Acts 2:14–41

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Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] 11, lifted up his voice and addressed them. Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words.

For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even on my male servants and female servants, in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke.
The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.
[1:12] This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

For David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand and I may not be shaken. Therefore my tongue was glad and my tongue, my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced.
My flesh also will dwell in hope, for you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life.
You will make me full of gladness with your presence. Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day.
Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on the throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.
[2:17] This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.
Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said 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 for the promises for you and for your children and all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.
And with many other words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them saying, save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.
This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.
[3:48] I'd like to add my greetings to you. My name is Dave Helm and I'm one of the pastors here in the Hyde Park congregation. We have the joy today of welcoming into the assembly a baby boy, Finley David Yates, born this week to Tom and Maggie.

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Praise God you're here today. Thank you. What a day to have your second-born child, but an infant, in the house of the Lord to know that the very first words coming forth from the church really give him already a sermon that shook the world.
Perhaps the most important historical document we possess on the early Christian church, that is, documents that we find outside of the scriptures themselves, comes from the letters of one named Pliny.
Pliny. He had a whole cache, cache of letters that were discovered in a 5th century monastery and they were copied and we have them even in our own day.
Pliny, the younger, had been governor of a Roman province called Bithynia. Bithynia. Bithynia was a far outpost of Rome's center.
[5:30] It really would have pulled you all the way from Rome to the northern coast of what would today be modern-day Turkey. And he's writing letters given his charge back to Trajan, who is the emperor at the moment around 110 within the common era.

So, imagine it. These letters, which we have, are within the same milieu of time that Luke himself is giving us.
Luke acts. Most people think that these very volumes came to us somewhere between 85 or all the way stretching out as far as perhaps 115.
In one sense, the same page of history. Let me put it to you this way. Pliny's letters are, in my estimation, the most important historical documents we have that give you a glimpse from the outside on what the early church was on about.
Christian preachers occasionally refer to these letters because they provide indisputable evidence that the Christian faith, even in its earliest days, was persecuted.
[6:45] That's not my concern today. What I want to go after in Pliny's letters is of more interest to me and I think of greater historical value.

Not that the Christian faith was ill-treated, but that it was, in its earliest days even, ever present. It is Pliny who provides us the indisputable evidence, not only that Christianity found themselves in some side on the wrong side of Roman law, but more importantly that Christianity had gone to the far reaches of the Roman world.
In his own words, listen for the rapid expansion of the Christian faith. Quote, as he writes to Trajan concerning what to do with these Christians, for the matter seemed to me well worth referring to you, especially considering the numbers endangered.
Endangered, of course, would mean moving away from Roman rule and our ways of worship to a particular allegiance to one named Christus.
The numbers, he says, endangered. Persons of all ranks and ages and of both sexes are and will be involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts.
[8:21] End quote. There it is. The historical document about as early as you can possibly get. 110 within the common era indicating the vast numbers, all ranks, all ages, both sexes, not confined to cities only, but to villages and rural districts.

It is stunning. I would love one day to end up in some library wherever these things are housed and put my own eyes on the later copies of that very document.
Within a very short period of time then, a few decades only, the Christian faith rightly wore the banner ubiquitous. The historical significance of what plenty has left us is not therefore my.
look how the faithful suffered. But my, we must acknowledge that this faith spread. Not, whoa, those poor early folk, but wow, what power.
Not, see, faith followers were hastily wronged, but instead look and see how widespread that word went out. which leads us to our text, this sermon that shakes a world.
[9:57] The first observation from our text is simply this, in regard to what accounts for the rapid expansion of the faith. It's a question of historical curiosity, is it not?

What accounts for the rapid expansion of the Christian faith? We've already seen in some measure from chapter one that the Holy Spirit accounts for it, that God was active in something that was unexplainable in any other way.
We've also seen from chapter one that a small group of committed people were responsible for it, but today we see something else. The speeches, the sermons, such as the one read for us this morning, account for Christianity's rapid rise.

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note the emphasis, Luke himself, the writer, is bent on stating as soon as he finishes with his summation of the sermon. Verse 41, once the sermon finishes, and you'll remember Peter began speaking early on, but now Luke finally finds his own clear narrative voice, and he says, on the basis of this speech, so those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.
This is one of Luke's concerns, that Theophilus and the readers that would come after him would have their curiosity sated.
[11:30] You want to know how Christianity got to the ends of the earth? Through sermons, the likes of which you had troubles paying attention to while being read.

