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Pentecost

## **The Birthday of the Church—for Everyone** **Acts 2:1-21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

**2** 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.

**3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

**4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

**5** Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

**6** And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

**7** Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

**8** And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

**9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

**10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

**11** Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

**12** All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

**13** But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

**14** 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.

**15** Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

**16** No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

**17** "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

**18** Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

**19** And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

**20** The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

**21** Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

**37** Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

**38** Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**39** For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

**40** And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

**41** So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Do you know why we call this Sunday ***Pentecost***?

It comes from the Greek word for fifty.

And it's roots are from the Jewish holiday known as the Festival of Weeks, or Shavuot in Hebrew.

Why 50? Leviticus 23:16 instructs people to count "fifty days" from the end of Passover to the beginning of the next holiday.

*Shavuot* was the second great feast for Israel.

It was originally a harvest festival (Exod 23:16),

but, later became a day to remember the giving of the ***commandments*** on Mt. Sinai.

This day became special for Christians because,

seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus,

during the Jewish celebration of Shavuot/Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the followers of Jesus, giving them power,

and creating the first church! [www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/).

Remember that Acts was ***written by Luke***,

and it is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, only about the early church.

We heard that a ***mighty wind*** rushed in where the followers of Jesus were gathered in Jerusalem,

and something like ***tongues of fire*** rested on their heads,

and suddenly they were talking about God's power in dozens of different languages—the languages of people who had all gathered in Jerusalem.

You might ask, ***did this really happen?***

Well, we all have to answer that for ourselves.

Do you believe in miracles? In resurrection? In healing?

I find that asking God for help understanding these things

is the best thing we can do.

If you don't or can't believe it, just tell God that—  
Jesus always had compassion for those with doubts (remember Thomas?),  
knowing that doubt is not the opposite of faith, but part of true faith.

I assume it did happen.

And if so, ***what does it all mean?***

Well, the Holy Spirit is ***God's power***—  
and when we receive the Holy Spirit,  
we are ***receiving God's power to do great things***,  
that we cannot do on our own!

Those people who had something like little flames on their heads,  
and who felt a mighty wind rushing into the room,  
they gained the power to talk about God's "deeds of power" Luke says.  
They were essentially ***preaching***—telling folks about God.  
***Ordinary people with extraordinary gifts!***

So what does ***Pentecost mean for us today?***

***Why*** are we celebrating?

We don't have flames and wind rushing in here, helping us speak in foreign  
languages....

But we do believe the ***Holy Spirit comes to us today!***

And Pentecost is the ***celebration of that power!***

Actually, Pentecost has a lot of meanings.

It was certainly the ***birthday*** of the church—  
it was the first time that followers of Jesus were brought together  
in ***mission and ministry by the power of God.***

In fact the ***Book of Acts is all about the church!***

Acts 2:42-47 has one of the most powerful definitions of the early church,  
and it's a reminder to us about what church is all about.

*They devoted themselves to the ***apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking  
of bread and the prayers.****

***43*** *Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the  
apostles.*

***44*** *All who believed were together and had all things in common;*

***45*** *they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as  
any had need.*

*46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,  
47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Now that's humbling, isn't it?  
They had ***teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer.***  
But they also saw ***miracles*** in their midst,  
They ***shared*** everything in common.  
And they ***praised*** God for every blessing!

Wow. What if we modeled ourselves on the early church?  
Wouldn't that be powerful?

And there's more!  
Pentecost is not just the birthday of an institution known as church.  
And it's ***not just about God's power in the lives of believers,***  
although individual believers did gain amazing power.

Pentecost is also about God's power in the ***community***—  
the group of believers, who came to be known as the church.  
That wind and fire came to them as they were ***gathered together,***  
not when they were each alone at home.  
That's important.  
Holy Spirit comes to us in our hearts and lives,  
but perhaps more importantly, it comes to us ***as a church,***  
as a family of faith, the body of Christ.  
When we receive God's power—it's for a purpose—  
and that ***purpose involves the whole church,*** the whole community.

I think it's important to remember this ***communal aspect*** of the Spirit.  
When Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit as our Counselor, our Advocate,  
And the Spirit of Truth, or the one who prays for us when we cannot,  
we tend to think of that for us as individuals.

But there is another very important side to the Holy Spirit.  
The ***Spirit's power for all of us together.***

Do you remember what Paul says in ***1 Corinthians 12?***  
that we have each been given ***gifts from the same Holy Spirit***—  
gifts that enable us to fulfill our calling as different parts of the ***same body.***  
Just like our bodies have eyes, ears, and toes,

so does the church, the body of Christ.

And it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power  
to live out our role in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit enables us to use our gifts and talents  
for the good of the whole community.

If you have a gift or talent or anything that you have contributed to church,  
That's ***Holy Spirit at work in you!***

Do you know why there's a ***big list of nations*** in this passage?

When Acts lists the 15 different nationalities who heard people speaking in their  
native tongue, that was a list of the ***known world*** at that time!

Luke was saying that the ***whole world*** was hearing the Good News!

This means ***EVERYONE*** in the world was hearing about God's power,  
When the Holy Spirit came!

The church was becoming ***universal***, a church for everyone,  
not just Jews, not just those who had personally known Jesus, but everyone.

