

The Coming of the Holy Spirit; The Day of Pentecost; May 28, 2023

Acts 2:1-13

“The Spirit Brings Together”

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently.

Now there were godly Jewish men from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When this sound was heard, a crowd came together and was confused, because each one of them heard them speaking in his own language. They were completely baffled and said to each other, “Look, are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is that each of us hears them speaking in his own native language? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, and of Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.” They were all amazed and perplexed. They kept saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocked them and said, “They are full of new wine.”

They had come from everywhere. St. Luke gives us quite a list of places they had come from, but it’s nowhere near complete. There were **Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia and Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; Cretans and Arabs.** If you’re like me, you could find some of those places on a map. (Some you couldn’t, because the names have changed; and others you couldn’t, because you just don’t know where they are.)

Most of them were Jewish people, others Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. Some were in Jerusalem for a feast, others were living there (probably retirees from around the world who moved back to their homeland to live out their days). St. Luke calls them **godly Jewish men**. This means they followed the Law of the Old Testament as best they could, under the guidance of religious leaders in Jerusalem.

All of them were in Jerusalem at the same time. But when the day of Pentecost began, only a few of them were together in the true sense of the word. **When the day of Pentecost came, they** (Jesus’ apostles) **were all together in one place.** And then the Spirit-fueled miracles began. With the sound of violent wind the Spirit announced his arrival; with tongues of fire he showed his presence; and with his power he filled Jesus’ apostles with the ability to speak languages they had not learned.

When the Holy Spirit came, those Twelve were **all together in one place.** And they were together in every sense of the word. They were together in faith. By this time they had seen their Savior Jesus rise and return to his Father. And the Holy Spirit brought them together in their trust that Jesus had given his life to save theirs for eternity, and that he had risen so they too would one day rise.

So the disciples were together in their Christian faith. They were also together in their mission. Jesus had taught them this truth, and promised this moment when the Spirit would come and guide them in all truth. And Jesus had commanded them to stay there in Jerusalem until the Spirit came, and then to start right there in Jerusalem proclaiming the gospel of Christ, before taking it out into all the world.

The rest of the godly Jewish men in Jerusalem were only together in the sense that they were all in Jerusalem. And what divided them from each other wasn't really that they spoke different native languages or came from different parts of the world. It was what they believed – or rather, that what they believed was incomplete.

They trusted that the Old Testament, along with its prophecies about the Messiah, was true. And they were doing their level best to follow its rules. Because that's what **godly Jewish men** believed and did. But their religious leaders were terribly wrong about who Jesus Christ is, and wrong about his purpose for coming into the world, and wrong about his death on the cross, and wrong about his resurrection. To them, Jesus was just a dangerous rebel who had to be silenced. To them, he deserved his death for blaspheming (at least they claimed it was so). And to them, his resurrection never happened.

What would happen to these nice Jewish guys from all over the world who wanted to believe and do the right thing if they stayed were they were spiritually? Separation, in every sense. Separation from God because of their separation from the truth about his Son.

[The apostles] were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently...When this sound was heard, a crowd came together and was confused, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Now they are physically together with each other and the disciples. The wonder of them all hearing their own native language brings them to the same place and grabs their interest. But they are not yet together in faith. And they are not yet together in mission. In order for that to happen, they will need to hear the truth about themselves and about Jesus Christ.

And so, after brushing aside a nonsense allegation of A.M. drunkenness (wine is not known increased anyone's ability to speak unknown languages fluently), St. Peter tells them the truth. He draws the double-edged sword of the Spirit and uses both sides: law and gospel. He condemns these men who are trying to please God with their good lives. Not only does Peter condemn them with the law, he cuts them to pieces: **"[Jesus Christ], who was handed over by God's set plan and foreknowledge, you killed by having lawless men nail him to a cross...God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified..."**

And it works. At the end of Peter's sermon, St. Luke says the crowd is **cut to the heart**. But Peter has not preached their guilt with the ultimate goal of hurting them. So he also tells them the saving truth about Jesus, the gospel: **"He is the one God raised up by freeing him from the agony of death, because death was not able to hold him in its grip...This Jesus is the one God raised up. We are all witnesses of that. So, after he was exalted to the right hand of God and after he received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out what you are now seeing and hearing."**

The Spirit had arrived on Pentecost with this purpose: to pour out salvation by pouring out the good news of Christ through his apostles. And the Spirit achieved his goal. Later Peter told them, **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." ...Those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added.**

Three thousand of the people who came together to hear the apostles preach stayed together. Because now they were together in the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. They were one in faith, sins forgiven, baptized into Christ.

