

Cut to the Heart

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Good morning, Christchurch.

My name is Lawrence Liu, and I am a member of the North Berkeley Community Group. Today's reading is from the Book of Acts, Chapter 2, Verses 1-14, and Verses 22-39, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all 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 each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

[1 : 13] Now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

Utterly amazed, they asked, Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 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. Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, What does this mean? Some, however, made fun of them and said, They have had too much wine.

Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd. Fellow Israelites, listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

[2 : 43] David said about him, I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices.

My body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead. You will not let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence.

Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet, and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.

Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

[3 : 50] Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

Peter replied, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you, and your children, and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. It is good to be here, and it's good to give thanks to God for the great time we had at our Soul Care retreat yesterday that was so life-giving.

And I also give thanks for a wonderful spring break with our family. The week before last, we had a time of rest together down in Scotts Valley near Santa Cruz, which is where we're going to have our all-church retreat on August 27 to 29.

So mark your calendars if you haven't already. I'm just so grateful to work for a church that values rest, particularly the rest of your pastors.

[5 : 04] I don't know if you know just how demanding and exhausting working one day a week can be. You're probably familiar with the old definition of the pastor, six days invisible, one day incomprehensible.

But I shouldn't arm you with this kind of stuff. I have jokes about your professions as well, so be warned. I don't know how you feel about church jokes or desert island jokes, but I have one that sort of brings those together.

There was a guy, and he was deserted on an island for many years, and a ship came by and discovered him, found him. They went on to the island, and they were amazed to see all the things that he had built for his own survival.

And they saw in particular these three structures that he had made out of bamboo and leaves. And they said, you know, what's this first structure over here? And he said, oh, well, that's my home.

And they said, well, what about this second structure here?

What is that? And they said, well, that's my church. And then they said, well, how about this third structure over here? And a pained look came over his face, and said, well, that's where I used to go to church.

[6 : 12] But, you know, church and our relationship to the church can be tricky business, right? And some of us are unchurched. We've never been in a church building.

We're gathering for the first time with Christians we don't know. Christchurch is their first church experience, and we're just honored to have you here. Others of you might call yourself de-churched, meaning you had a church experience.

It kind of went from good to bad to ugly. You were disappointed by a leader, maybe hurt by a lack of love, maybe just burned out by over-serving.

Now, some people have just felt invisible or unknown in their church, and so over time they just drift away. Maybe you're surprised to find yourself back in a church. Many of us, though, consider ourselves churched.

But even that's kind of weird right now, right? We've been on a screen for a year. We're pretty disconnected. We've had to merge these two congregations from Berkeley to Oakland.

[7 : 13] Our staff has been reduced from 17 people down to 5.5 people. Many of us have had friends from Christchurch move away. Maybe your circle of friends here is intact, but you have an ambiguous relationship to the rest of the congregation, to the leadership of the church.

Maybe you're just flat-out low on motivation right now for re-engaging with your church post-COVID. Some of us are churched, and so we've moved to the area trying to figure out what is this particular church all about.

I think all of us read about the church in the news, and we want that bumper sticker that says, Lord Jesus, save us from your followers, right? But we have this wide-ranging diversity of experiences of the church, and so it seems fitting for us to ask the question, what is the church?

What are the essentials? What are the non-negotiables of the church? What's the identity and the mission of the church? What are your gifts, and what's your role? What's your part to play in building up the church?

And so we're looking at this book of the Bible called the Acts of the Apostles. It could also be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, the Acts of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in his church.

[8 : 29] But this is the second volume to Luke's gospel that we've been looking at for quite a while now. And this is the continuation of the story of Jesus in the life of the new community that he's launched into the world, and it gives us an opportunity to see all the ways that God is calling us to reopen our church, to reclaim the identity of our church, to reweave the community of our church, to relaunch the mission of our church.

And so hear this message from Acts chapter 2, which is just super simple yet deep. And that is this, that spirit-filled Christians share good news about Jesus Christ.

