

DCCCP 6/5/22 Like Tongues of Fire

Welcome to Pentecost! - The birthday of the church!

Pentecost is a season of celebration, not only of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Disciples of Jesus but also of the transformation of springtime, from growth into harvest, from dormancy into spiritual fruitfulness.

Pentecost is all about being transformed.

Last week we talked about, in a nutshell, liberation, salvation, and transformation when we looked at the story of Paul and Silas meeting Lydia in Philippi, exercising a demon from a girl, being beaten, and jailed and then miraculously released through an earthquake and then the salvation of the jailer and his family as they came to know and trust the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Liberation, salvation, and transformation.

We ended the service with a realization and a challenge for us to do the work God has asked us to do instead of simply praying and asking God to do that work for us. God has set us in motion to do God's work on earth. We are the Church.

Today, we're going to spend a little time looking at living out this work of the church through the transformation that happens through the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life. I'm not just talking about the idea of salvation that comes when the Spirit indwells us but also about becoming a people who can positively do God's work, as the church, with Confidence and Authority - not bragging or being condescending but being who we are and living our lives as who we are as favored people of God.

Speaking with authority - 1 Peter 2:9 describes Christians as A Royal Priesthood. Peter says:
9But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, to proclaim the virtues of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

You are a big deal!

Let's keep that in mind as we jump in today.

Genesis describes the beginning of all things like this: **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The cosmos that was the earth was void and covered in water and the spirit was over it all, making order.

The Winds of the spirit blowing over the Cosmos making order. See how this fits as I read our scripture passage from Acts 2 today:

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.

The Winds of the spirit were blowing over the Cosmos making order.

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?”

The Winds of the spirit were blowing over the Cosmos making order.

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, “Fellow Jews 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.

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19 And I will show wonders 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.’

The Winds of the spirit were blowing over the Cosmos making order.

The Word of the Lord

Pentecost as a day, is the 50th day from Easter. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ while they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Festival of Harvest.

That festival, which had gathered together so many Jews in Jerusalem, celebrates God as one of his 3 required Festivals to God each year:

Exodus 23: God said -

14 "Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me.

15 "Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt. "No one is to appear before me empty-handed. 16 "Celebrate the Festival of Harvest with the first fruits of the crops you sow in your field.

"Celebrate the Festival of Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in your crops from the field. 17 "Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord. (Exodus 23:14-17)

So, on this festival day, 50 days after Easter, the city was packed with Jews from everywhere and the disciples were still waiting to be baptized by the Holy Spirit just as Jesus had told them.

You know, this day could have started with something like: when the day of Pentecost had come, they went fishing, or they went about their day, but instead they were waiting.

And without the work of the Holy Spirit there is no scene to report on. Without the transformation of these disciples from timid ex-followers of a crucified teacher to leaders of a risen messiah - there is no church!

Without Pentecost, no Christian church at all!

Still, wasn't it amazing that tongues of fire should land, that voices would speak in foreign tongues so all could understand? What a mysterious and wonderful plan.

But then the scene moves quickly outside the room, likely to the temple grounds where the people can hear and experience the ministry of Jesus set alive, on fire if you will, by the work of the Holy Spirit.

And they spoke the good news of a risen Jesus every tongue.

Every tongue, everyone was included.

The difference between the inclusiveness that Jesus taught his disciples - and therefore us - and what society offered then and offers now - is highlighted when the crowd claims that the disciples are essentially drunk Galileans.

This is a perfect and intentional social insult. Because the area around Galilee was a very low-class area with a distinctive low-class accent. So maybe, just maybe, the Medes and the Arabs and everyone else heard their unique specific language but with a distinctive Galilean drawl!¹

The inclusion of such a widely diverse group is emblematic of Jesus' inclusion of literally everyone in his ministry. We remember encounters with Roman centurion's, both Jew and Gentile women, children, slaves and free people and even lepers. Although the focus of Peter's pronouncement is very much to a Jewish audience these disciples were soon going to find the experience of spreading the words of Christ was going to take many voices and they were going to go well beyond the ears of Jerusalem.

And you know it does take all kinds of voices to reach all kinds of ears, then and now. Some churches preach a message of only happiness and joy; some a practical, pragmatic working Christianity; some teach the Bible without judgement or expectation; and some take the tact of Peter here, teaching hellfire and brimstone and ultimate judgement.

Vs 17-21 are a word for word quote from Joel 2:28-32 that highlights the mystery of God and the hellfire and brimstone all in one.

Peter highlights this passage to let his congregation know that they were in the "last days" and that judgement is soon to arrive.

