

Pentecost: Restored Spirit

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Pentecost: Restored Spirit

Today we are concluding our “Restored” series on this Pentecost Sunday.

As I have been preparing for today, I've been thinking about something that just happened about a week and a half ago while I was in Salem helping my parents. We took the car to get gas at the Salem Costco. The lines were long because it's a popular place for cheaper gas, but also because Oregonians aren't allowed to pump their own gas. It is illegal for anyone other than the gas station attendant to pump gas. Oregon and New Jersey are the only two states where it is against the law to pump your own gas. That really slows down the lines. So, the line was long, and in front of me is a young lady in her Subaru Outback, talking on her cell phone. We've got like four cars ahead of her before we even get to the pump. They fill two cars at a time. The cars at the pump in our line get done and move on, but she doesn't move – just yammering away on her cell phone; she's oblivious. It didn't even appear to be anything serious – she was just talking away, laughing, having a good time while we kept sitting there, about fifteen feet from the pump. I'm thinking I need to give her a “friendly” tap on my horn, but then the attendant waves at her to move forward, so she did. This happened *again* with the next set of two cars while she's still talking away, not moving. Again, the attendant flags her down and gets her to move forward. Again, I restrain from a “friendly” tap. There are two sets of pumps, so she takes the furthest one, and I pull up at the pump behind her. The attendant has to tap on her window to get her to stop talking on her phone just to ask her what gas she wants and to pop her gas tank lid. So he puts the nozzle in her tank and starts the gas going. She's still on her phone. Less than two minutes later, she just starts to drive off and yanks the nozzle right off the gas pump! She's still on her phone, driving away with the nozzle still in her car! The attendant had to yell at her to stop just so he could get the nozzle back. Fortunately the pumps have an automatic shut off. She got out, phone still at her ear, looks at the tank and realizes she can't shut it anymore – it's too bent out of shape – then she gets in her car and drives off with the tank door still open, and she's *STILL* talking on her phone all the way.

So I wonder if that's not a picture of us at church sometimes. Church is the place where we come to get refueled for the week ahead; we get to refill the power of the Holy Spirit like gas for our tanks. Without the Holy Spirit, we're like empty cars. We might look like Christians, but there's no power, no movement. Cars are made to move – to get us places. We are made to make a difference in this world for the love of God, but without the Holy Spirit we're kind of liked parked cars.

So we make our way into church, busy being distracted by whatever's going on around us in our lives, not even really paying attention, and then we head back out

again long before the Holy Spirit is done working in us, and we charge off into the week just as distracted as ever.

Let me invite you today to put down your metaphorical cell phones and allow yourself to be fully present in the presence of God who is here in the Holy Spirit. Receive the fullness of what he has for your life; don't miss a drop of it! I'm going to share with you some very important theology today, okay? But this is far from being purely academic; this can powerfully alter your whole life and being.

Today is the day of Pentecost – it's the day that commemorates the Holy Spirit becoming available in the lives of believers; it marks the day that the presence of God took up residence in the lives of people, making our very physical bodies the new Temple. Pentecost is the event that restored the Spirit of God to the people of God.

On this 1,986th anniversary of that day (give or take a year or two), I'd like us to revisit that event and see what difference it makes in our church today. If we don't get what Pentecost is about, if we don't experience what happened at Pentecost, then this church might as well be a philanthropic club. We are nothing more than maybe a religious Rotary Club, or more likely a religious country club.

But we were created to be in a relationship with God and our purpose in this world is to show and to share the love of God with everyone. That's what this whole "Restored" series has been about. Your joy and purpose and meaning in life is found as you spend your life for God and for others. The more you spend your life on yourself, the less joy and purpose and meaning you have. The more you spend it on God and others, the more joy and peace and contentment you will get in your own life. And that's a hard thing to do; in fact, we can't do it in our own strength, but the Holy Spirit is the key to making it happen, and he is the key to joy and purpose and meaning in your life. The Holy Spirit unlocks the power to live that kind of life. The Holy Spirit is how God imputes, imparts, and implants what Jesus did for us on the cross into our lives.

First of all, I encourage you to read Acts chapters 1 & 2 today sometime. We don't have time to read those two chapters here, but it won't take you long to do it. In the meantime, let me summarize it.

