

## **SERMON ACTS 2: WHAT A DIFFERENCE THE SPIRIT MAKES 2024**

**May 19,**

Now if you are observant, you will recognize that the colors in the church are different this morning. They have been changed from white to red. Throughout the world today, Christian churches are celebrating Pentecost. While Pentecost is not celebrated as much as Easter and Christmas in the church calendar, it is still a very important date in the history of the Church. Originally, it was one of seven Jewish feasts that occurred fifty days after the Sabbath of the Passover. Each feast was a reminder to the Jewish people of what the Lord had done for them in the past and what He would do for them in the future.

Historically Pentecost had two purposes: first, to celebrate the Lord giving Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai; and secondly, to present the first fruits of the barley harvest to the Lord God. And it came at the right time of the year. The weather was beautiful, travel was pleasant; no one worked on Pentecost because it was a religious holiday. In addition, the streets of Jerusalem were often more crowded than at Passover with many God-fearing pilgrims coming from all over the known world. It was a time of thanksgiving for the Jewish people.

But one Pentecost was more memorable than any other. This was the Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. It was a turning point in world history and the beginning of the church as we know it today. In a sense today is the birthday of the Christian Church. I have often wondered why we don't put a birthday cake with candles on our Pentecost banners. The account of what actually happened on that day is recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. I will be reading selected verses from the second chapter starting with the first verse.

Acts 2:1-8, 12-21

At Pentecost the disciples received the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised them earlier. In the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus told His disciples that He would ask His Father to send the Spirit to guide them. Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit would live in the hearts of those who believe in Him to guide them to the truth and the right way to live. Then right before He ascended back into heaven, Jesus told His disciples in Acts 1:4-5 - "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Ten days later at Pentecost all of this came to pass.

The disciples had heeded Jesus' command to wait. In reality, they needed this waiting time to let all the events of the past forty days sink in. They had been spent emotionally; their spiritual tanks were on empty. They were still unsure about their relationship with Jesus, and had no

idea of what was going to happen next. They were also confused about the power that they were about to receive, and more importantly, what to do with it. They had no idea what lay ahead of them: the rejection, persecution, opposition, and how they were going to change the world.

Do you know what a sinkhole is? You may have seen them in the news in Florida. And of course, one was recently reported in Las Cruces. In a sense, the disciples had experienced a spiritual sinkhole that had grown larger and larger in their hearts since Jesus' death. Even after Jesus appeared to them following the Resurrection, they were still lifeless and without purpose. As we have discussed before, some of them had even gone back to their old profession of fishing. But then came Pentecost and everything changed. The Spirit's baptism spilled out from the early Christians, out of their meeting room into the streets, and the world has never been the same since.

There are many ways to look at Pentecost, but this morning I would like for us to look at it from the perspective of the participants, the disciples. Do you remember who was the first person to stand up and speak? Listen to verses 13 and 14 again: "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." Here's old Peter, the one who denied knowing Jesus three times on the night that He was arrested, being the first person to feel the power of the Spirit and to witness for the Lord Jesus. And Peter delivered a message that all preachers would love to give; the Bible tells us that 3,000 people joined the church that day.

What a difference the Spirit can make when it comes into a person's life. Here's Peter the head-strong fisherman from Galilee standing up in front of a crowd that has started heckling the disciples. Before he met Jesus he probably would have jumped into the crowd and started a fight with the hecklers instead of trying to save their souls. His pride would have never let him endure anyone making fun of him. Remember that Peter is the disciple who told Jesus during the Lord's Supper that while the rest of the disciples may desert Jesus in His hour of need, he would be there beside Jesus all the way. And of course, the minute things got dangerous, Peter was the first one to run away. Then later when asked if he was one of Jesus' followers, Peter denied knowing Jesus not once, but three times. He was afraid for his life and turned his back on his best friend and his Lord and Savior.

But at Pentecost Peter is no longer afraid of the Jewish authorities or what people might say. He is no longer ashamed to admit that not only did he know Jesus, but he is one of His faithful followers. Why the sudden change in character; why the sudden display of courage; why the sudden willingness to share the story of Jesus Christ and salvation with a crowd of strangers? It was because he had received the Holy Spirit. Oh, the difference that the Spirit can make when it comes into your life.

