

Pentecost Sunday 2014

Video clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lofMrKydR3Q>

Acts 2:1-7

2 On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

5 At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. 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.

There once was a church in need of a new pastor, the old one had reached that age when he could finally be put out to pasture. They farewelled him, sung "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow", told nice stories about him and gave him a new fishing rod with instructions on how to get lost in the wilderness. And he went on his way.

Then they set up a pastoral call committee and started the process to look for a new pastor. The first meeting of the new search committee was chaired by an enthusiastic woman of the church who impressed upon the group that in looking for a new pastor they were charting their church's destiny. God was depending on them to put all other agendas in their lives aside to focus on this God-given task; and heaven help them if they didn't rise to the occasion. She did such a superb job that four members of the committee resigned on the spot.

So she quickly backpedalled. What she really meant to say was that she hoped they would do their best and work around the busyness of their lives. While the others who remained were still tentative they stayed on to consider the next item on the agenda. "*What do you want in a new pastor?*"

There was great participation at that discussion. Every last person spoke with a voice of authority on the subject and the minute taker for the evening noted all their points on a whiteboard until an image began to emerge. Then they all agreed to some modifications since Jesus was not available for a call.

Then, it was suppertime and, while refreshing themselves for the task at hand, some started talking about their former pastor. "You know, after all is said and done he really was a pretty good guy. But we took advantage of him. We let him carry a huge load. Whenever things needed doing, we generally left it up to him."

One by one the others voiced similar sentiments. And it was as if they experienced some heavenly revelation. Suddenly it came to them that they would never ever expect everything to come from their minister again. They would take their responsibility from now on and play their part in helping to lead their church. And the more they thought about it, the warmer their hearts became not only toward their old pastor but to one another as well. And the more they talked about it, the more enthusiastic they became until their voices became like a rush of mighty wind filling the room.

Word of this great moment quickly spread to the entire congregation. And there was a great and most spontaneous "Amen!" to this new spirit. "Find us a pastor and things will be different this time," everyone said. And the search began.

Now, it was shortly after this that a group of concerned Christians asked the church make SUBMISSIONS TO WORKING PARTY ON ISSUES OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE. It was a matter of truth and righteousness, to stop the values of the world from infiltrating the church and they thought the church would naturally have something to say about that. So the church held a meeting about it and discussed the controversial matter at great length. Then someone said, "Let's table the matter for now until the new pastor gets here. Let him or her decide."

No, that story was not told to put you all on a guilt trip about not doing your share, although yes there are times that I feel people think I should have all the answers and carry all the responsibility, but as I said that is not the point of this story...

Today is Pentecost Sunday and one of the things to notice about the sudden outpouring of God's grace on the day of Pentecost is that it was a very *inclusive* moment. That is the point of the story! Unlike other moments in the history of God's powerful interventions in human history - like Jesus' birth, his baptism or his transfiguration - where only a few people were witnesses of what happened, everyone was included at Pentecost. The wind blew and tongues of fire come to rest upon each and every one of the disciples who were gathered together, and a moment later the huge crowd gathered outside the house comes surging forward because

...each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

And just to make sure that even the slowest among us doesn't miss his point that this is for everyone, Luke lists all the nations of the Greco-Roman Diaspora who were represented there that day.

What happened at Pentecost was no mystical, internal, personal experience of the Spirit. Pentecost was a public outpouring of God's power that touched every life that was present.

Even Peter. The one who at the last time Jesus met with his friends, was saying, "No matter if everyone else does a runner, when things get tough, I'll be right there behind you, Jesus."

When things got tough for Jesus, Peter was behind Jesus all right, a long way behind him! Like everybody else, he ran away into the darkness. "Weren't you with that group from Galilee?" somebody asked him outside of Herod's palace and Peter couldn't deny Jesus fast enough.

But Peter, on the day of Pentecost, was out in front of everybody speaking to the crowd of people! Peter, the one who could never seem to get one foot out of his mouth without exchanging it for another. The one who denied having known Jesus - preaching about Jesus to a crowd in Jerusalem!

Whether it was the best sermon he ever preached I don't know, but it certainly seems to have been one of the most effective. It only lasted about three minutes, but about three thousand people got saved by it. (Do you think there is something I could learn there?) The Holy Spirit was given to a very ordinary man and it turned him into a preacher just like that. And he didn't even go to Bible College!

Remember what Jesus said when he preached his first sermon back in Nazareth?

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..."

Remember, he had just been baptised, been out in the desert for 40 days, praying, fasting, being challenged, tempted and he come back from the desert filled with the Holy Spirits power...

