

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, July 25, 2010**

**NINE O’CLOCK IN THE MORNING:
PETER AT PENTECOST**

Acts 2:1-21

PRELUDE TO PENTECOST

So far we have seen many scenes in the life of Simon Peter, including his first encounter with Jesus when his brother Andrew brought him to meet Jesus, as well as the unforgettable night on the Sea of Galilee when Peter actually got out of the boat and walked on the water. Last Sunday we looked at Peter’s encounter with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, following the resurrection, when Jesus, the Lord of second chances, demonstrated His amazing grace by restoring and recommissioning Peter to leadership as one of His apostles, after Peter had previously denied even knowing Jesus three times.

Today we turn our attention to Peter at Pentecost. In doing so, we jump from the Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus to the Book of Acts. In the interim between the passage we looked at last Sunday in John 21 and today’s Scripture text in Acts 2, here is what took place:

Over a period of forty days following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers a number of times, on one occasion appearing to more than 500 at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). During those forty days, Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28, the charge to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all” of His commands (28:19-20).

In addition, Jesus gave His disciples another command, along with a promise, in Acts 1. The command is found in Acts 1:4: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.” The promised gift was the Holy Spirit Himself, with whom the followers of Christ would soon be baptized (1:5) and whose power they would receive to bear witness to the whole world (1:8) that Jesus truly is the promised Messiah, the Son of God and Savior of sinners.

Luke (the writer of the Book of Acts) then goes on to describe the ascension of Jesus into heaven (1:9), along with the promise, communicated to the watching disciples by two angelic beings, of His eventual return. They said in verse 11: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.”

Following the ascension, the disciples did what Jesus told them to do. They followed orders. They stayed in Jerusalem. They waited. And prayed (1:14). They chose a disciple named Matthias to take the place of Judas as an apostle and witness with them of Christ’s sufferings and resurrection (1:15-26).

All of this is a prelude to what took place in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, which is described in Acts 2. So let's look together at God's Word found in Acts 2:1-21. Our VBS children learned this last week that God's word is true, God's Word gives comfort, God's Word is full of surprises, God's Word changes lives, and God's Word is for everyone. It is all of these things and more. So, let's give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God's holy Word.

The Day of Pentecost holds special meaning and significance for Christians because of what happened that day in Jerusalem. But Pentecost was not originally a Christian "holy day." It was a Jewish festival with origins in the Old Testament. Pentecost, which means "fiftieth" in Hebrew, took place fifty days after the Jewish Passover. In the Old Testament, it was known as the Feast of Weeks (occurring seven weeks after the Passover). It was a time of thanksgiving which marked the end of the grain harvest. By the time of Jesus, in the 1st century A. D., it had become mainly a commemoration of the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. It was one of three annual pilgrim festivals that every adult male in Israel was to attend. As a result, there were lots of pilgrims in Jerusalem for the observance of Pentecost. Just as huge crowds of people from all over America fill the National Mall in Washington every year on the fourth of July to celebrate our nation's birthday, thousands of Jews from all over the world had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. And it was on Pentecost, fifty days after His resurrection, that Jesus fulfilled His promise to send the Holy Spirit in power into the lives of His followers. It was on Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, that the church was born.

I want to divide this passage into three parts today:

- 1) What Happened at Pentecost (2:1-4)
- 2) The Crowd's Reaction (2:5-11)
- 3) Peter's Explanation (2:14-21)

1. WHAT HAPPENED AT PENTECOST

Let's look first at what actually happened at Pentecost. To say what occurred that day was surprising is a major understatement. It is not the sort of thing that happens every day.

First, there was a noise that sounded like a hurricane-force blast of wind blowing through the place where the followers of Christ, probably about 120 of them, were meeting. I'm pretty confident it did *not* sound like vuvuzelas blaring at the World Cup in South Africa, which annoyed soccer fans around the world! This sound of a mighty, rushing wind got their attention like an air-raid siren or a fire siren.

