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 Pentecost

Together in the Spirit
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 people 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."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews^[a] 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.'*

Pentecost is definitely the **birthday** of the church.
 It was an event that started with 120 followers of Jesus,
 And grew to over 3000 people--forming the first church!
 What started as a Jewish festival commemorating the **Harvest**
 and the giving of the 10 **commandments**,
 became a celebration of the birth of the church through the Holy Spirit!
 One theologian wrote that Pentecost
 is when **gestation ceases and birthing occurs**.
 It is the birth-day of the church.
<https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/pentecost>

But Pentecost is more than a birthday party.
 It is a **WILD party!**
 Peter acknowledges this in his sermon when he says that these people are not
 drunk, for it's only 9 o'clock in the morning!
 It's a wild party because a **holy wind blows** into this room of 120 believers,
 and **tongues of fire** rest on their heads,
 And then they all start **preaching** in different languages--
 The languages of those who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival!

Can you **imagine SEEING** all of this?

In many ways, Pentecost was **TROUBLE**.
But 'good trouble'.
 The great civil rights activist John Lewis, who passed away in 2020,
 was known to encourage others to get into 'good trouble',
 just like he did, standing up for civil rights.
 He suffered beatings, imprisonment, and scorn for his brave work
 Defending the rights of black Americans.
 Many people have invoked his phrase 'good trouble' since his death,

and I think it's fair to say that the

Holy Spirit brings a kind of 'good trouble'—all for the sake of the gospel.

Elaine Eberhart, Upper Room, Disciplines May 30, 2022.

The Holy Spirit is an ***instigator*** of good trouble,
bringing about change, to birth the church.

The Holy Spirit brings ***discomfort and disorientation*** to the people.

They didn't know what was happening,

They were given gifts they never could have imagined,

They were given this incredible power to talk about God!

You know this church is blessed with people from ***20 countries and 6 continents!***

Last year we had several people speaking their native languages,

But they were all saying the same thing: 'God is good' on video.

It was amazing to hear them speaking—

now imagine that ***YOU could speak*** in all of those different languages!

In Acts 1:8, before he ascends to heaven,
the resurrected Jesus says to his followers---

***and you will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit comes upon you,
and you will be my WITNESSES.***

At Pentecost, this is exactly what happens!

Power comes, and they start witnessing!

And just like in Acts, ***TODAY the Holy Spirit gives US courage*** as Christians.

WE TOO are ***FILLED with the Holy Spirit***—because we follow Jesus Christ!

And the Spirit gives us courage to do things
that move us ***out of our comfort zone.***

Courageous things, like bringing a Bible study to a prison,

helping people who are homeless, or hungry,

making the church welcoming to those with disabilities,

or even volunteering for a youth lock-in!

The list is endless!

When have ***you been challenged*** to do something in your faith?

That's the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit brings ***US power and courage***
to do what needs to be done in the body of Christ!
In fact, ***everything we do*** for Jesus is empowered by the Spirit!

The ***Spirit continues what Jesus began.***
Jesus himself was always getting into ‘good trouble’.
He healed on the Sabbath,
He welcomed women and children,
He rejected laws that excluded and marginalized people.

And like the good trouble of John Lewis,
Pentecost is not just about power.
It’s also about embracing DIVERSITY.
It was a diverse crowd that heard the good news in their own languages.
Luke, the author of Acts, goes to great lengths to talk about this.
He describes in such detail, the different people who are hearing the gospel:
*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.”*

Think about that!

It has often been thought that Pentecost is kind of the ***reversal***
of what happened at the ***Tower of Babel*** in Genesis 11.
In that story, God sees the people trying to build a tower to heaven,
and in response God confuses their languages,
scattering them across the earth.

Some people say that Babel was a tragedy,
scattering humanity with all those different languages.
It was definitely God’s way
of making sure that we would not try to be God ourselves.
But what if it wasn’t a bad event—
What if it was God’s way of making sure we would flourish?

Some people say ***Pentecost heals Babel because of the unity.***
 And Pentecost DOES bring unity.
 It brings ***diverse people together***
 because they all can hear the good news about Jesus.

