

When The Spirit Comes

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Preacher: Rod McArdle

[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 24th of April 2005. The preacher is Rod McArdle.

His sermon is entitled, When the Spirit Comes, and is based on Acts 2, verses 1 to 21.

We read about this extraordinary event of Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts. You might like to follow along with that in the Pew Bibles on page 885, but the verses will also appear up on the wall.

So this Feast of Pentecost, in the New Testament times, the Feast of Pentecost was the name for the celebration of the Feast of Weeks. And that marked the end of the barley harvest, and it was about halfway through the wheat harvest.

The Feast occurred 50 days after Passover. It was just a one-day festival, and it was a festival of just extraordinary joy. And a huge number of pilgrims came to Jerusalem for Pentecost.

[1 : 0 7] I mean, at the Passover time, they estimate that maybe 100,000 came to Jerusalem. Now, some of those would have left, but more would have come to the city. Pentecost was about in our May or June period, and that was a great time of the year for pilgrims to travel, because it was just prior to the long, dry, hot summer.

So Luke starts off, and he tells us that when the day of Pentecost had come, and the idea that he's trying to demonstrate there is that when the day had been filled up, Pentecost was about to come to its fullest expression.

All of the prior feasts of Pentecost would fade into absolute insignificance in comparison to this day. This day would be the Supreme Pentecost.

It would be a beginning which would culminate in an extraordinary and great harvest in the future. The coming of the Spirit and that subsequent great harvest of believers who would all acknowledge Jesus as their Saviour and Lord and who would become an ever-enlarging body, a body known as the Church.

So all of the believers were together in one place, Luke tells us. And when he says all, he's probably referring at least to the 120 believers that he's mentioned back in chapter 1, verse 15, but he's possibly also speaking of other followers of Jesus, also from Galilee and perhaps from elsewhere.

[2 : 3 8] We're not sure exactly where the believers were gathered. In verse 2, it's described as a house, but that may have signified one of the large halls in the temple. It probably wasn't a private place, because the large gathered crowd of onlookers quickly become aware of what's happening.

And notice what happens. Suddenly, the Spirit came upon the believers. And there were three supernatural signs.

From heaven comes this tumultuous noise. It's described as a sound like the rush of a violent wind. Not the wind, but a sound like the rush of a violent wind.

And tongues, tongues like fire, which rested on each believer. You see, the natural is being used to describe the supernatural.

And these events convinced the believers that the Spirit of God had indeed come upon them. That they had been baptised with the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 49] And that's just what Jesus had said to them just before he ascended. Back in chapter 1, he left these words with them. He said, And so this analogy of the wind and the fire signified God's Spirit.

Both terms have that background in the Old Testament. And their use shows that the fulfilment of the Old Testament is taking place. Notice that a tongue rested on each believer.

And that's powerful symbolism. Because these believers represented the whole church. And therefore, all of them participated in that gift.

In the New Covenant, of course, established by Jesus, inaugurated at Pentecost, the Spirit now rests on each individual, on each of us. But the Spirit also has a corporate indwelling.

And in both respects, that's quite different to the Spirit's work in the Old Covenant. This is the beginning of what we call the church. A survey was held on how the members of the various sections of 11 major symphony orchestras perceived each other.

[5 : 07] The percussionists, of course, they were viewed as insensitive, unintelligent, and hard of hearing, yet fun-loving. But it's okay, Alex, that certainly doesn't apply to you. String players, though, were seen as arrogant, stuffy, and unathletic.

I'm glad no one was playing the violin tonight. Orchestra members overwhelmingly chose loud as the primary adjective to describe the brass players, and also the guitarists.

Woodwind players seemed to be held in the highest esteem. They were described as quiet, meticulous, though a bit egotistical. And with such wildly divergent personalities and perceptions, how could an orchestra ever come together and make such great music?

Well, the answer is simple. Regardless of how the musicians view each other, they subordinate their feelings and biases to the leadership of the conductor.

And it's under the conductor's guidance that they're able to play great music. Well, the body of Christ is made up of lots of different personalities.

[6 : 14] People with varied life experiences and giftedness. And yet, each of us are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and we're held together by the Holy Spirit, and we serve under the headship of the Lord Jesus.

Diversity, mutuality, and unity. All of these believers at the Feast of Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit.

You see, they had an objective experience of the sound and the tongues like fire. But they also had a subjective experience, a subjective experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they expressed this experience by praising God. They proclaimed His wonders, and they proclaimed them, Luke tells us, in other languages. Now, as we read on in the text, we realise that this is not ecstatic speech, but actually a variety of languages.

