

Confirmation

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[0 : 00] It's commonly thought, and certainly in the last 50 years, a lot of skeptics and critics of the Christian faith would have said that the world is becoming less and less religious.

As more people modernize and gain technology and advancement, that we would put away myths and superstitions.

But many scholars and folks who study this show us that the data says quite the opposite. The world is rapidly becoming more religious.

Ecclesiastes 3.11 says that God has set in our hearts eternity. He's designed all of us with this longing and this desire for us to encounter, to experience the divine.

However we define that, we have so much in this nation. We are so powerful, so advanced, yet we're so bored and so empty and so hungry and so thirsty.

[1 : 15] For the Christian, we teach and believe that this longing is ultimately and fully found in the person of Jesus Christ. I love the author Pat Conroy, who wrote *The Great Santini*.

He once wrote, I could not quiet that pearly ache in my heart that I diagnosed as the cry of home. I'm 53 years old.

I've lived in nine homes. And every time I drive up the driveway of my parents' house, I feel like I'm home again. But I know that it's ultimately not the home that I long for.

Don't we all want to find home? I thought it was interesting. I walked in and saw the sign out there that said home. We're all looking for community, for friendships, for relationships, for family.

This eternal longing is a longing that God has placed in our hearts to come home to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 23] So if the world is becoming more and more religious, and people are more hungry and thirsty for home, then I commend to you that the answer will be given on Pentecost Sunday that the Lord has sent to us his spirit.

And I'm supposed to do this in about 17 minutes. So buckle up. I want to show you in just a few brief moments the beauty of Pentecost, the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing unity, and the great telos of God's plan, every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

So first, the amazing beauty and the timing, the unique timing of this unique day of Pentecost in human history. In the Old Testament, as Tommy mentioned from the outset, there's this theme.

It's latent. It's nascent. Running through the Old Testament scriptures that God will be our God, and we will be his people, and he will send to us the promise of his spirit being poured out.

We heard in the opening liturgy the renewal of this promise through the prophet Joel that God will send his spirit upon his people, and young men and young women shall dream dreams.

[3 : 47] And if you know the passage of dry bones from Ezekiel, you see this promise of the renewing of God's spirit, and at the end of it, Ezekiel writes about God, my dwelling place is with them.

I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I, the Lord, make Israel holy when my sanctuary is among them forever.

This is the great promise that we see coming through all of scripture, that God will be with his people. Think about this. What has God promised you in this life?

He's not promised you that all will go well with you in this world, that your dreams will come true, that the answers and longings of your hearts will be met in the things and the events and the circumstances of this world.

He has promised you this. I will be with you. And the way that he ensures you know this promise is that he gives you his spirit.

[4 : 57] So there's this festival in Israel, this festival called the Festival of Weeks, and every year people would gather in Jerusalem 50 days after the Passover Sunday.

That's the word Pentecost in Greek, 50. So they would gather and they would bring sacrifices of new wheat, new crops that have come up in the spring season as a celebration that it is God who provides for them.

And this agricultural celebration of new wheat was symbolizing it is God who brings newness of life to his people. And it was also tied to Moses giving the law on Mount Sinai.

So year after year and season after season for hundreds if not thousands of years, the people of Israel gathered together in Jerusalem with this festival, celebrating and being reminded of the newness of life, the promises of God.

But at this festival, uniquely, people had for some reason, in God's providence, come from all over. So who is here?

[6 : 07] We heard a list that Aaron read for us. Scholars and commentators have said about this list. It represents the list of the known world nations.

So all the nations are here in Jerusalem. We're representatives from them. And Luke, the writer of Acts, says that there's converts and there's God-fearers.

Something very special and electric is happening in the city of Jerusalem this day. Back to the promise. God would pour out his spirit upon all flesh.

Meaning we could know him personally and intimately and relationally. A relationship with God was no longer just speculation or the activities of our mind, but a reality of our heart.