That's the message of Acts chapter 2, spirit-filled Christians share good news about Jesus Christ, and particularly about the historical Jesus and the contemporary Christ, which we'll get to in a minute.

But let me start with this, that spirit-filled Christians share good news. And that's where our story opens up in verse 1. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place, 120 disciples.

They'd spent 40 days with the resurrected Jesus, and now they're praying in this upper room, doing what Jesus said, which was to wait to be clothed with power from on high.

[9 : 50] And that moment has now arrived in verse 2. It says that suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they are sitting, like the sound of a Category 5 hurricane force wind.

And then in verse 3, they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each one of them. The sense of flames of fire might remind them that John the Baptist said, one is coming who's going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

And it's the sound of the wind, the sense of fire that are signs that the Holy Spirit is this wild, untamable power.

And what's being unleashed on these people right now are the uncreated energies of God himself. And when that power of the Holy Spirit comes on people, what happens?

That Spirit that ordered the chaos into a creation, that Spirit that took the dead body of Jesus and raised him to a life incorruptible, what happens when that Spirit comes on a community of 120 disciples?

[11 : 06] Well, we read in verse 4 that all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The Holy Spirit's dancing over these disciples like flames of fire and that enables us, enables them to find their tongue, to open their mouth, to speak words, to utter rational, intelligent, articulate, meaningful information that everybody can understand and finds relevant to their lives.

This is so important because many of us expect that the Holy Spirit, when he comes on our lives, is going to turn the whole thing into this marvel, superhero, pyrotechnical action film.

But what actually happens when the Holy Spirit comes is a ministry of speaking. When the Holy Spirit comes, there's a ministry of words. When the Holy Spirit comes, guess what?

There's a long sermon with Scripture. I know, that's not very exciting. But what are they talking about? In verse 11, it says, we hear them declaring the wonderful works of God in our own tongues.

[12 : 20] Some of you are reading a book called The Wonderful Works of God. We hear them declaring the intervening actions, the saving deeds of God who's come to his beloved yet broken and ruined and fallen creation to make it into a new creation.

You see, when the Holy Spirit comes, evangelism happens. And what I want to convince you of this morning is that everybody is an evangelist.

Everyone you meet in the Bay Area is evangelizing good news to try to win converts. This is particularly true in our consumer culture where we're just shamelessly yet subtly evangelized all the time.

You read a magazine, you browse the internet, you watch TV, you drive down the freeway. And we get these messages that say, you cannot have joy without this. You cannot have a good life without that.

This is from Guy Kawasaki, who was the former chief evangelist of Apple Computer, the father of evangelism marketing. He says, the starting point of evangelism is having a great thing to evangelize, a cause that seizes the moral high ground.

[13 : 33] It is a product or service that improves the lives of people, ends bad things, or perpetuates good things. You ever found a product or service like that? Did you ever think, this will change the world, this will make your life better.

And did you ever share that with somebody else? You're an evangelist. I was walking out of sports space the other day, an activist said, hey, you got five minutes to save the environment. That was an evangelist.

You say to your friends and family, hey, have you read this? Have you seen that? Have you eaten here? Have you traveled there? Whether your good news is Burning Man, the keto diet, Peloton, Gwyneth Paltrow Goop, whatever the wellness industry experiences are promising you to make you strong and pure and beautiful, that's all evangelism.

And what is it for you? What are you so excited about you had to share? One of you recently said, you got to get on Ting Mobile. You've got to buy Olukai sandals.

It'll change your life. You need to read this Matthew Walker book on why we sleep. You should do this life hack on cutting back on your email. I remember reading a few years back this article in The New Yorker called Sacred Grounds, The New Coffee Evangelist.

[14 : 50] And it said, in 1966, a second generation coffee roaster from Holland, Alfred Peet, opened Peet's Coffee and Tea, Incorporated in North Berkeley, just one block down that way, which might have been the first evangelical cafe in America, aiming not just to serve its customers, but also to enlighten them.