I want to argue that we need to look at this speech because it's the first of many in Luke's narration of the Acts of the Apostles.
Some people have actually argued that no less than 30% or more of the book of Acts is a record of these sermons.
In fact, he seems to be concerned with using them to show you how fast everything went. Just take a look over at chapter 3 and verse chapter 4 and verse 4 after a sermon that Peter gives in the temple.
But many of those who had heard the word believed and the number of the men came to about 5,000. In other words, he's interested in showing you sermons as the means by which the church grew.
[12:55] We could do this throughout the book, but I'll just show you a few things so that you'll know Luke is actually trying to do this for you. In chapter 8, verse 1, when Saul approved of the execution of Stephen after Stephen's sermon, we read in verse 4 that they were scattered and they went about preaching the word.

And so it's this preaching of the word now through many that actually accounts for this avalanche of continued adherence of the Christian gospel. You can look at it in chapter 11, I believe, and in verse 1, now the apostles and brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God because the previous chapters talked about this big long sermon two times over that had been given by Paul to Cornelius.
And they want you to know that the consequence of sermons in the early church was numerical growth. Take a look at chapter 19 and verse 10 and I'll shut it down with that just enough to let you know that God, it says, this continued for two years so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.
Here it is, a matter of curiosity, a matter of the historical record. What accounts for the growth of the Christian faith in the early church? Speeches.
In part, that is the answer. And given that this is the first speech, chapter two, of what will be many, let me make a few observations.
[14:44] First, the speech that we have here in chapter two, like the others, is an abridgment. It's an abridgment.

Just take a look at chapter two, verse 40. And with many other words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them. In other words, you're not reading here the fullness of what was said there.
You're reading Luke's summation. To put it differently, these are not transcripts. These aren't even Peter's sermon notes that he had written down because you and I know this was an extemporaneous message.
He didn't go to his filing cabinet and pull out something. No, an event happened and he began then to preach extemporaneously. I remember this from my rhetoric classes in undergraduate years. You'd walk into class and occasionally the professor would just hand you a little slip of paper. He'd say, good morning, welcome everyone, I've handed Dave Helm a piece of paper, he'll begin to speak in 30 seconds.
[16:03] And you open the piece of paper and you would have to immediately stand and present something intelligible, hopefully, on what was given. Well, Peter had had this massive cacophony of sound at the arrival of the Spirit when people all of a sudden were speaking in different languages, human languages, praising God, and people said, what in the world is this?

And Peter had 30 seconds and he stood up and he began to preach. This is not a transcript. But that said, let me say this, Luke, the writer, is not inventive.

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It's better to think of the sermons in Acts as summaries where he has artfully, beautifully, and investigatively put down the gist of things.
We already know he had wonderful eyewitness testimony. Not only could he have talked to any number of the 3,000, what was the message that day, but you know, if you're familiar with the way Luke's gospel opens, he actually says, I'm not an inventive kind of guy.
I actually have done investigative research, and I am putting before you that which I have clear, plausible reason to believe actually occurred.
[17:29] So we have every indication to believe firmly that Peter chose three Old Testament texts for this message, and he explained the events of that day in accord with those Hebrew scriptures.

So the application, just as we get underway, today I want to say that Holy Trinity Church will continue to be a place where we celebrate for 30, 35 minutes a week a simple, raw attempt to explain the inscripturated word for salvation, and the strengthening of the whole.
And I know that that's unique. The church today relies on any number of methods for expansion, but Holy Trinity Church is going to be content with the simplicity of what we're doing here, as non-powerful as it may appear.
I'll never forget some advice I got early on in ministry. A gentleman said to me, remember this, whatever you save people by is that which you save them to.
You want to save them by dry ice, or you're going to save them to dry ice? You want to save them by a simple explanation of the word, then the simple explanation of the word will hold them.
[19:05] So, just as a matter of budgetary constraint and my desire to not have dry ice behind me every week, we'll let the word of God do all the heavy lifting.

Now, the first time I came on to this, I didn't grow up in a church that gave itself to that kind of speech that we see here. I was 18 years old, and I was first year at the place I was attending college, and they had a new preacher in town.
He was 37, had come all the way from California, and he got up and he started preaching. At that time, it was from the Gospel of John, and he talked, man, he talked, he talked for like 30, 33, 35 minutes.
I wasn't used to that. Some of you are used to that and wish you weren't, but at any rate, I wasn't used to that. And when he got done, he said something like, thus far, God's word, and then all of a sudden musicians appeared and we sang a song and we went out and I thought that was kind of odd.
And I came back the next week because I was kind of intrigued that he was looking at the text and taking it seriously. And he just picked up from where he left off that week. And at the end of the sermon, he said something like, thus far, God's word.
[20:24] And I'm slow. I was an athlete. But by the third week, even I began to realize he's going to simply keep going through this whole book until he finishes.

