

Natalie W. Bell
 May 19, 2024
 Pentecost

The Spirit of Life
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.'*

I was talking this week with my lectionary Bible study
about the *Asian concept of Chi*.

Chi is a term in *traditional Chinese philosophy and medicine* that refers to the
"vital life force" or "flowing vital energy" that runs through everything.

It's an *unseen energy* that connects all things.

Chi is central to health because *it flows throughout the body*
along meridians and it controls the movement of blood.

Chi is also all around us in the universe,

It is what gives us *life, and sustains life.*

It is in all living things.

But what does Chi have to do with Pentecost?

The concept of Chi is about *a life-spirit, a life-force,*

That dwells within us.

If you think about it, *that's very similar to the Holy Spirit!*

The Holy Spirit is a spiritual life force dwelling within us.

We sometimes think of the Holy Spirit as being 'out there',

Or *separate* from us.

But what if we could understand and rely upon

the Spirit that brings us life and dwells within us?

In Ezekiel 37, God tells the prophet to look at a valley of dry bones,

And God asks, *can these bones live?*

But then the prophet Ezekiel is told to speak, and prophesy to those dry bones,

And suddenly they come to life!

Those words were written for *a people in exile, a people without hope.*

And it is the Spirit of God that breathes life into those dry bones!

The *same way the Spirit brings life to us,*

especially when we feel dry or near death.

The Spirit breathes life, *when we are empty and need to be filled up.*

When we are without hope.

How much do YOU need that kind of 'life'?

Filling you, reviving you, renewing you?

I know I sure need it!

But don't we all need something to ***fill*** us up, when we run dry?

a fire within to ***inspire*** us?

Don't we all need ***encouragement*** to keep going?

The Bible says that the ***something*** we need is a ***Someone—the Holy Spirit***.

And today---***Pentecost***--is all about the ***Spirit***.

The name Pente-cost means fifty, for 50 days after Passover.

It was a Jewish festival of the harvest

and a memorial of the ten commandments.

But just like Passover, Jesus gave new ***meaning to Pentecost***.

It becomes something far more

than a harvest festival, or a commemoration of the law.

It is the ***coming of the Holy Spirit***, the ***gift promised*** to them by Jesus.

That holy wind and fire---that energy and excitement—started the church!

It's why we call Pentecost the ***'birthday of the church'***!

Jesus had ***promised to send them Someone*** after he was gone—

A Holy Spirit—a ***Counselor, an Advocate, a Helper,***

A spirit of Truth.

Then in the beginning of Acts, before he ascends to heaven,

Jesus says in Acts 1:8:

*“you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,
and you will be my **witnesses** ...to the ends of the earth.”*

Then on the day of Pentecost-***that's exactly what happened!***

on Pentecost, when Jesus' followers were gathered together,

devoting themselves to prayer,

*suddenly from heaven there came the sound of a rushing wind, and tongues of fire
appeared on their heads.*

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

Wow. Imagine that scene! The Holy Spirit came in ***wind and fire***.

Both were ***known symbols*** of God's power.

Wind was synonymous with God's breath & new life.
 And fire? Well, remember the burning bush?
 Or God leading the Israelites by a pillar of fire at night?
 People knew *wind and fire were symbols of God.*
 So wind and fire bring about the *birthday of the church!*

It all began when each person received the ability
 to talk about God's love in different languages— not unintelligible tongues,
 But the languages of the people gathered in Jerusalem that day!

They spoke in foreign languages,
 And when people heard the good news in their native tongue
 they were so amazed,
 that many of them stayed to hear Peter preach his first sermon,
 and *3,000 of them were baptized--right then and there!*
The church was born!

The entire book of Acts is about the *early church,*
 and the *fire of the Holy Spirit* inside it.
 To be honest, the two cannot be separated—*church and Spirit.*
 The church was literally created by the Spirit,
 And the Spirit inspired and enabled
 everything the early Christians did and said!

What if we could say that today?

In the book of Acts we see the church grow, in faith and numbers.
 We see *individuals on fire* with the Spirit inside them,
 enabling them to do the extraordinary—to stand firm amidst persecution,
 to preach, to teach, to heal and to serve.