Luke 4:14-21

¹⁴ Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. ¹⁵ He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. ¹⁷ The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

*¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
¹⁹ and that the time of the LORD's favour has come."*

²⁰ He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. ²¹ Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

When people are filled with Holy Spirit, all sorts of interesting stuff can happen, and let's face it, sometimes it is strange stuff, sometimes amazing stuff, miraculous stuff, but while I would never want to try and put the Holy Spirit in a box, according to Luke in this passage, and what Luke wrote in the Book of Acts, it seems that primarily people receive the Holy Spirit in order to speak up publicly so that everybody can hear. The Holy Spirit is primarily given to empower people to witness.

Acts 1:8

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."

Now as you know, I talk for a living. Some would say I have been talking non-stop since the day I was born. Those of you who remember Bob Alcorn, apparently when I was aged 2 I used to go next door to his place and talk to him and he said "boy you talk so much I believe you will be a preacher!

Some people say that public speaking is one of the scariest things. I recently read a poll that said that public speaking is scarier than being buried alive. Sure, I thought. Because being buried alive at least would be private. No audience to watch you writhe!

I don't fear public speaking, I am lucky enough not to get overly nervous but I must admit I find the responsibility of speaking a "Word from God" daunting. It is scary, imagine the nerve, imagine the boldness of saying, "Thus saith the Lord". Oh at times I think I pull together a good, solid and occasionally inspirational message, people really like it, but is it a Word from God? That is a huge claim and I often feel inadequate.

I sometimes think that's one of the reasons the some churches use robes to wear, a funny kind of armour to help us appear more "godly/holy". They give us a pulpit to stand behind, which we can duck behind if necessary! You could argue the only thing that would make a sane person put himself or herself at such a position is the Spirit of God.

I guess what I would like to say is if I can do it, with the help of the Holy Spirit, you can do it. That's got to be one of the most important lessons of Pentecost. If people like me can do it, people like Peter can do it, then people like you can do it too. You don't have to wear robes to do it; and you certainly don't have to do it from a pulpit. You might be on the phone to somebody who is feeling that life is getting on top of them. What on earth do you say to someone like that? It's a scary thing, isn't it? But...

The Spirit of the Lord... is upon me to bring good news to the poor...

Or you find out somebody's marriage has just come to an end. What possible comfort could you offer somebody like that?

The Spirit of the Lord ... is upon me... to bind up the broken-hearted...

Or somebody who thinks she has nobody finds also that she has nowhere to turn.

The Spirit of the Lord... is upon me ... proclaim that captives will be released...

That's what Pentecost is about as much as it is about anybody speaking from a pulpit or speaking in strange languages.

- It's the very public speech ordinary people like you and me find ourselves giving to others, because even though we didn't know how we were going to do it, the Holy Spirit descends and gives us the power to speak.
- It is what the prophet Joel meant when he said that in former days God's word was given only to prophets, a few charismatic leader types who managed to speak up for God. But he said that a day would come when

God said,

"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."

- Everybody gets to speak up for God; because the Kingdom of God is the place where the power to speak belongs, not just to a few, but to all.

Pentecost is a pregnant moment in the life of the people of God. Something has been promised. Something had been stirring for some time. Suddenly, at Pentecost - new life bursts forth in the most unlikely of places - in the midst of a group of frightened but ordinary men and women.

Pentecost is the day that the friends of Jesus became religious enthusiasts. For the first time in their lives they found themselves saying and doing things they never thought possible. Jesus had promised that he would indeed send them such power "from above" but nothing could have prepared them for the magnificent outpouring of God's grace that the day of Pentecost became.

Let me conclude with a question. Gay raised this issue recently when we were talking about upcoming Pentecost and the low profile it holds in many churches.

The question is this: If we had to forego the celebration of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter or Pentecost, which one would seem the least crucial?

When Gay raised it, I said, Christmas and Easter are way more significant. I'm guessing that most of us would have a tough time picturing a year with no Christmas, no Good Friday or no Easter. I think most Christians would probably say, "Well, if I must choose, I can do without Pentecost."

As I have prepared for this service my mind has been challenged and changed. As we consider the significance of Pentecost, the bottom line is that without Pentecost the other three would not be celebrated at all!

- There could not be a Good Friday without the coming of Christ which we celebrate at Christmas.
- Good Friday would have been a meaningless martyrdom without the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ which we celebrate at Easter.
- But it is Pentecost that enables the gift of faith by which you and I can know that the birth, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are for us!

Read

1 Cor 2:10-12

¹⁰ God's Spirit has shown you everything. His Spirit finds out everything, even what is deep in the mind of God. ¹¹ You are the only one who knows what is in your own mind, and God's Spirit is the only one who knows what is in God's mind. ¹² But God has given us his Spirit. That's why we don't think the same way that the people of this world think. That's also why we can recognize the blessings that God has given us.