Pete, who died in 2007, viewed typical American coffee as not merely bad, but wrong, overbrewed and under-roasted. Guided by his edicts, locals could learn to drink a richer, more alkaline form of coffee.

Among his fans were three young men in Seattle who bought Peet's Beans for the coffee shop they opened there in 1971 called Starbucks. The tradition of coffee evangelism, epitomized by Alfred Peet, can seem in its clumsier expressions, capricious or even pernicious, a small cabal of self-appointed experts telling everyone else that they are doing it wrong.

But fifth-generation coffee farmer ate a battle, resists snobbery, as any good evangelist must. She thinks that coffee salvation should be available to anyone who seeks it.

We're all evangelizing good news. We're all trying to win converts. But the good news that the Holy Spirit brings is better than computers and is better than coffee. And what we read about in verse 37 is when the people heard this good news, they were cut to the heart.

[16 : 17] They say, ouch, that doesn't sound like good news. But actually, we've now penetrated beyond the superficial. We've now gotten beneath the surface down to the real stuff, down to the heart, down to what matters the most.

The Holy Spirit brings an evangel. He brings the good news that speaks to our deepest problem, our deepest need, that none of these other good newses can even touch or even get close to satisfying.

So what I want you to see is that spirit-filled Christians, they share good news. And when they share good news, that news is about Jesus Christ.

That news is about the historical Jesus and the contemporary Christ. First, let me say something about the historical Jesus. We notice in this story that it's not just the leaders who are speaking the good news.

It's all the whole community of 120 disciples. The Holy Spirit gifts everybody the ability to speak the good news. But then eventually, one person steps to the microphone.

[17 : 26] And we read in verse 14, Peter stood up with the 11, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd. And this, remember, is the guy who failed Jesus the most. Right? And if I'm Jesus, I'm like, hey pal, you're off the team.

And Jesus is like, no, you're the captain. You're now the spokesman. Jesus loves to empower the worst failures among us. And Peter just becomes, as we'll see, he becomes this man on fire.

And so, he gives this little preamble and he says, okay, first of all, we're not drunk. We're just under the influence of the Holy Spirit. But then when he finishes the preamble and he begins the first Christian sermon ever preached on Pentecost, what does Peter say?

He says in verse 22, people of Israel, listen to this, Jesus of Nazareth. Every good sermon is about that.

Every good sermon is about the person and work of Jesus because Christianity begins and ends with the word and the name Jesus. And Peter then carefully unpacks the history of Jesus in stages. [18 : 33] First, he talks about the life of Jesus. And he says in verse 22, Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him as you yourselves know.

Jesus is a real, genuine, flesh and blood human being. Peter affirms Jesus' divinity, but never at the expense of his humanity.

And this is the thing that baffles the mind. How is it that this Jesus can be the God-man? How can he be man and God at the same time? But Peter says, I don't know, but he is.

And when he came, he did wonderful things. He fed the hungry, he healed the sick, he raised the dead, he cast out evil, he forgave sins. And when he did that, he was making people whole in body and soul.

He was putting the world right, bringing heaven down to earth as signs that the reign and the rule of the kingdom of God is here in and through this man, Jesus.

[19 : 41] And Peter not only talks about the life of Jesus, but he talks about the death of Jesus.

And he says in verse 23, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

In other words, Jesus' crucifixion is equally attributed to the wickedness of human beings and to the eternal purpose of God. Meaning that his cross was not an accident.

His cross came out of a covenant commitment between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to say, we are sending Jesus. And Jesus is going to stand in their place and bear their sins and take their curse and die their death.

All of that judgment and condemnation that was heaping up on us because we were breaking the law of love, because we owed so many debts to the law of love.