It was personal. So this year, this particular year in the history of Israel, this particular time and celebration of the newness of life and the first fruits has now become the stage for the most powerful event in human history, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 20] Some say this is the birth of the church. Second point. Jesus had told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem. Acts 1.8 says, he says to them, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

So the 120-ish disciples waited and they're waiting and they're waiting on the Holy Spirit. And at the Festival of Weeks celebration, this day we now call Pentecost, God poured out his spirit on the disciples.

As the writer says, when the day of Pentecost came, they were 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 them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Before our theological and denominational minds get tied up in these symbols and these words and these concepts, let's just simply see the work of the Holy Spirit.

[8 : 48] Jesus says, if you love me, you'll keep my commands and I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.

The Spirit of Truth. He says further down, I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.

This is the fulfilling of the promise of God throughout scriptures. And the Christian life that we teach and that we strive to live is simply a life trusting and walking in the power of the Spirit.

We can often think that the Christian life is lived by just what I do, but it's a life lived in trust and surrender to God. On the contrary, Jesus sends his Spirit to dwell in us, not just by what we do, but he sends his Spirit to us to assure us that we are not alone, to remind us that we are coming home. You know, I think about all of the power that we possess. My cell phone has more information within a click of a button than the whole library of ancient Alexandria.

[10 : 09] And yet we are the most disconnected people, the loneliest people. I hear it everywhere I go. People say, I'm looking for community.

We had the Comfort Man share yesterday, and a number of them remarked one of the reasons why they ended up here at Advent is they found a home.

They found community. If you're a guest today, we pray that you'll come back and find that kind of community. The Father sends us his Spirit so we are not alone in this life.

You are not an orphan. Yesterday, Bayou shared with us some of her story, and something you said really stuck with me. Of all the things that you have gone through and the things that we have

gone through in this life, we are reminded that Jesus was with us through them all. That is the work of the Spirit assuring you, you are not alone in this life. Psalm 68.6 says that God sets the lonely in family.

[11:18] Romans 8 says that if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.

He continues, for those who are led by the Spirit are children of God, not orphans. The Spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear. Rather, the Spirit that you have received brought about your adoption to sonship.

And so by Him we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

I'm not finished in Romans. Listen, He says that a little bit further down in the same way. The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

[12:34] And probably the most famous verse of Romans, and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

The hardest thing for me to believe in my 53 years of life is not, is there a God? But is there a God who is good and really working through the circumstances of this world when I see the troubling things that happen, troubling things that happen to us, to me, to believe that God is actually at work in all of these things, takes a trust in the Holy Spirit.

You're not alone. The Spirit is poured out so everyone can be filled. And just to show off, not because I'm a Greek scholar, but one of the confirmands is, the word filled means present, imperative, passive, and plural.

The Holy Spirit is continually or repeatedly filling us. We leak. We need the Spirit. It is imperative. We are to be filled. The Apostle Paul says, don't get filled up on wine or any other thing that you want to substitute, but instead be filled by the Spirit.

[14:01] It's passive. I don't make the Spirit fill me. I surrender and say, Holy Spirit, come and have your way with me.

A very dangerous prayer. Lord, have your way with me. And lastly, it's plural. It's not just for me. It's not just for super people or leaders.

It is the filling of the Spirit for all of God's people. So God pours out His Spirit on disciples and He pours out His Spirit on people from all over the known world at Pentecost.

But what else happens? Let's look at Acts chapter 8 for just a second. Acts chapter 8, those who had been scattered preached the Word everywhere they went. Verse 5, Philip went down to a city in Samaria and He proclaimed and he proclaimed the Messiah there.

When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they paid close attention to what he said for with shrieks impure spirits came out of many and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

[15:07] So there was great joy in that city. Jump down to verse 14. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.

and when they arrived, they prayed for the new believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them.

They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts chapter 10, Peter began to speak. He's with Cornelia and he said, I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached.

[16:15] How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with

him.

Jump down a little bit. While Peter was still speaking these words the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

See what's happening in the book of Acts. The disciples in Jerusalem the disciples in Samaria the Gentiles jumped to Acts 19. While Apollos was in Corinth Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus.

