

Acts 2:1-13, 41
(Ezekiel 36:22-27; Mark 1:1-11)
“Filled with the Holy Spirit”

Introduction

We come this morning to Luke’s account of the day that changed human history forever, because it was the day promised by God to his people throughout history. The Bible teaches us that God made us for intimate friendship with him and with one another, but our rebellion against him broke that friendship, and human history since has been marked by war and division and a longing, never satisfied, that our alienation from God and from one another would one day be healed, that we would be reconciled to God and to each other, and know peace and wholeness. So, God promised through his prophets that one day, he who lived *among* his people would live *in* them as at the beginning, making us his living temples, bearers of his Spirit, at peace with him and with one another.

The entire history of the new covenant community, the church, begins with this particular Pentecost, so if you are God’s child, you will find here a key moment in your own history, and in studying it should understand more deeply than ever before what has been given you in God’s great gift of his Spirit.

Note this morning the significance of the day – the Feast of Pentecost, the significance of the signs – the phenomena of Pentecost, and the significance of the response – the people of Pentecost.

Body

1. The significance of the day: the feast of Pentecost (2:1).

Pentecost, which is Greek for “Fiftieth,” was celebrated in the Old Testament under the names the “Feast of Weeks” or “First Fruits,” fifty days after the beginning of the barley harvest. I find it interesting how often the order and relationship between the feasts and rituals of the old covenant foreshadowed the order in which God would fulfill their meaning in the life and ministry of Jesus, and then in the application of redemption through the Holy Spirit.

So, the apostle Paul refers to Jesus as the “first fruits of the resurrection” (1 Corinthians 15:20), and the Holy Spirit is poured out on Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Paul says that the Spirit is given as “guarantee” (or “down-payment,” 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:14) of all that is to be ours when at last God consummates history and raises us up from the dead. The fact that the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost enriches our understanding of its meaning and should encourage us that all of history

has redemptive meaning as we understand it in the light of the story of salvation, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. The significance of the signs: the phenomena of Pentecost (2:2-4).

Sound: “And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind” (2:2). In both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New, the words for Spirit (*ruach* and *pneuma*) also mean “breath” or “wind.” The breath is a sign of life, while the wind is an invisible source of power that moves trees and windmills and sailing ships. So, then, the sound of a mighty rushing wind that fills the house is a sign that God is giving us the power we need to accomplish the mission entrusted to us.

Sight: “And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” (2:3). Fire was the sign of God’s presence among his people: from the flaming torch by which God appeared to Abraham, to the burning bush through which God called Moses, to the pillar of fire by which God led Israel through the wilderness, to the smoke on Mt Sinai as God spoke to Moses, to the fire that fell upon the sacrifices and the smoke that filled the temple. Israel knew God as one whose fire was a sign of his purity, so that in Isaiah’s vision, it is a coal from the altar of God that touches his lips and cleanses them so that he can speak on God’s behalf. So, then, this sign assures us that God will work in us the purity of heart and life necessary to live and speak in such a way that people will have a reason to believe the gospel message entrusted to us.

Speech: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:4). Unless God speaks to us in ways that we can understand, we will never know or believe the gospel of grace. If it is told in another language, how can we respond? So the gift of tongues breaks the curse of Babel (Genesis 11:7-9), which involves the curse of ethnic division expressed in the utter breakdown of communication caused by the multiplicity of languages. This sign assures us that we will have all of the gifts necessary to communicate the Word of God in clarity and power.

3. The significance of the response: the people of Pentecost (5-13,41).

Who were they? In Jerusalem on Pentecost were Jews, “devout men from every nation under heaven” (2:5) as well as Arabs, people from Crete, and Gentile proselytes (2:11). The key point is they represented many different cultures and languages, languages that divided them and served as such a basis of identity that they are listed (see 2:9-11). They represent a Babel of tongues and the very idea of presenting the gospel to them all at once seems impossible to the point of folly.

What did they hear? Each heard *in his own language* the great things that God had done through Jesus Christ (2:8&11). Here is the key: the tongues of Pentecost were not an incoherent babbling, but clear speech, languages unknown by the speakers, but miraculously spoken for the sake of the gospel. It prefigured all the labors of those who through the ages have gone to other cultures to learn their languages and communicate to them the Word of God.

How did they respond? Some were amazed, others were amused, but still others believed and received the gift of grace on offer that day. Thus it always has been: when God pours out his grace, the response is varied, and there will be found in any group people filled with wonder, others filled with cynicism and still others with open and receptive hearts and minds. In the end, everything depends on which of those you are.

Conclusion

So where do you stand today? Have you yet known the reality of God's presence in your life, the sweet intimacy of friendship with him for which we were created and redeemed? Have you known the power and purity and wisdom that the Spirit gives to those who seek him? These are the birthright of God's children. If you are his, don't rest satisfied living a powerless, impure, foolish life, a life shaped by the surrounding culture. Seek from the Lord all that he has promised to his children and do not rest until you have been filled with the Spirit of power and purity and wisdom, the Spirit of the living God.

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