For three summers when I was in college, I worked at a hotel at Chautauqua, NY, which is a lakeside cultural resort in western New York. Each of those summers I lived in a dormitory right next to the fire station. One summer, right outside the window of my dorm room was the fire siren. When the siren went off, especially if it went off at night, my roommate and I knew it. It got our attention.

The sound of wind that signaled the coming of the Holy Spirit got the attention of all the believers as they met together that morning. And it got the attention of a lot of Pentecost pilgrims as well. They heard the sound, and wondered what it meant.

Along with the sound of wind, there was fire, tongues of fire which came to rest on the heads of the believers, a visual symbol of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them.

Third, as if the wind and fire weren't enough, these 120 followers of the Lord Jesus began to speak in the languages of the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem from all over the Greek and Roman world. They were not babbling incoherently. They were not making unintelligible sounds like a baby. They were speaking real languages. They were speaking languages they had never learned. Can you imagine opening your mouth and beginning to speak fluently in a language you have never studied or learned? It was a supernatural gift, a gift from God the Holy Spirit Himself. And it was a sign that something supernatural was happening.

The wind, fire and languages attracted a crowd (2:6). They were both amazed and bewildered by what they saw and heard. Not only was it the wind and the fire, but here were a bunch of uneducated, unsophisticated hicks from Galilee speaking of God and His greatness, not in Hebrew or Aramaic, not in Greek or Latin, but in the languages and dialects of the pilgrims themselves.

That, in brief, is what happened. It is safe to say this Pentecost was unlike any other they had ever experienced.

2. THE REACTION OF THE CROWD

The crowd, as we have already noted, was bewildered. They were puzzled by what was happening. They were confused and perplexed by it all. At the same time, they were amazed at what they saw and heard. They were astonished by the wind and fire and languages.

They compared notes with one another and discovered that, regardless of where they were from and what language or dialect they spoke, they all heard the believers "declaring the wonders of God in (their) own tongues" (2:11). No one was left out. But they didn't know how to explain it. And their inquiring minds wanted to know.

As is often the case when something extraordinary is happening, there were some in the crowd – at least a few – who began making fun of them. Imagine what someone like Bill Maher might have said if he had been there! Suggesting that the disciples may have had too much to drink would likely be the kindest thing he would have to say.

John Piper points out what was true then and is still true in our day, which is that not everybody gets it, not everybody understands and approves of it, when God acts in a dramatic, unexpected, out-of-the-box way, as He did at Pentecost. When God acts in His sovereignty to bring revival to His church, when the Holy Spirit moves mysteriously and powerfully to bring sinners to saving faith, not everybody is on board with what He is doing. Some don't

understand it. Some people don't like it. And some people oppose it. Because, at root, they oppose God.

If you ever find yourself opposing God, repent immediately, without wasting a single moment. To oppose God, or to criticize or make fun of what God is doing in a person's life, has serious and dangerous consequences.

The reaction of the crowd that day? They were amazed. They were puzzled. They were curious. They were confused. They were astonished. And some were cynical, too.

3. PETER'S EXPLANATION

Then Peter stepped forward as the spokesman for the apostles. The events and phenomena Luke has described in verses 1-13, Peter now proceeds to explain.

The first thing he says is that the band of believers is not drunk. I suppose there may be a lot of things in life that can be blamed on too much wine (or other adult beverages), but not this. If you consume too much alcohol, there can be all kinds of negative consequences. And the Bible cautions against getting drunk. In Ephesians 5:18, for example, Paul says: "Don't get drunk on wine. It leads to debauchery (self-indulgence) and cheapens your life." Then he goes on to say: "Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit." Being filled with the Holy Spirit doesn't cheapen your life. It doesn't lead to a feeling of disorientation or to decisions you will regret. Instead, the Holy Spirit enriches your life. The Holy Spirit gives guidance and strength and power to your life.

