

The Lord of the harvest

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[0 : 0 0] And this morning we're going to be reading Acts chapter 2, starting at verse 1 through to verse 21. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now they were dwelling in Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from every nation unto heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

And they were amazed and astonished, saying, Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language?

Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadacia, Pontus and Asia. Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene.

And visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians. We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, What does this mean?

[1 : 4 0] But others, mocking, said, They are filled with new wine. But Peter, standing with the eleven, 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 vapour 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.

[2 : 5 5] Well, like me, do you sometimes feel afraid? To bring Jesus into conversations. Especially given the live and let live age we're in.

To urge others to submit to an ultimate truth claim. To try and convert people. And as you probably heard in Victoria, even to, in some circumstances, pray for people.

It's considered totally arrogant. How would you engage with someone like this lesbian activist professor?

Here's her words. As a university professor, I am tired of students who seem to believe that knowing Jesus meant knowing little else. Christians in particular were bad readers.

Always seizing opportunities to insert a Bible verse into a conversation with the same point as a punctuation mark. To end the conversation rather than deepen it. Stupid.

[4 : 00] Pointless. Menacing. That's what I thought of Christians and their God Jesus. How would you engage with someone like that?

A professor. Encountering someone like that, fears would be choking me. Do I have the right to say that there's another way to live? Do I have the words to say to a professor?

We're going to come back to this woman's story near the end of the sermon this morning. We might be living in an age of live and let live, but in our passage today in Acts 2, we're confronted with a reality that tells us there is a much more primary, more fundamental age that we're living in.

A different way of describing it than live and let live. Everyone needs to know what age we're in, what time we're in. So far in Acts 1, we've seen the risen Lord exalted to the highest place in heaven, but he's got a new base of operations, but he's got the same passion to save his people.

He's done the hard part in dying, and now he wants the reward of his suffering. His scope is the ends of the earth. His focus is his died-for people. His goal is to gather them to himself.

[5 : 27] And he's going to accomplish it through his witnesses, his people, through us, his ambassadors. More precisely, he's going to rule, he's going to speak through the apostolic testimony of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, what we call the gospel message.

Whomever the risen Lord calls to himself, we can be sure that he will send his message of the gospel to them, and that's how he will gather them to himself. So now in Acts 2, the day of power arrives.

So come with me, open your Bibles, come with me to verses 1 to 4 of Acts 2. Pentecost, the word means 50.

It's a feast described in the Old Testament law, found in Leviticus 23. It's meant to occur 50 days after the Passover.

50 days after that first sheaf of wheat of the new harvest has been presented to the Lord, thanking him for the new harvest, recognizing that God is the Lord of the harvest.

[6 : 47] So Pentecost is also known as the Feast of Weeks, because it's meant to be seven weeks after the Passover. The Feast of the Firstfruits of the Harvest. Later Jewish tradition thought this time was the timing of Moses giving the law, so the time when God entered into covenant with his people.

This feast was meant for all the people, all Israel meant to gather, young and old, rich and poor. It's meant to be a holy gathering, a holy assembly, and it's meant to be a celebration, a time of rejoicing.

So that's Pentecost in the Old Testament. God chooses his timing for a reason. It's been 50 days since Jesus rose from the dead.

I think we're meant to think of that as the kind of first sheaf of wheat of the new creation, the first bit of the harvest when Jesus rose from the dead.

And now at Pentecost, the rest of the harvest begins. The eternal blessings of heaven begin. So I want us to imagine where one of the 120 gathered that day, sitting in the upper room, and the Spirit makes a grand entrance from heaven.

[8 : 06] You couldn't miss it. A sound fills the entire house like a violent gale. There's no mention of a breeze. It's the sound that's overwhelming.

And it came from heaven. Luke is clear to say. It came from heaven, which is a clue as to who sent this. And something that looked like tongues of fire.

I don't know how you picture this. But tongues of fire divided up and rested on each one. And then you, along with the rest of the church, start speaking in languages you've never studied.

I don't mean saying bonjour and thinking you know French. The picture here is just starting to talk fluently in a different language. Later in Scripture, the idea of speaking in a divine language of tongues is mentioned.

But that's not what's going on here. Keep in mind that tongue, the tongue is the instrument of speech. The word itself, glossa, is the word used for language.

[9 : 15] This was a fearful, amazing moment. A unique event, never to be repeated, when the Spirit visibly and audibly was poured out and filled up each one of Christ's people and gave them power to speak.