And it's different to the tongues that are spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Well, not surprisingly, a crowd builds up. I mean, a crowd seems to always attract a crowd.

[7 : 25] I don't know what your experience is like, but often when I'm walking down the Bourke Street Mall, I tend to be drawn to a crowd. I mean, you see a group that are gathered together. They're either watching something or watching someone.

And you want to see what's happening too. And as you approach it, it seems like lots of other people are coming to see what's happening as well. And soon there are these rings and rings of people straining their necks to see what's happening in the middle.

And often you put this great effort in to get in and see what's happening, and then you're a little disappointed. Well, this was not the case in Jerusalem. Not on this day.

This was an extraordinary day. Here were these Galileans. They were praising God. They weren't praising God in Aramaic, but in the various dialects and languages of the crowd.

And that, that is a stunning miracle. It's also a fantastic sign, isn't it? I mean, at the beginning of what we might call the era of the Spirit, we have this proclamation of God's greatness, and in those different languages, if you like, symbolically, to the ends of the earth.

[8 : 35] And that just ties in exactly with Jesus' last words before he ascended. And he said, You'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Luke tells us that there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And the list of people that we read about in verses 9 to 11 shows that Luke is seeking to convey just this great variety of people that were present.

I mean, firstly, there's a listing of those from the major inhabited regions, and then those from the islands, and then finally, those from the desert regions. So the believers filled with the Holy Spirit are praising God, and they're praising God for his deeds of power.

And they're doing it in this extraordinary range and variety of languages. This miraculous gift of the Spirit was preparing the crowd.

It was preparing the crowd because soon Peter is to stand up and address them with the gospel. Notice the significance of this.

[9 : 48] The Spirit overcomes all barriers, even of languages. He overcomes all barriers to witness to all people. And that is a great act of mercy and grace by God.

Because think about it. Think about it. Here's this crowd, local Jews, Jews from afar, and many of those who were present on that day were likely the ones who were also present as they stood, as Jesus stood before Pilate.

And they would have been some of the ones who cried out, crucify him, crucify him. And Peter actually has no doubt about the crowd's guilt.

Because in verse 23, he tells them that they crucified and they killed Jesus of Nazareth, who was attested to them by God with deeds of power.

So, here they're gathered. Another crowd, another day in Jerusalem. But, it's not just any day, is it? This is, in our terminology of last week, a mountain peak day.

[10 : 58] Because, instead of instant judgment, what does God do? God sends his Spirit. I mean, do you catch the significance of this scene?

God doesn't just instantly destroy them for killing the very Son of God. No.

In his extraordinary mercy and grace, he fills his children, he fills his believers, with the Holy Spirit. And they go on and proclaim God's great deeds of power.

And then Peter offers the crowd God's forgiveness, if they'll repent. what extraordinary grace. What extraordinary love that God has for fallen, sinful people.

Sinful people like me. Sinful people like each of you. Well, the sound of these Galilean Jews speaking in so many different languages confused the hearers.

[12 : 02] You recall back in Genesis 11 at the Tower of Babel, the unintelligibility the unintelligibility of the lots and lots of languages at that time caused confusion. But, here in Jerusalem, at Pentecost, it was the very intelligibility of this great number of languages that caused confusion.

And of course, the people from Galilee will look down on it. If you came from the southern region around Jerusalem, you saw Galileans as being simple folk, as being uneducated folk. And I find that a pretty useful lesson for each of us.

We always need to let God be God. Because God will use whoever he wishes to use in his mission of salvation. The Lord seems to repeatedly break down earthly stereotypes of greatness.

God regularly demonstrates that the ideas that we have about greatness are not his ideas. And the crowd asks, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

And they're stunned, they're amazed, they're astonished. And how is it that we hear each of us in our own native language? I mean, what does this mean, they ask in verse 12?

[13 : 17] And others simply sneered and said, they're filled with new wine. And of course, this idea of new wine is actually one of sweet wine. The sweeter the wine, the more they would drink of it.

because of its sweet taste. It's interesting, isn't it? The crowd has just witnessed this stunning miracle. And some of them simply put it down to drunkenness.

That's also got a lot of relevance for us in our world, hasn't it? I mean, theories are advanced as facts. Theories seeking to avoid admitting the existence of God and the work of God in our world.

I often think it's probably best summed up in this sort of attitude that you might hear someone express in thinking about the resurrection. The sort of response that says, I won't believe in the resurrection unless I can see it happen in a test tube.

