

Sermon Title: Come, Holy Spirit
Pentecost 2018

by David Hockett
Acts 2:1-21

Today people of various nations and tribes, languages and cultures, from all over the world gather to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Church at Pentecost. We remember that Christ promised his first disciples, and us, that he would never leave or forsake us and that we could trust in his constant and abiding presence with the Church. Because of Pentecost we know that Christ continues to be present with us in a very intimate, powerful and uncontrollable and sometimes unpredictable way - through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Many of you have probably heard this story before. Jesus has ascended to be with the Father, Peter has just preached a powerful sermon bearing witness to the resurrection, and the disciples have selected a replacement for Judas. The Church, the gathered community of those who were following the way of Jesus, were all gathered in one place, gathered for worship and fellowship. They are frightened and uncertain of their future. The way forward may not be so clear now that Jesus is no longer physically present with them to guide and direct and lead. I'm sure there were internal debates going on about what to do next. How will we order ourselves, who will lead us, what is our mission, how are we going to pay for this, we're such a small group with little power and few resources, how can we possibly continue the way of Jesus considering how demanding and unrealistic it seems. I'll bet some even said, "I think I'll go back to fishing or tax collecting." That seems safe, familiar, comfortable.

Only "...suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages.....They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, "What does this mean?" Others jeered at them, saying, "They're drunk!" Peter stood with the other apostles. He raised his voice and declared, "Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! These people aren't drunk, as you suspect;....Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy*

*Your young will see visions.
Your elders will dream dreams.*

*Even upon my servants, men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below...*

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

“I will pour out my Spirit.” What a powerful experience of God’s presence. Just as the Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos and brought forth order and light. Just as the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism and dwelled with him throughout his earthly ministry, so in Pentecost, the Spirit is poured out upon the Church, poured out on us empowering us for ministry and meaning that Jesus is with us always.

We cannot be Christian without being a disciple of Jesus and Jesus calls us to live and teach and serve and love like him. He calls us to take up his mission in the world, not to do our own thing, or to make the Church what we’d like it to be or are comfortable with, but to follow him, to be a sign pointing to God’s coming reign by going out into the world and joining Christ’s mission of...

*bringing good news to the poor,
binding up the brokenhearted,
proclaiming release for captives,
and liberation for prisoners,
proclaiming the year of the LORD’s favor
and a day of vindication for our God,
and by comforting all who mourn,... (Isaiah 61)*

And Jesus says, to make it possible for you to live in this way, to be my Church, to be my body given for the life and salvation of the world I’m going to give you what you need most, my Spirit, my power, my life dwelling in you.

Friends Pentecost is about being filled with the Spirit of the living, resurrected Lord. But let’s be clear, being filled with the Spirit is not so much about our feelings. It’s not really about being overcome with emotion, having a nice religious high, raising our hands in praise and then

returning home, back to life as usual as if nothing significant had happened at all. No, being filled with the Spirit of the living Christ means having our lives consumed by Christ.

It means having our hearts set on fire with love for God and love of the world for which Christ came and died. It means that we come to look and sound like Jesus, saying with Paul, "...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me..." (Galatians 2:20a)

I think it is hard for us to imagine the disruption that took place on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came not as a gentle summer breeze to comfort and console, but as a violent, howling, fierce wind, filling the entire house. The Spirit upended the disciple's lives, invaded the safe little corner of their world that they had allowed God to occupy, and propelled them into the world with a mission and a message that literally turned the world upside down.

Pentecost is Jesus saying to the Church...I am sending the Holy Spirit upon you in order that through you all others might catch a glimpse of God's presence and know that God loves and cares for them and longs to have a relationship with them. For you see, the person who lives like Christ, who devotes their money, their time, and their energy to the things that Christ is interested in, they are counted among Christ's sisters and brothers. The world may not believe our words, but if we love the way Christ loves, if we forgive the way Christ forgives, if we practice peace, if we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, welcome the stranger and the outsider, comfort the sick and those who mourn, then the world might believe. When we live this way, full of the Spirit of Christ the world will know that God, our Father, is not some vengeful tyrant, a monster waiting for them to slip up, so he can rain down fire from heaven and wipe them out. But rather, they will know that God is love and that God sent Jesus, and now is sending you and me, the Church, not to condemn the world but to be good news for a world that longs for a word of grace and mercy and hope and truth.

It's not so much that the Church has a mission as it is that the mission of God to love and save the world has a Church. Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit, the holy fire that convicts and converts and transforms and empowers, Christ's presence with us, makes it possible for us to be God's mission in the world, to find those places in the world where the Spirit of Christ is at work and to join Christ there in loving and serving others. Pentecost makes us more than merely a gathering of friends. It makes us the Church.

Over the past several weeks we've been working our way through my upcoming departure to become the Superintendent of the Metro District in the Charlotte area. While change can be exciting and bring new things into our lives, change is also difficult. It creates anxiety and uncertainty about the future. The reality we have known is comfortable, it's broken in, it fits well. Tomorrow is a day we don't yet know, it feels uncertain and the way forward maybe is a

little unclear. And the beautiful thing is, God fills this space with the presence of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost means we are never alone – not yesterday, not today, and not tomorrow. Wesley was right. The best of all is, God is with us and God has given us work to do.

Pentecost is a powerful reminder that it is not enough for the Church to simply *say* God is love or even to *say* that we love God – unless – unless we are willing to embody that conviction in our life together as church. Jesus didn't come to his disciples with a list of truthful propositions, and say here, hang these in your Sunday school rooms or print them in your worship bulletins and everything will be okay. No, he came proclaiming, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." And by the power of the Holy Spirit *you* will be a sign of my truth, and my way, and my life here on earth. Jesus knew that words alone are not enough unless those words take on flesh and bone and come to life in the shared ministry of a people. Jesus is after all the Word become flesh. So, we can hand out fliers, put up signs, develop a great social media presence, say all the right things, and have a well thought out theological position on the pressing matters of the day and all of that may be important - but if we are not engaging the world in works of compassion and mercy in Jesus' name then we might just as well be talking to the wind. So, are we bold enough today, and on June 3rd, and into July, and the weeks and years to come, to pray – "Come, Holy Spirit."? Come and convict us, transform us, and empower us, come and take over our hearts and our lives, come and have your way with us, make of us what you will, for the sake of Christ Jesus and the glory of God's Kingdom. Come, Holy Spirit. Come.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.