Now, it's not meant to be a blueprint for us to stop and think, do I have the Spirit according to this pattern? It's not meant to be that.

This is a story. This phenomena of what they saw, the Spirit, the tongues of fire, and speaking in fluent languages all of a sudden, it's not described ever again.

This is a one-time event. Nowhere else in the New Testament are we told to measure the Spirit in this way. We are told that every believer has a Spirit.

But don't use this as a blueprint for yourself. This is a unique event. And that's the point. This day is a turning point in history. Something, a new age begins.

[10 : 18] You couldn't miss it. A new time has begun. It's the time of the harvest. Luke only devotes three sentences to describing the supernatural events.

Three sentences. Surely that deserves a bit more. But it's not his focus. He moves on very quickly. He's interested in verses 5 to 13, the impact that the Spirit had on the world, and then 14 to 21 with Peter's speech about what does this mean.

That should be our focus. So let's have a look. Let's listen. So the Spirit's arrival was noticed by the crowds in Jerusalem who had gathered for Pentecost, for the feast.

And I've got a picture to describe all these places. Bree, you did well trying to name all those places. I'm glad. I'm not going to try. Thank you for doing that.

But I think that picture says it better than I can. Christ is starting to gather the world.

[11 : 31] The geography, it's not about gathering to Jerusalem. The geography is meant to paint a theological picture. Christ is gathering people to himself through his word.

The crowds didn't see the tongues. They didn't hear the wind. What they heard is repeated three times by Luke, so we don't miss the point.

So look at verse 6. Each one was hearing them speak in his own language. Verse 8. Galileans of all people, they were considered religiously impure Jews, having intermarried with other nations since the exile.

Galileans? How is it that we hear each of us in his own native language? And then verse 11, in case we missed it, we hear them telling in our own languages the mighty works of God.

Christ's people are given power to speak intelligible, understandable words, so that each person in all the world can understand in their own dialect the mighty works of God.

[12 : 43] What's happening here is a reversal of Babel, the Tower of Babel, so Genesis 11. There God was judging the sin of man, and so he scattered people, confusing with languages.

Here he is saving. He's gathering, not scattering. He's gathering his people. Not by eliminating the diversity of languages.

He doesn't supersede that. He works through diversity and draws the world to himself. He's beginning to save. I think there's a principle here for us today.

Someone who truly wants someone else to know Christ will meet the person where they're at, searching for the most understandable language for them to hear the good news.

I think we see it in the example of William Tyndale during the Reformation. In England, he was burnt at the stake because he wanted to translate the Bible from Latin into English so that everyone could have the Word of God.

[13 : 51] That's quite a sacrifice for a translation, isn't it? He did it so that we could hear God's Word directly.

Christian jargon is not the measure of sharing Jesus. You don't have to use Jesus is King in your speech.

Meet the person where they're at. The Spirit's love will move us to listen well to someone to try and meet them where they're at the most understandably as possible.

So let's go back to the story. Many who were there that day wanted to find out what is going on, what does this mean? Others try and protect their current understanding of life and just try and dismiss it.

Oh, they're just drunk. Somehow being drunk makes you learn languages. But they try and dismiss it to protect their way of life.

[14 : 58] It's kind of funny. It is a kind of new wine, according to the prophets. I'll let you search that for yourself. So what does this mean? Peter stands up and speaking on behalf of the 11 apostles and on behalf of the whole church.

Peter, in good humour, keeps the sceptics listening. He doesn't have a go at them for saying that they're drunk. It's only 9am. He kind of, in a sense, laughs it off.

He keeps them listening. He then explains the significance of Pentecost by the prophet Joel. So I just want to mention a side note here, but I'm excited by this.

Look carefully at verse 16. This is what was uttered. That word rings a bell from verse 4. This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel.

If you can flick back to chapter 1, verse 16. Peter, quoting the Psalms, says, Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David.

[16 : 12] So David and Joel, they're not puppets, puppets, but God uses their individual personalities as a mouthpiece. He speaks through them. The Holy Spirit was active for Christ, but only for kings of Israel and prophets.

It's just a very select few people. And look at chapter 1, verse 2. What Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

I think we're meant to see a continuation here. God speaking by his Spirit through the prophets, empowering Christ's mission, and now he's empowering the apostles and the church.

Now at Pentecost, it's not just kings and prophets. There is a deluge of the Spirit. It is just poured out on all God's people.