Acts is literally part two of the Gospel story as it's told by Luke. Luke-Acts is really one story, written by Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, we get the story of Jesus: his birth, life, death, and resurrection. In Acts we see Jesus' final days with the disciples after his resurrection and before he ascends into heaven, then we see the Holy Spirit take over from there, and the Christian church is born and grows as God works in amazing ways and as people respond to the Holy Spirit working in the church.

So the story of Pentecost picks up in chapter one of Acts, with Jesus giving some last instructions to the disciples. In verses 4 and 5, Jesus says this:

"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5, niv)

Then the disciples ask some questions, about end-times dates and God's final Kingdom. But Jesus doesn't answer their questions; instead he calls them back to the *most important thing* as he answers:

“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” (Acts 1:7-9, niv)

I honestly don't know why so many believers spend so much time trying to predict whether we are in the end times or not, when Jesus made it so clear that we are instead to focus on being filled with God's Spirit and with introducing people to Jesus.

Anyway, thankfully the disciples obeyed and went into the upper room to wait and pray (and they also took care of a couple of minor organizational housekeeping things).

Now there's one more thing I want you to see in this before we jump in, and that is the significance of *why* God did this on the actual day of Pentecost. Pentecost was one of the ancient Jewish springtime festivals or feasts. The Jews celebrated Pentecost to commemorate God's giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Do you understand that? That was a key event in the life of the Jewish people – that God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses that would guide the Jewish people. The gift of the Ten Commandments helped people to know God better and obey him, but that was nothing compared to what would happen at the Pentecost in the book of Acts after Jesus had been resurrected. Where Jewish Pentecost was about the Law, Christian Pentecost would now be about the Spirit of Life who gives us the power and the ability to actually obey the Law and live life to the fullest.

Pentecost means “fifty” and takes place fifty days after Passover. We know by the Bible that Jesus was with the disciples for forty days after his resurrection. He was crucified on Passover. So simple math tells us that the disciples spent ten days together in prayer and spiritual conversation, waiting for what Jesus had promised them. God had good reason to keep them waiting, because at the end of those ten days, on the day of Pentecost, there would be thousands of people gathered at the Temple from all over the known world. So with all those people in one place, God gave them and us the...

1. Restored *Spirit*

Thanks to this event, our original God-breathed Spirit, the God-likeness that we were created with in the beginning, was restored.

We won't read every verse of chapter two, but I do want to read these first ones:

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven

and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2:1-4, niv)

Imagine that you are in that room – first, you hear the sound of a rushing wind. We read that, and we tend to think it was something like a gust of wind, like we have around here that blows down from Ellensburg and across the valley. But that’s not what it describes. I’ve never been in a tornado, and I don’t want to be! I have been praying for those who live in the Midwest and the South who have gone through so many tornados lately.

Have any of you been in a tornado? I’ve read that the wind that accompanies one sounds literally like a freight train going right over you. When you read this passage that says “rushing wind,” a tornado is what the original language means when it says they all heard it. The sound of the wind was so loud that all the thousands of people gathered outside at the Temple were shook by the noise too.

The word for “wind” in both the Hebrew – the language of the Old Testament (the word “ruah”), and the Greek – the language of the New Testament (the word “pneuma”), both of those words are translated three different ways: they can be “breath,” “wind,” and “spirit.” So in Genesis we read that God “breathed into” man’s nostrils the breath (or spirit) of life. (Genesis 2:7). We see this multiple times throughout the Bible that wind is a symbol for the Holy Spirit (e.g., Ezekiel 37:1-14). In the New Testament, Jesus made this connection when he said:

“The *wind* blows wherever it pleases...so it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8, niv)

So clearly, the sound of the rushing wind is to alert the disciples of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

But just in case the disciples were confused about what the sound of the wind might have meant, God also gave them the symbol of fire. God uses fire a lot in the Bible. He used the smoking firepot to seal his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:17). God appeared to Moses in a ___?___ burning bush (Exodus 19:18. See also 3:2 and 13:21-22; Psalm 104:4; Isaiah 66:15).

Something else: it was widely held in both Jewish and Greco-Roman writings of Luke’s day that fire was associated with prophetic inspiration, or being inspired to speak for God. So the fire that comes to rest above the heads of the disciples is God clearly saying that all of them – normal folks, men and women – were now being inspired by the Spirit of God to speak for God (see Numbers 11:29!).

These two signs were there to leave no doubt at all that these men and women were being filled the presence of God himself through his Spirit; they convey the awesomeness of the presence of God.