Jesus said, I'm going to take that as my own. And that's why he died. Peter talks about the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and then he talks about the resurrection of Jesus in verse 24.

[20 : 53] But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Good sermons help us to feast on the scriptures.

And so Peter takes us to Psalm 16 and he says, we should have seen this coming all along. That psalm says that the body of the Messiah would be snatched out of the sphere of corruption and decay to which dead bodies are subject.

And that's what happened to Jesus' corpse. He's not over here in his tomb like King David is over there in his tomb. What happened to Jesus is that he was transformed into a new glorified body, the first bit of the material universe to be redeemed and glorified.

In the resurrection, God the Father publicly declared his son Jesus to have accomplished the salvation that he came in the world to secure.

And so the resurrection is not the reversal of a defeat. It's the manifestation of a victory for me and for you.

[22 : 08] Peter's talking about the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, and then the exaltation of Jesus. He says in verse 30 that God made an oath to David that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

And then in verse 33 he says that's why he exalted Jesus to the right hand of God. And Peter takes us to the Bible again, Psalm 110. And he says that God raised Jesus from the place of absolute cursiveness to the highest place of greatest honor and authority where he sits on the throne to rule over this world as his rightful Lord and King.

Peter having talked about the life, the death, the resurrection, the exaltation of Jesus now gets to the fifth stage and he says it's Jesus who has poured out the Holy Spirit. Verse 33.

Jesus received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. Three persons of the Trinity that saturate every page in the New Testament, saturate every detail, of each of our lives.

They're working together to save us and to bless us. At each stage you notice that it's God the Father who witnesses to the life of Jesus, who gave Jesus up to die, who raised Jesus from the dead, who exalted Jesus on high, who gave Jesus the Holy Spirit so that he could pour the Holy Spirit out and fill up his empty disciples with the power and the dynamism and the energy of God himself to bear witness to this world.

[23 : 51] The Holy Spirit brings good news and the Holy Spirit brings a good news that does not abstractly affirm that God is love or even that God loves us.

The Holy Spirit brings a good news that says God the Father loved this world so much that he gave his son. That's the gospel that we have and we are not free, we're not at liberty to preach any other gospel as a church.

We can't substitute the gospel of this ideology, the gospel of that zeitgeist. We can't even talk about the downstream implications of the gospel culturally, psychologically, socially, economically, politically as if that's the gospel because this is the gospel.

Peter's talking about the wonderful works of God the Father through Jesus by the Spirit. And he says if you're not talking about Jesus, you're not talking about God.

And if you want to be talking about God, then you must be talking about Jesus, the real historical man, Jesus. You with me?

[25 : 04] Spirit-filled Christians share good news about Jesus, the historical Jesus, but also about the contemporary Christ. And when we talk about the contemporary Christ, we're talking about the one who lived, died, and rose, who's also the one who lives, reigns, and saves today, right now.

And this is what Peter's getting at in verse 36. He says, therefore let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

Exalted to that throne, that position of power and authority, Jesus is now saving sinners who cry out to him for mercy. And it's from that place, from that throne, that the contemporary Christ makes promises and demands, which is his right to do as the Savior, Lord, and Christ of this world.

And I just want to end by talking about those promises and those demands. The contemporary Christ makes promises that we can be forgiven and have the Holy Spirit. Meaning we can have what our hearts most desperately seek, the freedom of forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit. It says in verse 38, the people, they're cut to the heart, they're asking, what should we do? And Peter says to them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 37] To be forgiven is the great need that each of us has that none of us can do for ourselves. We've all done, said, and thought things that we would be ashamed of, that we would be completely embarrassed for anybody to find out.

It nags our conscience. We wonder, you know, can I ever be released from that memory and from that reality? And friends, Jesus died for those sins.

Jesus died to free you from your fear, guilt, and shame. He came and bore that condemnation that you and I deserve so that we could receive the forgiveness and the freedom that we simply don't deserve.