¹ Sandra Polaski, *Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:1-21*, Connections, Westminster press, 327

And that should make sense because, from his perspective, the messiah had come and would soon come again. Their work, to spread His word was going to be the last work done on earth.

The world had moved from the time of the prophets to 400 years of silence and from silence to 3 short years of proclamation by Jesus and then 50 more dramatic days of silence and then “Like Tongues of Fire!”

The time is now says Peter - strike while the iron is hot!

It is time to seek the Lord’s favor and believe in the man they crucified and His gift of eternal life.

“Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Says Joel and Peter. Peter’s on a roll! He knows that this is it, the final plan has been engaged - he goes on to explain how Jesus came for everyone there and what the now-risen Messiah’s ministry meant to them.

Peter said:

36 “Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified.”

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. And 3000 that day were saved.

Our story of God’s Good News in Jesus went from one man being baptized in the Jordan river, to 12 apostles, to 120 disciples, to 3000 new believers all standing in the temple square.

Now that’s a party! The Winds of the spirit were blowing over the Cosmos of Jerusalem, making order. That’s our church being born! And here we are.

For many of us here today, this story is the foundation of our story. We understand the plan of God, the salvation of Jesus. But maybe for some others, maybe not so much.

One of the points I tried to convey last week is that people need to hear about God and what is God's plan for their life.

That's the entire point behind Pentecost, everyone there on that Festival Day could understand God's plan as they were told it, on that day. And on that day of Pentecost, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit to make that happen.

You see, Jesus had given them what we call the Great Commission when He appeared after he had died, and I'll bet they were in Jerusalem for 50 days puzzling how they were ever going to pull it off. I'll bet they were stumped, frustrated, looking at each other thinking that their task was impossible!

Because Jesus had said:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

But then He left them. And then they were alone.

And then, well then there were tongues of fire!

It really does take all kinds, you know, to tell God's story, because there are so many ears to hear.

Maybe 10 years ago our church in Groton along with a couple folks from a Baptist church in Mystic took a mission trip down to a town called Naranjita Guatemala (Little Orange), a town so small not to appear on a map, on the outskirts of San Martine Jilotepeque (Baby

Corn) outside of Chimaltenango, outside of Guatemala City. 20 or so homes in a valley so steep only accessible by 4wd or horse or foot.

Single power cable in the valley that powered 1 house, 1 radio with 1 loudspeaker, and 1 church. We were there building brick outhouses for each of the homes. They dug the holes, 25ft deep, we built the structures around them.

It was a 30 min walk to water source from every home.

During the day, Christian contemporary music (like KLOVE) played all day on that one radio, through that one loudspeaker.

We attended their Pentecostal church service the first evening there - they had a keyboard - big speakers, microphone. It was so loud! The pastor, the mayor of Little Orange and the Governor of Baby Corn spoke great speeches about our work, and we worshiped for 2 hours in that little village. They sang to us, and then we sang back to them the one song we all knew well, Sanctuary, which we sang before this sermon. You see, it takes all kinds of voices.

That is a place of great poverty, very little individual value in a person, much government corruption, and these men spoke to the needs of the people and the love of God that provided for them. The Holy Spirit showed up that night, hovering over the Cosmos of Little Orange, making order.

They spoke with the confidence and authority of a chosen people, a royal priesthood, of the virtues of Jesus, who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Researcher Braulia Ribeiro, writing about *Pentecostalism* in Central America said of the church:

“If the Creator of the universe speaks to me individually through his Spirit, I have value. If I have value, the community to which I belong has value.

If my community has value, I have to act responsibly toward it.

Because I have value and my community has value, I get a public voice.
Because I have value, I can strive for a better future”²

Ephesians 2: says that we (the collective Christian we) are the church.
We are God’s house all across the planet but “carefully joined together
in Jesus, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.” (Eph 2:20-21)

The mystery of Pentecost, of the tongues of fire, empowered the
disciples and brings the voice of confidence and authority to all of us.
We’re going to close our service today with an awesome song reminding
us that we don’t need to be loudspeakers or voices speaking in foreign
tongues but that our God works through us with just just a little spark of
the Holy Spirit to pass it on.

The challenge for each of us is to be confident in that spark, to know
that, as God’s people, we carry the authority of God working through us,
the authority to transform a broken and shattered world, into a Holy
Temple for the Lord, one voice at a time. When we know this in our
hearts, we will be changed by God from the inside out.

May we accept that change and that challenge.

Amen

² Braulia Ribeiro, *Pentecostalism, the Latin American Reformation*, Providence magazine, Institute on Religion and Democracy, July 26, 2019, <https://providencemag.com/2019/07/pentecostalism-the-latin-american-reformation/> accessed 6/1/22.