God speaks through human agents. And Peter goes on to explain this. This is exactly what the Father had said would happen. This is what he promised.

[17 : 27] And we get the first hint of this with Moses. During the time of Moses, two men are filled with the Spirit and start prophesying. And people like Moses, are you going to stop them?

They're going to steal your thunder. They're going to steal your authority here. And Moses isn't threatened by it at all. He says in Numbers 11, 29, would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them.

He wants all God's people filled with the Spirit. That's the first hint we get. Then in Ezekiel, he pictured a day in chapter 37 of Ezekiel where God's people were a valley of dry bones.

And the prophesied word, by the power of the Spirit, brings new resurrected life to God's people, recreating them. He describes it in chapter 36, as I will give you a new heart, this is the Lord speaking, and a new spirit I will put within you.

I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

[18 : 34] And so too we find this new day promised through Joel that Peter quotes here. This is the last days. This is the promised future, God had said. A time period when the Lord is reigning, when he's ready to carry out judgment, and when he's ready to save.

This is the new day when God's Spirit would be poured out on the people he saves. And notice in Joel, it's young and old. It's men and women.

It's all. Poured out on all. So if it's poured out on all, then we know that time period has begun. Christ is reigning.

He is saving. The first taste of heaven has begun. We have received the Spirit. And the outworking in the Spirit will be for all to prophesy.

I think we often think of prophecy as foretelling future events. And occasionally the Bible talks that way. But even the Old Testament prophets, a lot of their stuff isn't new.

[19 : 41] They're taking the law of Moses and applying it in their day and age. A lot of it. Or considers Peter's speech here as an example of being empowered to prophesy.

He doesn't talk about future events. He talks about past events. God has fulfilled his promises in Christ. He's risen him from the dead. Salvation is now available.

I think we should use Luke's own term to know what prophecy is. So I like the term speaking the mighty works of God.

And what mightier work of God is there than raising Jesus from the dead? The Spirit empowers God's people to speak the mighty works of God.

If you haven't received divine dreams or visions, don't be worried. It doesn't say that we should be experiencing this every single Christian.

[20 : 50] These seem to be in service of prophecy as well. So consider Acts chapter 10 when Cornelius, the first Gentile, comes to faith. Both Cornelius and Peter received dreams and visions.

But what's the point of them? The point is to bring Peter and Cornelius together so that Peter can, in intelligible language, tell Cornelius the gospel so that he can repent and be saved.

So let's not put God in a box that he can't use dreams and visions. But they're in service of the gospel. The deluge of the Spirit means one thing.

The promised day of the Lord, the last days of eternal life have begun. Heaven has begun. Heaven has invaded earth. And it's starting in our hearts, changing us from the inside, cleansing us, filling us with God and empowering us to share that good news with others.

And if the Lord has begun his harvest, if that is the new day, if it's the day of salvation, then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This promise of God's Spirit is still available today.

[22 : 08] We're going to hear more of that next week, but just look at verse 39 quickly. The promise is for you and for your children, the next generation, and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord, our God, calls to himself.

The promise of the Spirit is for all who believe in the name of Jesus. A new age, the time of salvation, the time of God's Spirit, the time of Christ gathering his people to himself.

That's the age we're in. Heaven has begun. People need to understand that that is the time we're in. Judgment is coming, but first it's time for salvation.

Christ is reigning. So let's return to our lesbian professor.

Her name is Rosaria Butterfield. You might have heard of her before. I just love how the means God used to draw her to himself.

[23 : 11] So I'm going to read a substantial portion of her article. that Christians who mocked me on Gay Pride Day were happy that I and everyone I loved were going to hell was clear as blue sky.

That is not what Ken did. He did not mock. He engaged. So when his letter invited me to get together for dinner, I accepted.

My motives at the time were straightforward. Surely this would be good for my research. Something else happened. Ken and his wife, Floyd, and I became friends.

They entered my world. They met my friends. We did book exchanges. We talked openly about sexuality and politics. They did not act as if such conversations were polluting them.

They did not treat me like a blank slate. When we ate together, Ken prayed in a way I'd never heard before. His prayers were intimate, vulnerable. He repented of his sin in front of me. He thanked God for all things.

[24 : 17] Ken's God was holy and firm, yet full of mercy. I started reading the Bible. I read the way a glutton devours. I continued reading the Bible, all the while fighting the idea that it was inspired.

