

First Presbyterian Church
 Greenfield, Indiana
 Pastor John J. Paulson
 June 12, 2011 Pentecost

The Spirit Arrives!

Acts 2:1-21	Peter speaks about the Spirit
Psalms 104:24-34, 35	Sing praises to God always!
1 Corinthians 12:3-13	The gifts of the Spirit!
John 7:37-39	Jesus sent the Spirit to us!

Informally before the sermon: Our world is really in need of an event like the one that took place on that Pentecost. This was an event that took place in the second floor room of a rooming house on a side street in Jerusalem over two thousand years ago. It turned out to be an event that changed the world and continues to change the world today. Only God knew what would happen after the Holy Spirit was unleashed to a small group of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem that day; only God knew what would happen when those few followers accepted the Spirit's empowerment to be Jesus' witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Only God knows what will happen in the future as that Spirit continues to empower Jesus' followers today.

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer! Amen

Jews from all over the region have come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. Among them are a group of people who continue to be followers of the man named Jesus, even though he was crucified. They claim that although he died and was buried, he rose again, spent some time with them, and then ascended into heaven. These men and women are outcasts among the other Jews. Their leader had the audacity to criticize the Pharisees and challenge the way they practiced the Hebrew religion; the way they interpreted the commandments of God and applied the laws laid out by Moses. And, he even claimed to be the messiah that Isaiah and the other prophets wrote about; and, if that wasn't enough, this man Jesus actually claimed to be the Son of God!

His followers, still practicing Jews and following the Hebrew traditions and obeying the Hebrew laws and scriptures as they understand them, have gathered, as they have every year for as long as they can remember to celebrate Pentecost.

This year they are gathered in a second floor room in Jerusalem with the windows closed and doors barred. It is about 8:45 in the morning and they are gathered together in prayer. Ten days ago their leader, who actually had died on a Roman cross, had been buried in a garden tomb, and was brought back to life by God, had left them to return to God and take his rightful place in Heaven. They are afraid; what if the Romans track them down and crucify them as they did Jesus? Not only afraid, they are lost as well.

I don't mean actually lost; of course they know where they are; they are in City of David in a second floor room behind locked doors. I mean they are lost in that they don't know what to do. Just before he left them, Jesus gave them a mission when he told them that they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, and they wondered just exactly what that meant. They don't have a lot of friends outside of their own relatively small group. Jesus also promised that he would send them something he called a Spirit that would guide and fortify them for their mission, and they really didn't understand what he had been talking about.

And now here they are together again, celebrating the festival of Pentecost fifty days after the Passover celebration. As good Jews, of course they would celebrate Pentecost; they just can't celebrate it with families that have disowned them for their new-found beliefs; they can't celebrate it with friends who ignore and make fun of them and their excitement over actually having been chosen by the Son of God to be one of his followers.

Pentecost was traditionally a joyous time of giving thanks and presenting offerings for the new grain of the summer wheat harvest in Israel. It was known by several names including Pentecost and the "Feast of Weeks" ; Pentecost because it was fifty days after Passover and the Feast of Weeks because in the book of Leviticus God commanded the Jews to present offerings of new grain to the Lord after seven full weeks (or 49 days) after the second day of Passover. Pentecost has been a joyous festival and ingrained in their lives as a time to celebrate; a time to get together and celebrate with family and friends. Since they can't celebrate with many in their families, they are celebrating with their new friends in Jerusalem this morning. They have a strong bond in Jesus that is holding them together; however, it is a bond that may well weaken quickly if something doesn't happen soon. Here they are, celebrating, praying, fellowshiping, waiting and wondering when suddenly their lives are changed forever when the promised Holy Spirit arrives with a flourish as we heard Luke describe it.

The event had been predicted by the prophet Joel. Speaking through Joel, God had said “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women..”¹ In the midst of all the turmoil, Peter remembers what God had promised. This is the great day of the Lord that Joel predicted; this is the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised to send them. Their lives are going to be changed once again. First Jesus, then the Spirit.