And rather than turning me away from the church, it became a local congregation that I actually was eager to keep coming back to.
And it set the course of my own convictions. Christians. So what is it then of this message? We can see that what accounts for the rapid expansion of the faith in part are these sermons, which means that we're going to be preaching on preaching.
We're going to be sermonizing on sermons. We're going to be looking at the text of things that were said long ago. But what does he want to say here?
What does he want to say? A couple of things. First, Peter wants you to know in this sermon in verses 14 to 21 that this activity, all the tongues and the praising of God and languages unlearned, this activity is the arrival of that kingdom.
[21:45] Let me simplify it. His argument is going to be this which you see is that now come. Verse 14, But Peter standing with the eleven lifted up his voice and addressed them, men of Judea, all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words for these people are not drunk as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day, namely 9 a.m.

But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel, and then he goes back to some ancient Hebrew text where there was a prophesying moment that the kingdom of God would be restored, that God would have a concern for his own house, for his own land, for his own people, and that the Spirit of God which had left Israel would actually return.

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And what Peter is arguing is this, the arrival of the Spirit and the spontaneous praise of God in multiple languages is that which was promised.
Verse 17, in the last days, it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men dream dreams, even on my male servants and female servants.
In those days, I will pour out my Spirit, there it is twice over, the arrival of the Spirit on this day is that prophecy fulfilled.
[23:23] These tongues give voice to that text. The arrival was anticipated so that even when the verses talk here about the sun being darkened on the day that God's kingdom arrives, Luke has already told us in his gospel, chapter 23 verse 44, that when Jesus was crucified on the cross, the entire sun gives way to darkness, that there is some cataclysmic event that took place in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ that catapulted the kingdom of God returning on earth, that these praises were promised by that prophecy, which, if you are wondering, what does it mean here, prophecy, they shall prophesy, well in some sense, prophecy, given what occurred, was the spontaneous speech that would praise God for his mighty works in Christ, in this case, in languages that they had never actually taken the time to learn, so to prophesy

God. God was open to all. It was a gift where we could all contribute to the welfare of others by giving spontaneous praise to God through words spoken that glorify his work in Jesus.
And so when you begin to say to someone in your community group, let me tell you what Jesus has done for me, let me tell you a word tonight that would indicate his work in my life.
That is generating, in a sense, all that began to happen even on Pentecost Sunday. This activity is the arrival of that kingdom.
If that's the case, then Christian preaching is unique among various kinds of discourse, at least in this way. Christian preaching is always tied to inscripturated texts.
[25:54] In this case, Joel. But it is interpreting those texts in light of the Christ event. So Christian preaching, will always be looking at texts.

I will not be merely trying to emotively convince you to become a Christian. You won't find it from this pulpit.
No bells, no whistles. A clear look at texts in their relationship to what God has done in Christ.
And therefore, Christian preaching also is declaring what God has done first, before pontificating to you on what you ought to go do. I'm concerned that you would know what God has done in Christ.
In God has done in this sense, the kingdom of God has returned to humanity through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.
[27:07] Now, don't miss this then. God can be trusted by you because God keeps his word.

Remember when he starts to write this, he actually writes to Luke to provide certainty for Luke concerning the things he had heard about. In other words, and the word there is asphaleia, it's like asphalt.
One of Luke's objectives is to help his readers get hard road underneath their feet. It's a sense of why should you be a Christian or why should you remain a Christian?
And one of the things Luke is saying here is you should be a Christian and remain a Christian because God, unlike anyone else, actually fulfills his word. I mean, think about it.
We live in a world today where we're all trying to get out of things that have been put down on paper. I mean, do you think of what's going on in the UK with Brexit?
[28:13] They want out, or at least some want out. Why do we want out? Because I got the raw end of this deal. Our own country is loaded with this thinking right now. We want to get out of the Iran deal because we got the bad end of it.

We want to get out of NAFTA because we got the bad end of it. We want to get out of ACA because we got the bad end of it. We're always trying to get out of things.
You know, there's a guy in Australia, 1970, I love this guy. He's called self-proclaimed Prince Leonard of the Hutt River province. He actually seceded from Australia.
I mean, this dude is like, he's as American as you can get. If you look at Australia, there's this little thing way out where this guy has taken his stake and said, I'm out, I'm my own prince, he's got his own currency, he's got a lot of kids because that's the only way he's going to have his own subjects, he doesn't do taxes, not farming them out to H&R; Block, he's not paying them.
He's actually set up his own kingdom. Wow, that's America on steroids. And why?

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[29:36] Because he thinks you've got the raw end of the deal. The implication of Peter's point in this sermon has the opposite effect. With the God of the Bible, you actually gain a certain measure of certainty that he can be trusted by you, that he does keep his word, that he does make himself now available to all people regardless of social class, ethnic background, place or position in life.

It is completely democratized out. God is available to all because this day fulfills that prophetic utterance.
But let me go on. Not only does this day mark the arrival of that kingdom, but this Jesus, this Jesus is that promised king.
That's the way it begins to move in verse 22. Men of Israel, here are these words, Jesus of Nazareth. And then he goes on all about Jesus. Look at verse 23. this Jesus.
That's not the only time you're going to see that. It's going to come in a variety of places. Verse 32, this Jesus.
[31:13] Verse 36, God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus. That's the second thing he wants you to know in his sermon. Not only is this event the fulfillment of that text, but only this Jesus is that kingdom's king.