And here's the *best part*—
this same Spirit is available to US today!

We too, have been *given gifts,*
 maybe not to speak in a foreign tongue,
 But maybe to pray, to teach, to greet, to administer, to count, to sing.
 You have a gift!

And *our gifts*---make the church--the church!
 In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says that we are *all members of the body of Christ,*

Each with spiritual gifts from God!
It's so *beyond what we can ever dream or imagine!*

Unfortunately, in our *denomination*
There is sometimes a hesitancy to talk about the Holy Spirit.
Which is unfortunate, because the Spirit helps us to understand the Bible,
It help us know God & Jesus even more.
The Holy Spirit is *crucial*—because it's the part of God that *lives inside us*.
It's our life-force, our spiritual power source.

In other words, we need the holy wind & fire of the Spirit,
to *do what we are called to DO*,
and *be what we are called to BE!*

The *early church ONLY existed* because of the Spirit at work.
It was *created* by the Spirit, and *sustained* by the Spirit.
Unfortunately, *that's not always the case* in churches today.

A.W. Tozer said once,
*"If the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from the church today,
95 percent of what we do could go on and no one would know the difference.
But if the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church,
95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.*

Wow. We don't want that.
We want to be ON FIRE for God!
We need life breathed into our dry bones,
And into every corner of our church—
we need God's revival, renewal, and power!

When officers in our church take vows, they promise to serve with
Energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.
Notice that first word? *Energy---where does that come from?*
The Holy Spirit!

I wonder, where have you *seen and experienced* the Spirit's power?
I've seen it in the musicians, I've felt it in prayer,
I've experienced it in the joy of baptism, fellowship, or communion.
What about you?

*Tozer also said, “God dwells in a state of perpetual enthusiasm... whatever else happened at Pentecost, one thing that that cannot be missed was the sudden upsurging of enthusiasm. Those first disciples burned with a **steady, inward fire**. They were **enthusiastic to the point of complete abandon**.”*

Is that true of us?

Don't we need that?

Isn't it the Holy Spirit that gives meaning to our worship?
And enables people to be touched by sermons, music or prayers?
Isn't it the Holy Spirit that makes what happens **IN HERE**
change lives OUT THERE?

Isn't it the **Holy Spirit** that stirs our hearts **to serve and reach out?**
That enables us to **share our stories** of what God is doing in our lives?

*What if, when we rely upon the Holy Spirit
We **DON'T** get **burned out or worn out?**
But rather, we are filled with energy--to serve in this world?*

When we don't allow the Spirit to work, we can start to **wither away....**
We need the Spirit for power, and life.

We need the Spirit,
to **guide** us, to **comfort** us, to **counsel** us, to teach us the **truth**.
We need the Spirit to give us **meaning** and purpose in life.
We need the Spirit to **inspire us and enable** us to do
what we could never do without God's power.

And here's the **best part**—**we already have the Spirit's power in our hearts!**
And, it's something we also pray for—and wait for, together.
We have the Spirit dwelling within us,
But we **cannot control** that Spirit...
The Bible says **it blows where it will**.
But it is a power that is ours for the asking.

Even though it's inside of us, we need to be *filled and refilled*,
Peter and all the believers who received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost,
had to be *filled and then re-filled* with the power of the Spirit.

Almost like a *lake*, always full of water, but sometimes running low,
And dependent upon the rain and the rivers to keep it filled up.

The Spirit is already inside of us,
But we have to *allow the Spirit to work* within us.
And *when we do*—we too can tell of God's love.
We too, can *do things we'd never imagine!*

When the *first Christians were filled* with the Spirit
they devoted themselves to four things:
the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.
Just imagine what God can empower *US to do!*

I believe *we see the Spirit at work right here*---in this church merger,
in our kids and youth, in the Confirmation class today,
In the upcoming VBS,
In the new fellowship and friendships!

And today on Pentecost, we celebrate that Spirit.
We celebrate the gifts of the Spirit in our lives,
And the opportunity we have to share them in our church!

The Spirit is at work in all of us,
So, may our hearts be moved with *energy, and enthusiasm*
And may we *offer ourselves to God*, together!
For the gift of the Holy Spirit, all God's people can say together, Amen.