I was thinking this week about how ***divided our nation*** is right now,  
And maybe it's because we lack some human decency these days.

My brother's colleague in their Dallas office lost her son recently—  
a ***high school senior*** who had just graduated and was celebrating with friends,  
when he defended a girl who was being catcalled by a group of guys.

He was shot in the head.

He was his parent's only son.

We've all heard of the bigotry on a train in ***Portland*** that inspired 3 men to come to  
the aid of some Muslim women.

Two of them were stabbed to death for their compassion.

Ruth Marcus, a Washington Post columnist, quotes Defense Secretary ***James Mattis***,  
when he was asked what worries him most about his new role:

Mattis said in the New Yorker: "***The lack of a fundamental friendliness. It seems  
like an awful lot of people in America and around the world feel spiritually and  
personally alienated, whether it be from organized religion or from local community  
school districts or from their governments.***" [www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/pentecost-  
something-not-right/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/pentecost-something-not-right/)

In many ways, ***hasn't fear of the stranger almost crippled us?***

We can buy into that fear of those who don't look like us,

who don't talk like us, who don't worship or celebrate like us, right?

But that is the **opposite** of our Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.  
 We believe that the **Good News is for everyone**.  
 That everyone is **welcomed, invited, and accepted** into the body of Christ,  
 the church.

Do you know **what Gospel really drives that point home?**  
 Which one names the most **women** followers of Jesus?  
 Which one is dedicated to a **Gentile**? (Luke 1:1-4)  
 Or which one **traces Jesus' ancestry** all the way back to Adam? (Luke 3:23-37)  
 Where Jesus' preached **good news for Gentiles**? (Luke 4:14-30)  
 What writer spoke well of **Samaritans**? (Luke 9:51-55, 10:30-37, and 17:11-19)  
 Who counted **women as valuable** followers? (In Luke 8, 10, 18, 21, 23, and 24)  
 It's all the **Gospel of Luke**.

Luke wanted us to know that Jesus' message and his ministry  
 were for **ALL people**.  
 The other Gospels also talk about this **universal love of Jesus**  
 for the world.  
 John 3:16 that we all know so well says '*for God so loved **THE WORLD** that He gave  
 His only Son...*'

But **are we living that?**  
 Aren't most churches today still very **segregated**,  
 very **homogenous**?  
 Yes.  
 It's **easier, safer, more comfortable** in many ways if we are surrounded by people  
 'like us'.

But it's **NOT Gospel living**.  
 If everyone thinks and looks just like us, we need to do a better job of reaching out  
 into the community and world!  
 We have work to do!

Because Jesus' desire was that the **church would be for everyone**,  
 that the **Holy Spirit would come upon all people**,  
 just as it says in Acts 2:17-18, quoting the prophet Joel.  
 Jesus' desire was, as Paul writes in Galatians 3, that there would **no longer be Jew or  
 Greek, slave or free, male or female...**

Pentecost is the **birthday of the church**,  
 And the birth of God's **grace—for everyone!**

It was a ***new beginning***,  
 It was a ***new mission*** for the church—opening the doors of the Gospel!

The question is, ***are we opening the doors*** of the Gospel to our community?  
 To our world?

Are we seeking the power of the Holy Spirit  
 to reach people with the Good News?

Or, are we content to just keep ***maintaining*** a building and being a group of people  
 who like to be together?

I think this ***building is used for kingdom*** purposes,  
 and that's why we need to be good stewards of it.

I think we are certainly reaching young people, without a thought of who they are or  
 what they believe.

I think our church family is in the ***business of opening doors, hearts, and minds***.

I think our First Pres family is about ***loving our neighbors—ALL of them***, regardless of their language, culture, or race,  
 or anything else that separates people today.

This is what makes us ***unique*** in our community.

This is a unique mission—opening the doors of the Gospel,  
***Welcoming all people, out of God's grace***.

And it's the mission of the ***Holy Spirit***,

And our ***Savior Jesus***.

We are a people ***empowered by the Holy Spirit***,  
 And part of a broader church that is so ***diverse***,  
 with no national boundaries, no official language,  
 no dress code, no 'one way' to worship!

Do you remember when we have ***welcomed Malawians*** to our church?

Lovely Alice came many years ago,

and Luso and Rev. July came a few years ago from our sister church.

Do you remember how much we learned from them?

From our differences? Their culture? Their language?

***This November*** we'll be hosting new friends from Malawi.

And next year hopefully some of us will join a delegation from our Presbytery to  
 Malawi!

**Mark Twain** once **challenged people to travel**, and see the world.

His words apply to our mission of welcoming our neighbors.

Whether we hop on an international trip, or we just drive to the grocery store these are wise words:

*“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness,  
and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.*

*Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by  
vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”*

[www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2017/06/01/what-is-pentecost-this/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2017/06/01/what-is-pentecost-this/)

We need to swing wide the doors of the church, and the Gospel!

Friends, today we celebrate something amazing—

the **coming of the Holy Spirit**,

the **birthday of the church**,

and the birth of the Good News of the Gospel

being **spread to the ends of the earth!**

May **we be part** of that mission and ministry!

Amen.