The Holy Spirit is a unifier. He brings people to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. When he does that, they receive all the benefits of Jesus' saving work. But he also brings them together with each other. People from all over the world, living in all different lands, speaking all different languages. When he brings them together with Christ, he also gives them to each other. They may never physically come together on this side of heaven, but they come together in faith now and will all come together in the kingdom of heaven one day. And there, they will see each other in the flesh. Because, as Peter preached, God raised Jesus from the dead all of Jesus' followers will rise in glory too. And they will all be together forever. Together with Jesus, and with each other.

And they are together in mission, too. The Holy Spirit rushed with a purpose into the room where the disciples were staying on Pentecost. The Spirit's work is to call sinners to faith and add to those who belong to Christ. That becomes the mission of Jesus' people, too. The Spirit did not speak directly to the crowd; he spoke through the apostles, with Peter in the lead. Peter proclaimed the law and the saving gospel of Christ, and the Spirit worked.

Suddenly, there were three thousand more messengers at the Spirit's disposal. And he used them. He used them right there in Jerusalem. From later in this chapter, right after the day of Pentecost: **[The new Christians] continued to hold firmly to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers...Day after day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.**

The Spirit kept working with the Word, baptism, and the Savior's Supper after the day of Pentecost, and kept adding to those who belong to Christ and to each other in his Church. And he kept using Christians to spread the message. And they went all in, together in the mission of proclaiming the gospel.

The Holy Spirit is often depicted as fire. What happened on Pentecost was like a lit match dropped into a full gas can in a forest. There was an initial, fast, jarring explosion: 3,000 conversions at once. What happened after Pentecost is like what happens in the forest after that initial explosion: the fire keeps spreading. It doesn't spread as shockingly or quickly as it did after the initial explosion, but it does keep spreading, steadily and surely through the whole forest.

And the gospel of Christ has, over two millennia, steadily and surely spread. Not as spectacularly as it did on Pentecost, with 3,000 in one day in one place. But it still spreads, and as it does the Spirit burns in new hearts, and more come to faith.

And Christians are together in the mission. They were together in spreading the gospel right there in Jerusalem right after Pentecost. But it went farther, and fast. You see, God is wise. And he is a planner. There was a reason he chose to send his Spirit during a festival when Jews from all over the world had gathered in Jerusalem. Those new Christians would then go home to their native nations and proclaim the wonderful works of God in their own cities and towns. And soon Christian congregations were popping up all over the Empire and all over the world.

The apostles certainly shared in that mission too. The rest of this book of Acts is mostly the story of two of them – Peter and Paul – spreading the gospel of Christ among Jews in Israel and Gentiles all over the Mediterranean, respectively. But the Spirit used his whole Church in his mission. He used their words, of course. In order for the gospel to spread, words have to be used. But he also used their actions. The way Christians treated each other, shared with each other, nursed each other, harmonized their lives together,

was radically different from the pagans who surrounded them. People noticed. People wondered. And they listened and read as Christians of every kind spoke and wrote the gospel of Christ.

It wasn't just the apostles. Yes, they were the ones speaking on Pentecost. Yes, they were the ones the Spirit inspired to write the Bible. But Christians in general also understood: this mission belongs to all of us.

It is our mission, too, to proclaim the same basic message of sin and grace that Peter spoke to the Pentecost crowd. He accused them of crucifying the Son of God. And it was true; they had. But so have we. So has every sinner, whether or not they were in Jerusalem calling for his death on Good Friday. It is our sin that crucified the Son of God. Each one of us is guilty of his death.

But, as Peter also preached, it is a death that God turned into life. Through Jesus' sacrifice our sin and the sin of the whole world is atoned for, and all who believe have life. We have a blessed life in this world knowing that we are God's people. And because the Father raised Jesus from death to life on Easter, we have the promise of our own resurrection, and life in heaven together with Jesus and all believers.

All God's people share in the work of proclaiming sin, sacrifice, redemption, and resurrection to the world. The Holy Spirit has brought us together to do that work. Like that first generation of Christians, we must live in a way that stands out as radically different from the unbelieving world, in the way we share, the way we meet together and worship together and grow in faith together. And we must be willing to speak and write the message of sin and grace so the world can hear and read it. As there were apostles in the early Church who led those efforts, there are pastors and teachers and missionaries who lead it today. But we all share in it together.

Make this your goal: to share in that work by living the righteousness of Jesus that you were baptized into. And ask the Spirit to give you courage to speak the true message of Christ. Peter was made fun of on Pentecost; he shook it off. So do those who share in the mission. Peter was in danger on Pentecost; he spoke anyway. So do those who share in the mission.

As Jesus people come together in that mission, the Spirit will keep working. More and more will come together in faith, and live together with our risen Savior. Amen.