There he found some disciples and he asked them did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they answered no we've not even heard that there's a Holy Spirit. That's most of the church it seems like some days.

So Paul asked then what baptism did you receive? John's baptism they replied. Paul said John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him that is in Jesus.

[17 : 33] On hearing this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus when Paul placed his hands on them the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and they prophesied there were about twelve men in all.

What is happening is that God was making his promise come true through belief and the filling of the Spirit. The book of Acts gives testimony that there is this one holy Catholic and apostolic church and faith and those who believed became witnesses in Jerusalem Judea Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

This is the promise of God through the scriptures and you friends by faith are included in that family. Think of this staggering fact with me for just a moment. On Pentecost there were about 120 people waiting on the Spirit.

That was 2,000 years ago. Today there are more than 2.5 billion men, women, and children around the world identifying in some way with the person of Jesus.

[18 : 59] Feng Gang Wong who studies Christianity in China says, in China by the year 2060 the nation of China will be a majority Christian nation and the largest nation with Christians in the world.

God continues to pour out his Holy Spirit. He is making us witnesses to the ends of the earth. There are 3 billion people alive who do not know another living breathing Christian in this world.

Who will go and preach to them the good news? My last point is this, the effect of Pentecost is that God is building a people for himself as he's promised through the scriptures from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

God is building his people. This is the impact and the effect of Pentecost. What happened 2,000 years ago is staggeringly effective even today.

In Genesis chapter 11 there's this fantastic story about people then who wanted to make themselves great, their name great and they built a ziggurat, a tower to ascend on high and God scattered them and confused them with languages that divided and separated them.

[20 : 25] but here at Pentecost what's happening is God is reversing Babel. The world is present at Pentecost.

This is why the world history is one story after another of racial hatred and enmity. No people on earth have clean hands on this.

On Pentecost day, this is God's answer to the problem of enmity between the races and the nations. The message of Jesus makes a new people, one family.

Tongues even meant everyone at that moment could understand. A few years ago at Church of the Redeemer in Greensboro, we were reading the Acts 2 passage and I kind of slipped a surprise on people.

After about the first two verses, someone stood up in the congregation and they started reading aloud in German. And another person about three or four verses later stood up and started reading in Swahili and another one in Spanish and another one in Arabic and this lady who was visiting, she was visiting our church first time ever.

[21 : 36] She got up from her seat in the back and walked up to me and she said, they're speaking in tongues. You have to get an interpreter and make them stop. And I said, the interpreter's reading in English.

And she went, oh. And she understood. That's the moment that God made clear to every nation his gospel.

Seven times in the book of Revelation, the phrase, every tribe, tongue, people, and nation appears. Seven times.

Why so much? It's as if at the end of the book God is saying, I want you to understand what I'm up to in the world and with people.

Every tribe, Fule, every kin, every clan, every tongue, glossolalia, every language, every people, Laos, every living place where people exist, whether it's a yurt in Mongolia or a high rise here in D.C.

[22 : 48] And ethnos, every race coming together as one people, one family, no more enmity.

Through the spirit, God is reversing Babel and making one big beautiful family. You know, we talked today about the goal of diversity, but diversity is too low a goal.

God is interested and committed to a family. Psalm 133, how blessed it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity.

God is making a family through his spirit of people who love him and will be loved by him, and he's doing that as we become witnesses of his gospel.

Let me close with this thought to you, Church of the Advent. Don't be content to find your space and have a place, although it will be amazing.

[23 : 56] But see this church, this family, for every tribe, every tongue, every people and every nation, believing in Jesus, filled with his spirit to worship and to go tell their worlds and their neighbors where to find home.

Would you pray with me? I invite you just silently to think and consider the idea of God filling you with his spirit.

And I encourage you just for a moment, in your heart or even with your hands physically, just to open them and say, come, Holy Spirit, and fill me today.

We thank you, Lord, for the promise of your spirit that you give generously and graciously to all who believe. So fill us that we may be witnesses of you in our day and in this time.

And we thank you for the power of your Holy Spirit. may you receive honor and glory and blessing from our lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

[25 : 34] Amen. . . .

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