But the Bible got to be bigger inside me than I. I like that phrase. The Bible got to be bigger inside me than I. It overflowed into my world.

I fought against it with all my might. Then one Sunday morning, I rose from the bed of my lesbian lover and an hour later sat in a pew at the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Conspicuous with my butch haircut, I reminded myself that I came to meet God, not fit in. I fought with everything I had. I did not want this. I did not, excuse me, I did not ask for this.

I counted the costs and I did not like the math on the other side of the equal sign. But God's promises rolled in like sets of waves into my world. Then one ordinary day, I came to Jesus open-handed and naked.

[25 : 28] I don't know why this is getting to me, but please keep focusing on the story. I came to Jesus open-handed and naked. In this war of world views, Ken was there. Floyd was there.

The church that had been praying for me for years was there. Jesus triumphed and I was a broken mess. Conversion was a train wreck. I did not want to lose everything that I loved but the voice of God sang a love song in the rubble of my world.

I weakly believed that if Jesus could conquer death, he could make right. Man, my world. I drank tentatively at first, then passionately of the solace of the Holy Spirit.

I rested in private peace, then community, and today in the shelter of a covenant family where one calls me wife. many call me mother.

I have not forgotten the blood Jesus surrendered for this life and my former life lurks in the edges of my heart.

- [26 : 42] Shiny and still like a knife. Beautiful story, isn't it? The Lord is still gathering his people. He uses the collective witness of his church, whether the community's direct input or by setting apart and sending gospel workers.
- If we're sending, we have a share in what they say. It's the Lord's, Lord of the harvest responsibility to work on the inside of people.
- Ken, Floyd, in that story, they were just the mouthpiece. They were just the examples. It was the promises of God that rolled in on her. Our job is, I think, too cold a word.
- Our delight is to be his true and grace-filled mouthpiece that comes along for the right. He's the one who saves. If you're afraid to speak about Jesus, I'm afraid.
- [27 : 48] But don't let fear convince you that you don't have the spirit. You're in very good company. I'm really comforted by Paul the Apostle's words in Corinthians. When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testament of God with lofty speech or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
- And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. So if you're afraid, don't let that convince you you don't have the spirit. If your desire is the same as Christ, that they would come and share in Christ, then his spirit lives in you.
- And please don't think you need an eloquent gospel presentation. If you start a sales pitch, people will smell it from a mile off. No one wants to hear that.
- Instead, I think, think of what a Christian is. Paul describes a Christian this way in Romans 10.9. It's a person who confesses with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.
- Just being a Christian is confessing Jesus is Lord. God, it's to be open about what's true in our heart. So Jesus describes speech in Luke 6.45.
- [29 : 17] Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. I think sharing Jesus is just saying what is true in your heart already. What you believe to be true and good.
- So we're in the last days. Christ has given us his spirit to be his mouthpiece, individually but collectively, so we can have confidence that we have divine authority to speak.
- We're in an age where tolerance says, it just shames us to be silent. We need to know what age we're in. we have divine authority to speak because it is the age of salvation and the spirit will speak through us.
- We don't have authority to be arrogant and superior but we do have authority to speak. Although we do have authority and we do have help, divine help, what we don't have is power.
- Not power to save that is. You can't change anyone. You can barely change yourself if you're like me. You can't change anyone and it's not your job.
- [30 : 42] That's Christ's job, the Lord of the harvest and that should take the pressure off. It should mean we're patient. it should mean we should try our best to persuade but persuading isn't up to us.
- That's up to the Lord and it should mean we pray if it's not up to us. So the Lord has filled us with his spirit. The new day of salvation has begun and together as a church we're just the mouthpiece.
- We get to come along for the ride and we can leave the saving up to the Lord. Will you pray in the name? Let's pray. Lord, thank you for pursuing me.
- Thank you for pursuing each one of us. Lord, as I look back in my own life there's so many people who were examples and who spoke to me the word of God faithfully.

Thank you for sending them. Thank you for breaking through each of our sinful barriers and self-protection. Thank you for breaking through and changing us and drawing us to yourself.

[32 : 02] Lord, we praise you that you are still drawing people to yourself. Please lift our horizons as a church beyond just Newcastle but to the ends of the earth.

Lord, fill us with prayer to you as the Lord of the harvest. please give us courage when we're afraid. Please move us to have a share in others coming to know you and having eternal life.

Lord, please use us as a church but we praise you that you are Lord and that you are saving. In Jesus' name, Amen. God Good to zero.