But if that wasn’t enough, there was a third thing that happened: we are told that the disciples began to speak in other tongues. Now, you might wonder what that means. There’s no doubt in this passage that the disciples all thought they were

speaking their own native language as they were telling people about Jesus, but what they were saying was being heard by all the people from all over the world in their own mother tongues.

So miraculously, the 120 believers were filled with the Spirit to share the Gospel in ways that the people listening would be able to hear it.

The Holy Spirit was restored to the disciples, and here is a key statement, church: the Holy Spirit is also restored to us – to empower us in both showing and speaking to other people the great news of God’s love in ways that they will understand.

I want to speak to longtime Nazarenes here, because this is important to us – being sanctified, or filled with the Holy Spirit. If you are an older adult, one of the things you were probably told if you grew up in the Nazarene Church is that we are sanctified so that we don’t have to struggle with sin anymore; that you should seek and get this filling of the Holy Spirit so that you’ll stop sinning, and you will be sanctified, which is true. But somehow we’ve come to think it means we are pickled and preserved until heaven. If that’s what you think, I need to correct you here: if you think sanctification or Spirit-filling is *only* so that you can stop sinning, you are missing the whole point! God gives us his Spirit and sanctifies us *so that we can be proclaimers of God’s love – by loving God and loving people!* Acts chapters one and two doesn’t say anywhere that we will receive the Holy Spirit so we can stop sinning (elsewhere in the New Testament, but not here), but we *are* told that we are filled with the Spirit so that we can receive power to be Jesus’ witnesses. Now listen to me carefully here, because I’m not saying the issue of sin isn’t dealt with at sanctification, because it is. But *holiness is not ultimately about the absence of sin; it’s about the presence of someone – the God of love who empowers you to love!*

True, a by-product of the Spirit is that sin loses its power over us, but that’s *not* the purpose. The purpose is that Spirit empowers you so that you can love God and love people.

Something else I want you to see church: there is nothing in the language of this story that says that the reception of the Holy Spirit is an *individual* event. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes upon *people*, not individuals. Luke concentrates on the Spirit being poured out on the *community* of believers. As they prayed together and sought Jesus together, the Spirit was poured out on them, and they had power *together* to demonstrate the Good News of God’s love. Does this sound like something we need to do, church? That is what it means to be the church – together proclaiming the Good News! And to make the point even further, that leads to...

2. Restored ***Proclamation***

The next thing we see is Peter standing up on behalf of the other disciples to preach to the crowd. Keep in mind that as he does this, the other disciples have been powerfully telling those around them about Jesus. In Acts 2:14-41 we get Peter’s first sermon, and let me tell you, it’s a great one.

I think I've told you this story before, but I can remember my first sermon. I was in college and a group of my friends and I went to Portland – we took a spring break from school and lived on the streets and in the shelters of downtown Portland. And we volunteered at the Portland Mission. At the mission, for homeless folks to get dinner, they had to sit through church first and listen to a sermon, and that's where I got to preach my first one – what I thought was a pretty good sermon. It was difficult though, because they were cooking dinner in the next room while I preached, so it smelled really good. Anyway afterward, as the people are waiting in line for dinner, one of the homeless guys walked up to me, and I was sure he was going to compliment my great sermon. He shook my hand and then said, "You sure talk a long time." I learned a valuable lesson that day: even a great sermon isn't great when it's too long and people are hungry. The sermon gets worse the hungrier you get, right? I think it works the same way if you're tired. So WAKE UP!

Well, Peter preached a great sermon. We don't have time to read it all, so again, I hope you will read it later today. What's written in Acts is probably shorter than what Peter actually preached, but we're given the main point of it. There are some things I want us to see in this. First, Peter does an amazing job of quoting the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is God (2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 110; Deuteronomy 21:23). But there is something else, too: remember that less than two weeks ago, before Jesus ascended, the disciples were asking Jesus about when his Kingdom would be set up, and Jesus told them to get their priorities straight? Well between then and this point, just a week and a half later, Peter figured that out, because he's preaching on the arrival of God's Kingdom, and he's using a very famous passage from the Old Testament prophet, Joel (Joel 2:28-32). It's a prophecy all about the end times. All the Jews would recognize it. Peter is using it to make the statement that the Kingdom of God isn't some far away end of the millennia thing in heaven; that it has arrived *here and now*. This is very important, folks. Christianity is not about being saved for heaven someday – "just hold on and don't screw up too badly before you die and you'll get to heaven." *Christianity is about bringing the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven.* We are to live out the love of the Kingdom of God, and do our best to bring the Kingdom of God where we live and to everyone we meet and know. So we live in peace, we live in love, we don't bad mouth and slander and gossip, we treat all people with love and respect no matter who they are or where they come from, because if the world is going to see that God is real and that there is hope for them today, they *must* see it in us. It won't do any good to tell them that "someday you get to go to heaven!" because they want to see if the Kingdom is real *now*. And that's what Peter and the disciples are preaching, and that's the Gospel you and I are restored in the Spirit to proclaim with confidence. That's why we are given the Holy Spirit! I had a professor who said this:

*The Spirit didn't come at Pentecost for the sake of the witnesses themselves, but for the sake of their proclamation for others! In Acts, the gift of the Spirit empowers prophetic mission rather than promotes personal piety!*¹

¹ Richard Thompson, *The New Beacon Bible Commentary: Acts, A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (The Foundry, Kansas City, MO 2016)

So the disciples spent time in prayer, seeking Jesus, and the Spirit suddenly filled them all as a community in such a powerful way that they could communicate the Good News of God's Love in ways that others could understand it. We are here as a church, a community of believers to proclaim the love of God in Christ to our neighborhood! The Spirit filled the disciples so that they could carry on the work of Jesus with God's presence right there with and in them. He didn't fill them for their own sakes, but so that they could better follow Jesus and show the love of God to others. We are restored to proclaim the Good News!

Do you really want to spend your life just marking time? Or do you want to be sold out, all out, seeking Jesus and bringing the very heaven of God right here on earth, loving people and showing and sharing God's love with them? What do you want to your life to count for: sitting in church, attending Bible studies, or seeing transformational miracles happen all around you in the world, as you bring the Kingdom of God?

You see, *we don't seek church for our sake; we seek Jesus for the world's sake!* That's why we come together, but too often we are distracted and then just drive off without getting the fullness of the Spirit!

But here's the amazing thing: when we seek Jesus for other's sake, instead of seeking church to be for our sake, THAT'S when we become the church! Finally on this Pentecost Sunday, see...

3. Restored *Unity*

Luke brings this part of the story to a close by giving a broad over-view of first-century church life. And here's a clue if you plan to read the rest of Acts (and you should!) – Luke is giving a foreshadowing of what the Spirit can restore to the church *today*. Luke is giving us a picture of what God wants the community of believers to look like *today*. This is what Jesus died to create, and this is what the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost to empower. So let me read the description, and as I read it, I want to ask you to judge yourself. Ask yourself, “Am I acting in these ways toward my brothers and sisters in Christ?” Okay? Would you stand with me as I read? This is the description:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47, niv)

The church was restored to passionate unity. They were devoted! That means wholeheartedly, it was their primary motivation and ambition and goal. And as a result, many, many people joined in with them and came to faith.

Would you be willing to die to protect the unity of your church? They did. Or would you just say, "Oh well – they're doing something I don't like, so I'll just go join another church." The disciples were devoted to Scripture and to one another. In other words, their bond toward one another in Christ was as valuable to them as the Word of God itself. And why not: every true believer in church has the very presence of God the Holy Spirit within them; of course we should treat each other well! The early church shared communion and meals together, and they were devoted to praying together. How often do you pray together with people in church? I don't mean that you sit there while one of our pastors prays. I mean in your home as a couple. Or do you get with a friend and pray, and your friend prays, and you pray some more, and your friend prays some more? This passage doesn't say they were devoted to a Sunday School class or Bible Study. This says they were devoted to praying *together* – they loved it and couldn't wait to do it again.

Guess what that kind of restored unity produces: such a powerful display of the presence of God among them that outside people couldn't deny it and couldn't wait to join them.

Do you want to see God move in power in our church? He's the same God. We say we believe in the filling of the Holy Spirit. We say we are a church of Jesus Christ. Then let's pray and seek Christ so that the Spirit might be poured out on our church, filling us so that the Gospel could be proclaimed boldly through our lives and language, and let's be a church that is passionate about our unity.

We are going to pray together, and I encourage you to pray this in your home and in your small group, too: that the Spirit will be restored in our lives, that the Gospel will be lived out and proclaimed boldly by us as a church, and that we will live in fully restored unity with each other, so that together we may go live out the Good News in our world!

Pray