But Pentecost does not bring unity
 because ethnicity and differences and languages don't matter anymore.
 Pentecost is ***NOT about erasing differences.***
 Pentecost ***celebrates*** the different ethnicities in Jerusalem—
 it ***celebrates diversity!***

What does that mean to us?

Isn't that a ***powerful message*** for us today?
 Some people say about race, "*Oh, I don't see color*".
 Or, "*I don't pay attention to ethnicity*".
 But God doesn't say that.
 God ***created*** diversity, the many colors and backgrounds of humanity,
 God ***sees*** that diversity,
 And God ***celebrates*** it as something beautiful!

Similarly, Pentecost ***embraces and celebrates diversity,***
 It ***doesn't ignore it, or try to erase*** it!

The ***miracle*** of Pentecost,
 is NOT that all the people in Jerusalem understood one language.
 The miracle is that all the different people heard the good news—
in their own native tongues!

One commentator says that Pentecost gives us '***marching orders***'
 as followers of Jesus Christ,
 as people who have received the Holy Spirit!
 Which is far more challenging than celebrating Christmas,
 or the resurrection of Jesus at Easter!
 Because it means we have ***things to do!***
We have been called!

<https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/pentecostb>

What does that mean in YOUR life?

What does it mean that Pentecost gives ***YOU a mission in this world?***

Do you believe that the ***Spirit gives us all the courage and power we need to do that mission?***

And what if we too are called to ***embrace and celebrate the diversity*** of God's children?

What if we too are called to ***share the good news***—not just with people like us, but with ***ALL people?***

Will we embrace and celebrate that diversity?

Will we try to understand and welcome people who are different?

And speak one another's languages?

That is our calling as followers of Jesus, as people filled with the Spirit!

You know, the Pentecostal denomination focuses on the power of the Holy Spirit in believers.

They believe in being 'Spirit-filled'.

Pentecostal Christians ***emphasize the power and emotion*** of the Spirit.

Their style of worship to us Presbyterians, "God's frozen chosen", can seem strange and uncomfortable!

But there are real lessons to be learned from them!

The Pentecostal church is often known for being ***interracial and intercultural, embracing and celebrating difference and diversity*** among God's children.

How do WE celebrate all of God's children?

What can we do to ***embrace the diversity*** in the body of Christ, and ***welcome everyone*** into the church?

Episcopalian priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor calls the Book of Acts "*The Gospel of the Holy Spirit*" because of that Spirit-power in the early church.

In her sermon about Pentecost she says:

Before the day was over, the church had grown from one hundred twenty to more than three thousand. Shy people had become bold, scared people had become gutsy, and lost people had found a sure sense of direction. Disciples who had not believed themselves capable of tying their own sandals without Jesus discovered abilities...they never knew they had. When they opened their mouths to speak, they sounded like Jesus. and there was no explanation for it, except that they

*had dared to inhale on the day of Pentecost. They had sucked in God's own breath and they had been transformed by it. The Holy Spirit had entered into them the same way it had entered into Mary, ...it was time for God to be born again – not in one body this time but in **a body of believers** who would receive the breath of life from their Lord and pass it on, using their own bodies to distribute the gift.*
Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home By Another Way*, Boston: Cowley, 1999, pg. 14...

*So here's the question: **Do WE want to become bold? Gutsy? Get new direction?***

We too have inhaled the breath of God,

We too are filled with the Spirit.

There's no limit to what God can do through us!

Today we are **celebrating our music director, Graham McKinley.**

And we celebrate the many years

That she has brought **diverse people together, with diverse abilities,**

And **celebrated** all of that by **making music, together.**

She didn't teach everyone to make one kind of music,

She brought **different people together with different skills**

to make **beautiful music** in this church, all for the glory of God!

That's some **Holy Spirit-power!**

Friends, hear the **Good News** of the Gospel:

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are all **here together.**

United in our diversity,

Empowered by the Spirit, to share the good news, to grow the church,
to be followers of Jesus Christ.

And for that Spirit-power, all God's people can say together, Amen.