

Empowered

Acts 2:1-41

Last week was Pentecost Sunday, we started a new series looking at the book of Acts, the church on a mission. It might have been nice to preach this sermon last week but the plan didn't work that way.

I wonder what image comes into your mind when you hear the word Pentecostal. I remember when I was in my early teens being all very suspicious of those weird Pentecostal people who went to the church down the road and believed weird things, they were all a bit fanatical, and got up to some pretty weird stuff. I didn't really know what it was that they did that was weird, but it involved not being in control of themselves (so I heard, from I don't remember who). They spoke in tongues. They shouted. They prophesied. They were slain in the Spirit. They danced in the aisles. Dancing at church – what will they think of next.

My first positive and/or should I say informed experience of those weird Pentecostals was in my later teens in the midst of the charismatic movement. When the youth group I was part of encountered the Holy Spirit in a way that showed me he was real. I didn't necessarily understand it all, but it did open my mind to some new ways of God.

I bet there are some stories here about when people first experienced the move of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost Is a Biblical Word

Depending on your church background, will determine what your response to the term Pentecostal is. Some of you may not have even heard of the term, but the word Pentecostal has deep roots in the Bible. In fact, the biblical term is Pentecost and it is simply Greek for 50th.

It's found several places in the New Testament, most notably and most importantly in Acts 2:1 which is where we are reading from today and it reads, *"Now when the day of Pentecost had come."* The way it reads makes it sound like a holiday, like 'now when Anzac day had come', which is actually exactly what it was.

If you go back and read the Old Testament, you will discover that Pentecost was one of the Jewish feast days. Only they didn't call it Pentecost. That's the Greek name, not the Hebrew name. The Jews called it the Feast of Harvest or

the Feast of Weeks. It was the celebration of the beginning of the early weeks of harvest.

Today Pentecost is celebrated as the birth-day of the church. In the sense that what happened on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is an unrepeatable event in exactly the same sense that the day of your birth is unrepeatable. But just as there is a faint resemblance between the way you looked when you were born and the way you look now, there is a resemblance between the churches of today and the church that was founded on the day of Pentecost.

Photos of me

There are some who say the church should still be like it was in Acts. Not necessarily – people change as they grow up and so do churches. However there should be things that are still recognisable.

And that is what I want to look at today, what does it mean to be a pentecostal church, it not a denomination thing, and it's not just a tongues thing, it's not just a "They do weird stuff", or they believe in the Holy spirit, implying others don't.

A true pentecostal church is the one which reflects the marks of the church which was born that day, on the day of pentecost.

What are the marks of a truly pentecostal church?

1. The truly pentecostal church is a united church.

"And when the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place." Acts 2:1.

The King James says, **"They were all together with one accord."** The first mark of the Pentecostal church is unity. "With one accord" means they were all singing the same chord together. They were all hitting the same notes. They were all singing the same tune. It means that there were no private harmonies. No off-the-wall lyrics. It means that they were like one mighty chorus all together.

In case we miss it, Luke explains that unity in Acts 2:44-46:

"And the believers were together and had all things in common. Selling their possessions and their goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

Matt is going to talk more about this passage next week. This is a wonderful picture of what the early church was like. They were together so much that they took their money and brought it together. They sold their possessions and brought the money and put it together. They took the things they owned and everybody had things jointly owned together. It's an amazing picture. But did you notice what else they did? In the early church the mark of their unity was that they ate together. They cooked their meals together.

This is no small point. Eating together is one mark of a true unity. The fact that hospitality is a dying practice not only in the church but in our culture is a real problem.

It's not just an anthropological fact that people like to eat together. It's not just a gastronomic reality. It is also a biblical truth. Right here in the earliest days of the church the church ate together. Yes this could be a bit simplistic, but let me suggest to you that the church that eats together will stay together, will play together, will pray together, will grow together in every sense of the word. Bring back hospitality, sadly it seems to be a dying practice.

Then if we carry on in verse 47? It shows what happens when the people of God live this way. *"The Lord was adding to their number day by day people who were being saved."*

We are dealing here with something very crucial. We live in a world full of hurting people. They are living in a fractured, fragmented society. There are people who stay by themselves and to themselves and lock their doors 3 different ways at night. If they can find a place where they can come in, be themselves and be loved and accepted, they will stay forever. A united church is a truly pentecostal church

2. A truly pentecostal church is a Spirit-filled church.

This is the part we all know about. The second mark of the pentecostal church is that it is Spirit-filled. Acts 2:4 reads, *"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."*

It is so easy to go to extremes on this. It's easy to get all wrapped up in the Holy Spirit and the outward signs; and it's also easy to ignore the Holy Spirit altogether. One extreme is to look at the spectacular phenomena that happened that day and to focus on them—on the sound of the mighty rushing

wind, on the tongues of fire, on the speaking in tongues. Some people even build an entire theology around those things.

But it is just as dangerous on the other extreme. We may easily ignore the work of the Holy Spirit. I know many people who come to churches like ours because they fear certain strange things that happen in other churches. They think if they come to the Baptists they will be safe. They want to ignore or downplay the work of the Holy Spirit. What a tragic mistake.

When we come to a passage like Acts 2 we have to make a clear distinction between the signs and the event itself. The sound, the fire and the tongues were signs which pointed to an event.

What was the event? **The event was the arrival of the Holy Spirit to earth to enter the lives of men and women.** That was the great event. The signs are God's way of announcing the great event. The signs just point to the event. They are a means to an end, not the end itself. It is very dangerous to build your theology around the signs. There is a difference between that which is essential and that which is incidental. Tongues are incidental but the coming of the Holy Spirit is essential. If you focus on the signs, you miss the whole point.