And so he starts talking about Jesus and his death and his resurrection and what happened to him. But then he says in verse 23, this was all done by the definite plan of God.
And then he roots it in Psalm 16, verse 25, for David says concerning him, and then there's the quotation which we heard read today in our call to worship where David says, I saw the Lord always before me for you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One see corruption.
In other words, what he's saying is this Jesus is that king. That's the second move of the message.
And then it just speeds through to point number 3, 29 and following.
Not only is this activity the arrival of that kingdom, 14 to 21, not only is this Jesus that king, verses 22 through 28, but we all know that that David could not have brought about what this Jesus does.
[32:49] Verses 29 to the end. Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he died and was buried his tombs with us to this day. Therefore, back to all the way down in verse 34, when David's writing in Psalm 110, the Lord said to my Lord, he must be referring to two people above him on the food chain, not himself.

He's saying, my Lord, prophesying to Jesus, says to my Lord, Yahweh. In other words, David himself says, I'm not the one.
And Peter would say, verse 33, being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he, that is Jesus, has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.
That's the movement of the text. That's the sermon that shook the world. it moves like this. This stuff is fulfillment of that text.
This Jesus, he's that king. That David couldn't possibly have brought about what this Jesus has done.
[34:09] that's his message. Clean as I can get it. Hoping you got it. Let me put it this way.

The argument that Peter makes is powerful in its simplicity. He is looking back through the centuries of time and presenting to his listeners the notion, get it now, that there is an interlocking, an intertextual dance between this Jesus and that king which was promised in the Hebrews holy book.
Let me put it differently. There is a tango in play, not recognized at the time, between this Jesus, who was little more than a peasant preacher, nothing more than an unforeseen candidate or an ironic air of ancient Israel's prophetic predictions.
Because those predictions leaned heavily that somewhere in the distant future, we would be marked by an age of imperium. We would have one who was both Lord and Christ.
And so he concludes, there is the conclusion of his message, 36, let all the house of Israel therefore know, for certain, for certain, sure footing, why should you remain a Christian?
[35:43] Because Dave Helm got all emotional on a Sunday? No. Heaven forbid. Because we can move you with music? No. As glorious as that is. Why should you be a Christian?

Christian. Because it makes the best sense of all the prophetic predictions and promises. I believe I'm a New Testament Christian because of my dance with the Old Testament prophetic tradition.
Let me say this then. David couldn't have done this stuff. We all know that dead men don't dance. Do they? Dead men don't dance. Calcified ones don't dispense gifts.

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You might bury them with a gift or two, but they're not bringing the gifts out. Those who we set in the grave cannot save. And what he's saying is, Jesus now is at the right hand of the father.
He is given the promised gift of the spirit. To what end? To what end? To what end? Don't lose this. So that your sins can be forgiven and that you can enter into his salvation.
[37:09] That's what Joel put it as in verse 21. it shall come to come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That's the way Peter puts it at the end of his sermon.

Verse 40. Save yourself from this crooked generation. This is what I would implore you this morning to do.
To listen to the effect that this sermon had on its original congregation. This is wild. this sermon was mind bending for those who first heard it.
Life altering. They became convinced that this Jesus was the fulfillment of Israel's sacred texts. That this Jesus would offer them salvation before God. The forgiveness of their sins. The dispensing of his gifts. The ability to start anew and afresh.
[38:10] You can see it right there in verse 37. Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart. And they said what do we do?

What they did was repent and get baptized. What they did was they changed their mental outlook on Jesus and the scriptures forever.
what they did was reverse course on the Christ. What they did was take on the mark of belonging to him. And evidently there were a lot of them looking for water on that day.
So those who received his word were baptized and they were added that day about 3,000 souls. It ought to be mind bending for us. I want you to know this.
You live in an era where the spirit of God is available to all who repent and begin living under the new king Jesus who is both Lord master leader and savior the promised Messiah.
[39:26] So what do you do today? decide to repent believe and be baptized. It's the way the church grows.

No need for bells no need for whistles. They simply preach the world full of Christ followers. One day I'm going to die you're going to die we're all going to die.
But when this poor stammering tongue lies silent in the grave there is a nobler sweeter song that I will sing for everlasting ages because I have life in his holy and precious name.
heavenly father these words inscripturated from so long ago on the surface of it don't have the power to change but I pray that there would be many here today many many who would begin embracing in their heart the very kind of faith you gave to me at age 18 when my own soul was lit with the glories of the risen king as a fulfillment of your work for our salvation may we give ourselves to him and thereby find our lives forever altered in
Jesus name amen well well didn't didn't

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