Francois Fenelon, the 17th century Christian writer, observed that there are different kinds of drunkenness. In addition to being drunk with wine, he says, there is the drunkenness of pride, the drunkenness of anger and bitterness and vengeance and greed, which do not bring about the kind of righteous life God desires (James 1:20). But being filled with the Holy Spirit is a whole different ball game.

Peter said: "These people are not drunk, as you suppose. They are not drunk with wine – it is way too early in the day for that! It is only nine o'clock in the morning. Nobody in their right mind starts drinking this early in the day. It is not wine, it is the Holy Spirit, whom God promised long ago to send upon His people" (2:15-16, paraphrased).

Peter explains it by saying it is what the prophet Joel had said would happen (and what Jesus Himself promised before His ascension into heaven). In the words of John Stott, "The extraordinary phenomenon of Spirit-filled believers declaring God's wonders in foreign languages is the fulfillment of Joel's prediction (hundreds of years earlier) that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh." What Joel had prophesied, said Peter, is what was now taking place on the Day of Pentecost. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all of God's people, on men and women, young and old alike.

Do you remember what took place in Genesis 11, when men decided to build "a tower that reaches to the heavens" (11:4) as a monument to themselves? At that time, the Bible says,

“the whole world had one language and a common speech” (11:1). Everybody spoke the same language. Everybody could understand everybody else. But God was not pleased with their attempt to exalt themselves. And God thwarted their efforts. They never finished the tower. The place was called Babel, because God confused their language and proceeded to scatter the people over the face of the earth (11:9). At Babel, human language was confused so that people could not understand each other.

What happened at Pentecost reversed the curse of Babel. Instead of confusing languages, God gave the disciples the supernatural ability to speak and communicate in the languages of all the pilgrims in Jerusalem as a sign that He is sovereign, and that He was up to something big in giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church.

APPLICATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TODAY?

You may say: All these things took place a long time ago. What does what happened at Pentecost have to do with my life today? It is a fair question. Here is the answer: The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, is God’s gift of Himself to the church. He is God’s gift to you and me. He is God’s gift to every believer, to all of His children, including us today.

If you have given your life to the Lord Jesus in faith, if you have put your trust in Him as Savior and Lord of your life, the Holy Spirit has been given to you. Did you know that? The Holy Spirit is not only *with* you. He is not just *alongside* you. He is *in* you. He has taken up residence in your life.

God wants you and me to be filled with the Holy Spirit just like the believers in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Do you know what that means? It does not mean that we should expect to hear the sound of a rushing wind, or feel the earth move under our feet. It does not mean that we should expect to see tongues of fire in our midst, or to suddenly begin speaking languages we have never learned, though God might choose to do any or all of these. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not primarily about signs and wonders like these.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that you and I allow Him to occupy and control every area of our lives. So, the question is not so much, “How much of the Holy Spirit do you have?” It is more, “How much of you does the Holy Spirit have?”

In a sense, the Holy Spirit is like Alka-Seltzer. (This is an illustration I learned from James Emery White.) If I drop a packet of Alka-Seltzer, unopened, with the wrapper still on it, into a glass of water, what happens? Nothing. Except that the wrapper gets wet. But if I take another packet, unseal it and drop it into a glass of water, what happens? Plop, plop, fizz, fizz. The Alka-Seltzer gets dissolved and diffused and integrated into the water.

As White says, both glasses have the Alka-Seltzer, just as all Christians have received the Holy Spirit. But notice how you can have the Holy Spirit and still not be filled with the Spirit.

God's will for you and me is to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that He can use us in our world today in the same way that He used ordinary people, like Peter and the other believers, in extraordinary ways, beginning at Pentecost, to turn their world right-side up with the message of the saving love and power of Jesus. Just as you've got to get the Alka-Seltzer out of the wrapper if it is to do any good, we've got to live our lives in such a way that we don't hinder or inhibit the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us. And through us.

The Holy Spirit who came upon the believers at Pentecost is still at work in the church, still at work in the lives of believers today. Let the Holy Spirit have all of you, and then watch and see what He will do.

Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.