And that's the first gift of the contemporary Christ from His throne in heaven to us. But the second gift is the Holy Spirit coming to live within us.

We're told that it's the Holy Spirit who comes and He cuts their hearts. Meaning that the Holy Spirit gives power to the Word. The Holy Spirit says amen to the sermon and all the people that their conscience is stirred up, their conscience is stricken.

[27 : 46] And those who open themselves up to the Holy Spirit, He comes in and He regenerates us. He gives us new birth, new life. He starts to free us from our self-centeredness and to change us from the inside out to become more and more like Jesus.

That's what the Holy Spirit does. And so the contemporary Christ promises you can have this freedom, you can have this power. But the contemporary Christ also makes demands and He says you must repent and believe.

You must repent and believe. Peter said repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. That word repent, metanoia, means to change your mind.

Remember, He's speaking to this crowd who has condemned Christ to death and He says you must have a radical about turn in your attitude toward Jesus. You must embrace the one that you've repudiated.

And repentance is always combined with faith which is implicit here that if we're going to, there's no possibility of turning from our sins without turning toward Christ.

[29 : 02] And that turning away negatively and turning toward positively, that's what we call conversion. And baptism beautifully symbolizes that. It's this outward, visible, public act that shows

that we've been washed, we've been forgiven of our sins.

We've had the Holy Spirit poured out on us. That we ourselves have died and risen to a new life with Christ. That we have come and we've humbly submitted to the name and the authority of that person who we once rejected.

And now we say you're my Lord. You're my identity. You have my highest allegiance. And so Christ Church, I wonder what the next step is for each of us today.

For some of us, it may be to repent and believe for the first time. For some of us, we've done that but we've never been baptized. It may be to come and be baptized. For many of us, you know, the Christian life is about repenting and believing your whole life long.

And that's just what we need to do is come back. Come back to this baptized identity. Come back to this baptismal allegiance. To have Christ as our Lord and to be fully conformed to that reality.

[30 : 21] Christ Church, our mission is to lead people into a deeper relationship with Christ and His church through community and for the city.

And that's the question for us in the coming weeks and months is how do we share this good news with our city? And I don't know all the answers to that.

I hope that comes as we explore this book. But what I know is that it starts with these 120 Christians who gathered together in worship and prayer because that's where the Holy Spirit came.

That's where the Holy Spirit spoke. That's the, it's the gathered community of disciples where the Holy Spirit loves to most show up and pour out His power as a hot spot of what He wants to do in this world.

And the Holy Spirit works best among people who are experiencing Jesus not as a mere historical figure, not as the furniture of their mind, not as somebody who lived and died a long time ago, but people who are experiencing Jesus as a contemporary person who's alive, who's accessible, who's breathing out His life into us, His joy, His peace, breathing into us all it is that we need from Him.

[31 : 40] It's when this church gets together and the degree to which they cherish this Jesus is the degree to which they go out and they commend what they most cherish.

It's when this church comes together and says, Lord, would you open new doors of opportunity? Lord, would you open our lips to share? Lord, would you open the hearts of those who hear that, lo and behold, things are opened?

It's when the Holy Spirit erupts into the life of God's people that they find their tongues to go public with the truth of Jesus because that's the first gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of words, the gift of speech, the gift of not being able to stop talking about the wonderful works of God in the person of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And that's my prayer for us, that we'd be spirit-filled Christians, a spirit-filled church that shares news not about this and that, but about one thing, the historical Jesus, the contemporary Christ. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen. For the sake of God, the Holy Spirit is and for one thing, it was beautiful, and it was beautiful to eat.

[33 : 11] It was beautiful, it was beautiful, and I can't wait for you all for the sake of God and that is, Abigailender Messiahyer. Ha! He wrote down to me, the ■■■■ Truth, he wrote down to me, the philosophy of God, the purser high power and the painting of our■ and the mind of the life of Him.

He reached out God, so the■ist leg