may even sneer. But don’t let that stop you from sharing the good news of God’s love in Jesus. Of course, if it is truly from the Holy Spirit, it will be in a language that others can understand – that of peace, caring, kindness, and compassion. It may be a word of living in right relationship with God and others – as Jesus and the apostles declared.

Looking at the news this past week, as sad as the pandemic reality is to live with, it’s even harder with continued gun violence, taking the lives of the young and innocent, as well as those who seek to protect them, as occurred in Philadelphia this past week; or the disgrace of police officers who use their power to take the lives of the innocent as well, as seen this past week in Minneapolis. We can put men and women in outer space, who receive the needed breath of life by artificial means. And yet, some would casually take that breath of life away from another human being here on earth.

So, how do we change things for the better in our world? As I said before, by being filled and moved by the Holy Spirit.

† **To take a stand and share God’s call to repentance and right living with compassion and humility takes courage, and even more. It takes the Holy Spirit.**

As Trevor Hudson says, “We need to face the simple fact that to try to follow Jesus without the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit doesn’t work. We just cannot do it. From a biblical point of view, it appears that everything that happens before Pentecost is a preparation for this gift of Wind and Fire. This world was created so that in following Jesus Christ, we can have friendship with Abba, Father and be given the Holy Spirit. God-made-flesh lived, died, and rose, so that our eyes would be opened to the unfathomable depths of God’s love. And, we would be ready to receive God’s Spirit. The message of Pentecost is that there is a new power available, the very power of the kingdom of heaven.” (*from Pauses for Pentecost by Trevor Hudson*)



We have already considered Jesus' promise of the coming Holy Spirit, who would be an advocate, comforter and guide to his followers. Now, as he promised, they would have power and gifts to share the good news of God's love and salvation with all people!

† **You may have a special way or gift of sharing God's love and good news that is made especially unique by your personal experience or testimony.** You can make a difference in someone's life simply by sharing your faith. You can make a difference in someone's life by extending God's love and peace. You can make a difference in someone's life by showing the power and strength of God's Spirit in these or other challenging times and circumstances.

There are some who need to hear a story of faith, hope, vision, joy and peace in a language they can understand. And sometimes that language isn't of spoken words at all. Sometimes it is in a language of action, or even simply one of caring presence.

If you have not received the good news yet, I offer it to you now. Simply pray: Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. "Come into my heart. I welcome you as my Savior and Lord." If you have just prayed that prayer, I ask you to give me a call to encourage you in the way.

And may each of you know and feel the presence and power of the Holy Spirit with you each day! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us pray . . .

Gracious God. We are reminded again when the first believers in Jesus were given the courage to tell others about Jesus. We believe you give us that same courage to tell others about Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. You know, O God, that sometimes we are fearful, and we feel alone. But just like that Pentecost long ago, we, too, are surrounded by your love and presence. Help us live in such a way that others see in us a reflection of your love. Help us have the courage to tell others about the difference it makes in our lives to trust in your love and care. Help us see those around who want to be in the fellowship of Christians. Help us to witness to one another, so that we grow in faith. Through the power of your Holy Spirit and the witness of your son, Jesus the Christ, we pray today. Amen.

(The Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton, from "Ideas for celebrating Pentecost at home"; a UMC.org Feature by Joe Iovino, 2020)*