Nobody had a cel phone with a camera so there is no video posted on You-Tube. There were no computers, so there were no Tweets about what was happening. All we have is Luke’s first hand witness description in the Book of Acts.

The disciples have been through a lot in the last fifty or so days. You can just imagine what is going through their minds as they drink tea and share flat-bread for breakfast. They know they have an important job ahead of them; they know they have been chosen by God and singled out by Jesus to change the world. They know they are special; they know they are chosen; they know they are honest and truthful; they just don’t know what they are supposed to do. They know there is more to their future than gathering together with each other and talking about the past; they have already shared every story they can about Jesus. They each have some different stories to tell about him; some were with him when he healed, some when he fed, some when he fished; some saw Jesus one way, others saw a different side of him; Some were there at the foot of the cross when he died; others were in hiding. Some ran to the empty tomb on that first Easter morning; others were still in hiding. They shared their stories about the Son of God. And, as they share these stories, they realize that there must be more to come, they just don’t know what and they don’t know when. Jesus promised them that they wouldn’t be alone; that he would not abandon them. And they believed Jesus. They knew he is the Son of God.

Then the Holy Spirit arrives and in an instant changes everything.

On this day, fifty days after the resurrection and ten days after Jesus’ ascension, the disciples finally get it. They finally begin to understand just what it is they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to do it.

¹ Joel 2: 28 – 32 (My paraphrase)

When we look back at their walk with Jesus during his ministry, it seems almost impossible to imagine that they missed clue after clue, sign after sign, that Jesus had given them.

Remember the time when Jesus was walking with them and asked them, “Who do people say I am?” Some of them replied, “Some people say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” And Jesus said, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” And Peter stopped in his tracks and looked at Jesus and blurted out, “You are the Messiah.”²

Jesus’ friend Martha knew. One day Jesus was talking to her after her brother died, and he told her “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She replied “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”³ Martha knew.

So did the centurion who was on guard at the crucifixion site. When he saw “how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”⁴

The Samaritan women Jesus met at a well one hot afternoon knew. After Jesus broke the ice between them by asking her for a drink, he told her about the Spirit he could give her if she believed in him. Jesus said, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”⁵

And the entire population of Jerusalem knew, but missed their opportunity. “On the last and greatest day of the Passover Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.⁶

They all missed it but, when the Spirit arrived on that Pentecost morning, the disciples and other followers of Jesus didn’t. The Spirit came and hit them like a ton of bricks. Like a fire hose might hit a group of children on a hot day; like the “Aha moments we all feel once in a while. “Oh, that’s what it is all about!” “Wow, we really missed that,

² Mark 8: 27 – 29 (NIV)

³ John 11: 25 – 27 (NIV)

⁴ Mark 15: 39 (NIV)

⁵ John 4: 10 (NIV)

⁶ John 7: 37 – 39 (NIV)

didn't we?" "That's what Jesus meant!" "That's what we are supposed to do." That's what Joel was talking about. This is the day of the Lord; the beginning of the end times. We have a job to do. Let's get on with it.

The Spirit came with all sorts of gifts for them. It was better than any Christmas that we have ever experienced. Paul tells us that they received strength and support from the Holy Spirit and were give the gifts of wisdom and knowledge and faith and healing and the working of miracles and prophecy and discernment. They had the ability to speak in different languages and to understand different languages as well.

They suddenly found themselves living in a new and different world.

Suddenly no longer afraid, they threw open the windows in that second floor room and began talking to the crowds on the streets in Jerusalem. Suddenly no longer afraid, they boldly told their stories about Jesus. Suddenly no longer afraid, they shared the good news of Jesus' resurrection with everyone who would listen.

Suddenly no longer afraid, they shared the wonderful promise of eternal life an forgiveness of sins with everyone; they gave everyone the opportunity to become a follower of the risen Jesus as they were. They invited everyone to their celebration of Pentecost. They invited everyone to the party.

They invited us, and, thankfully we accepted their invitation, and we are here.

Praise God. Thanks be to God.

Amen!