There were many different signs but primarily they went from cowards to missionaries.

- It was the coming of the Holy Spirit that transformed Peter the denier, into Peter the preacher.
- It was the coming of the Holy Spirit that took Thomas the doubter and turned him into Thomas the missionary.

It was the coming of the Holy Spirit which took those cowardly, fearful, doubting, hesitant disciples and made them flaming evangelists for Jesus Christ who were ready to lay down their lives for him.

So if a Pentecostal church is Spirit filled church, how do you get Spirit-filled churches?

It's not as hard as you think. You fill them up with Spirit-filled Christians!!

And how do you get to be a Spirit-filled Christian? I don't have any formulas to give you but I will tell you this. It's been my experience that whenever you get really hungry for the genuine work of God in your life, you will be filled with his Spirit and God will empower you to serve him. Our greatest need is to

know how great our need really is. Those people who have no need of the Holy Spirit will find a way to live without him. Those Christians who are really hungry for his reality will be filled.

So, I recommend to you personally and to this church, not just the study of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (yes we need to learn our faith) but I suggest to you a determined seeking to know His infilling and hunger for a work of God in your life. That is the second mark of the truly pentecostal church.

3. The truly pentecostal church is a witnessing church.

Notice how Luke puts the matter in verse 11. The disciples were proclaiming “the wonders of God.” And in verse 22 Peter begins to preach the first great gospel sermon, at the end of which 3000 people were saved.

Here is the big question:

What happens in your life when the Holy Spirit takes control?

How will you know you are truly Spirit-filled? Will you speak in tongues? Will you be healed? What will happen? The New Testament suggests a number of answers to that question. But one answer stands out above all the rest. It is the great evidence that you have truly been filled with the Holy Spirit.

When you are truly filled with the Spirit, **you will be witnesses**. Look back at Acts 1:8. This is Jesus speaking.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 2 – the whole thing of that first experience of Tongues was about witnessing.

⁶ When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷ They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, ⁸ and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! ...

...¹¹ And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” ¹² They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

And Acts 4:31.

³¹ After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

That’s a pattern you find repeated throughout the book of Acts. As the believers are filled with the Spirit, they begin to share Christ openly. It happens in Acts 1, 2, and 4, it happens to Stephen in Acts 6, and to Paul in Acts 13.

Let me state it very clearly: **When the Holy Spirit fills your life, it is primarily for the sake of others! To love, to serve, to witness.** Sometimes we get it all backwards. We talk as if the filling of the Holy Spirit is primarily to help us feel better about ourselves. And we pray to be filled so that we will live more abundantly or walk with God more closely, or experience this or that. Those things are not wrong, but they are by-products of the Spirit-filled life. God fills you with the Holy Spirit so that you will share the love of Christ!

4. The pentecostal church is a harvesting church.

Look with me at Acts 2:9-11. These are the verses that you probably skipped over in your quiet time. They tell us who showed up in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

“Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

Luke makes a circular list starting from the east and going north, then west, then southwest, then southeast. He is trying to show us that on the Day of Pentecost people were in Jerusalem from everywhere. Why? Because it was a pilgrim feast. Jewish men and women came from everywhere.

What happened in Acts 2 was not a coincidence. It happened on the Day of Pentecost for a purpose. What happened on the Day of Pentecost? We read in verse 41,

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to their number that day.”

On the birthday of the church, on the day the church was formed, 3000 people joined. Wouldn’t that be nice? A church membership increase of 3000. Then

notice verse 47, *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

Who were the first missionaries in the Christian church? They were those people I just mentioned a second ago. Those Parthians, those Medes, those Cappadocians, those Romans, those Cretans, those Arabs, those Mesopotamians, those men who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. They were the ones who heard the preaching of the gospel by Peter. They were the 3000 who got saved. And after they got saved, they went back to Crete, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Rome, and all points of the compass, and through them the seeds of the church were sewn all over the Roman Empire so that within one generation the early church had evangelized the whole Roman Empire.

This is not a coincidence. Those brand-new believers were lay missionaries and as they went back to their home countries, they spread the good news of Jesus Christ. The seed from Pentecost was sown in thousands of cities, towns and villages as men and women moved from place to place.

Conclusion

Now let me bring it all together. Last week was Pentecost. Pentecost is not just about the birthday of the Christian church. It is that, but it's more than that. It is not just about the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven. It is that, but it's more than that.

The day of Pentecost is about the beginning of God's great worldwide harvest of men and women for his kingdom. It's an integral part of God's big story.

In Acts 2, the church was born in the midst of a mini world-wide harvest as men and women came from every nation and were saved under the preaching of Peter. Three thousand were saved in one day.

That was the beginning. Revelation 7 tells us the end of the story.

At the second coming of Christ, we see this vast assembly of people from all over the world standing before the throne. There is a harvest at the beginning and a harvest at the end. In between the church of Jesus Christ is God's harvest vehicle. That's what Pentecost is all about.

That's what it means to be a truly pentecostal church. We are to be united, Spirit-filled, witnessing and harvesting everywhere we go. May God help us, after 2000 years, to finally become like the church as it was in the beginning?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, what a pleasure it is to meet in this building. How good it is to see each other and to pray and to be encouraged. But, Lord, right outside these doors, men die because they do not know you. Oh, God, forgive us for our complacency. Forgive us for our unconcern. We know what we must do. Now give us hearts and minds to do it that we might follow you out into the harvest fields of this world. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Lord of the harvest. AMEN.