And this difference was not restricted to Peter; all the disciples and other people who were gathered together on that day received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and their lives were changed forever. While Peter is the only one singled out in this morning's text, as you read the rest of the New Testament, you will discover other lives that were also changed as these individuals gave the control of their lives to Jesus Christ. What changed Jesus' disciples after the crucifixion from a scattered, frightened band of fugitives hiding behind locked doors into the most remarkable collection of dedicated human beings the world has ever seen? The coming of the Holy Spirit, that's what.

Of course, the difference that the Spirit can make in the lives of those who come to the Lord is not limited to the original disciples or those in the Bible, but can be seen throughout history. In 1934, a great spiritual awakening was happening in our country; a repeat of which I truly believe is definitely needed today. Mordecai Ham was scheduled to preach in Charlotte, North Carolina. A farmer was deeply concerned about the upcoming revival meeting, so he invited a group of his Christian friends to come spend a day in prayer at his farm. As they prayed, they felt compelled to ask God to raise up a man from their own midst to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. Although they didn't see an immediate answer to their prayer, the Spirit was already at work. The farmer's teenage son was converted during that crusade, and that boy did indeed carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Of course, you know who he was; it was Billy Graham. What a difference the Spirit can make in an individual's life.

Although she was blind from childhood, Fanny Crosby wrote over 8,000 hymns in her lifetime of 95 years. One of my favorites is *Blessed Assurance* which reveals her personal relationship with Jesus Christ. On November 20, 1850, at a camp meeting, Fanny experienced a profound deepening of her faith. For the first time she realized that she had been trying to hold on to the world with one hand and the Lord with the other. She said that from that moment on the words that she wrote were a song of the heart addressed to God. If you remember John Wesley had a similar experience at Aldersgate when he felt his heart strangely warmed. The Spirit is always at work changing the lives of those who are willing to yield control of their lives over to the Lord; making a difference that has changed lives and the world.

Now think how you would feel if on Christmas morning, when you handed your children and grandchildren their gifts that you had carefully selected for each one, if they just took them, said "thank you," and laid them aside making no attempt to open the gifts, not even trying to find out what they were! Now imagine how God must feel when He has given each of us the gift of the Spirit to make a difference in our lives and the lives of those around us, and yet we never accept it, open it, or use it.

God's invitation to the church gathered at Pentecost, and to us gathered here today, is to respond to His wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to leave us when He

returned to heaven. As on that eventful day of Pentecost, today God calls each one of us into a personal relationship with Him and His Son – a relationship of love, grace, peace of mind, trust, and obedience – a relationship that will change our lives for the better; a relationship that will make a difference in our family, church, and community.

The Holy Spirit was not sent simply for a one time visit, but to abide and to dwell within those who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior so that we might become more like Him each and every day of our lives. We are called to take our place alongside the disciples and the Church. It is an invitation that we do not seek for ourselves, and definitely one that we do not deserve or could ever earn. It is the grace of God extended to each of us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evangelist F. B. Meyer described being Spirit-filled as follows: “Let there be no thought of what you can do for God, but all thought of what God can do **through** you.”

God is calling each of us to open our hearts and let His Spirit dwell there. And when we do, what a difference the Spirit will make in our lives and in the lives of those around us. We too will do things that we never dreamed possible, and we will live the abundant life that Christ promised to all who turn control of their life over to Him.

Dwight L. Moody said that he believed that the Church had made a mistake in thinking that Pentecost was a miracle that cannot be repeated. Moody believed that we should pray to restore the old fire of Pentecost again. We are not going to change the world by criticism or by conforming to it, but by re-igniting the fire of the Holy Spirit within our hearts. We must be careful not to let the institutional structures of the church domesticate the Spirit, so that it no longer spills into the streets to tell of “the mighty works of God.” We have a great potential and opportunity if we will only follow the Spirit; commit ourselves, each one of us to making this a church that Jesus can be proud of.

What are we waiting for? Are you satisfied with your life right now or do you really want to make a difference in this world for Jesus Christ? There is power in the Spirit and nothing is impossible when it is done in the name of Jesus Christ. If you haven’t done so yet, open your heart, let the Spirit come and dwell in your life; let it melt you, mold you, fill you, use you, and transform you into the person you were meant to be. O Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us gathered here this morning as You did on Peter and the disciples at Pentecost, and make a difference in our lives. May we as individuals and as a church make a difference for the Lord here in Rio Rancho; may this church always be Spirit-led, Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered. Come, Holy Spirit, come! Amen