And then I want to see it repeated in a test tube. Rejection of the gospel by some people is seen repeatedly as you go through the book of Acts with the mission of the church.

[14 : 23] So when we go to proclaim the gospel, we should anticipate some rejection and we shouldn't be disillusioned when that happens to us.

Well, Peter stands, he addresses the crowd and what an absolute contrast that is to the Peter who denied the Lord three times in John 18. He stands as the spokesperson for the group.

He stands as the interpreter of what has just happened. And he speaks with a newfound confidence. And despite the jibes of the crowd about the drunkenness, notice the courteous way that he starts.

Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem. And then Peter connects with the crowd at the very point that they're curious about. He says, we're not drunk. I mean, it's only nine o'clock in the morning.

And then Peter goes on and he points out the real reason for the surprising phenomena. The surprising phenomena that the crowd had just witnessed.

[15 : 24] The prophecy of the Old Testament prophet Joel is being fulfilled. And all devout Jews would have longed for that day. And Peter quotes from the book of Joel chapter 2 verses 28 to 32.

Of course, when Joel spoke those words, the land had just been devastated by locusts. And the prophet Joel saw that as a warning, as a warning from God and he called on the people to repent.

And repentance would be met by forgiveness. Rain would fall on the land. There would be plenty of wheat, plenty of oil. And then Joel says that after this, God would pour out his spirit on all flesh.

And that's where Peter picks up Joel chapter 2. Peter, of course, makes some minor changes. He begins with those words in the last days. And he does that so that the Joel prophecy fits this particular context.

And I suspect also that when Peter is using all flesh that he's probably thinking of all Jews. But Luke, who's recording this for us, knows that that includes Gentiles. So why is Peter using this passage from the Old Testament?

[16 : 37] to tell this crowd in Jerusalem that the future age has already begun. The promises of the Old Testament era are being fulfilled.

And they're being fulfilled where and in who? In the lives of those who follow Jesus. All of God's people now have the Holy Spirit.

And we know from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that from Pentecost on the Holy Spirit indwells each believer and indwells the company of believers, the body of Christ.

All of God's people now have his Spirit. From the least to the greatest, equipped for witness, equipped for service, and with various gifts.

Gifts to be used in this age, this age that's been ushered in by Jesus. We are actually in the last days. Pentecost is an event of the last days.

[17 : 37] It's one of Luke's major signposts in the book of Acts. It's one of his mountain peaks. Peter's explanation of the tongues to the crowd is put under the umbrella, if you like, of prophecy as we read in verse 18.

And I think that's simply because the believers were speaking in recognisable languages, which, if you like, is like prophecy because it edifies and builds up the church.

And that's what we read in 1 Corinthians 14 at the beginning of that chapter. Well, what about the signs and the wonders in verses 19 to 20? And I'll show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and smoky mist.

I mean, perhaps we're meant to relate that to the death of Jesus and the fire of the Spirit coming down on the believers. But most likely, verses 19 and 20 are final events before the second coming of Christ at the end of this age.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. You see, the coming of the Holy Spirit inaugurates the end times.

[18 : 50] the end has already been set in motion. Notice the urgency in verse 21. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

People must repent, believe and be saved. We are living in the day of God's grace.

God's gracious gift of salvation achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus is freely available to all. To all who would repent and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The cosmic disturbances will herald the great and glorious day of the Lord. It will be a day of universal judgment that will end this age.

but for believers there's absolutely nothing to fear. In fact, there's an excitement and anticipation in waiting for our Saviour's return.

[19 : 58] So let me then highlight four important applications that come out of this text in Acts 2. Firstly, these Pentecostal tongues heard by this large group of Jews from many different countries they were highly symbolic.

They pointed to the breaking down of social barriers by the Holy Spirit. You see, Christianity isn't about one homogeneous culture. Christianity is about Christ.

Christ for all cultures. And we look forward to the day when there'll be a great multitude that no one can count from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb robed in white with palm branches in our hands.

Secondly, Christian ministry is ministry in the Spirit. Pentecost tells us that we today can manifest power in ministry. Without the Spirit's power in ministry then whatever we do is simply futile.

I think it's easy to get distracted, it's easy to find security in lots of other things that serve as a substitute in ministry as distinct from the power of the Spirit.

[21 : 19] Thirdly, this event of Pentecost tells us that we today can in fact have an intimate experience of God. Pentecost has opened the door for us, has opened the door for an intimate, for a supernatural experience of God.

Paul says in Romans 5.5 that God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit whom he has given us. Our hearts are filled with joy and our joy expresses itself in praise to God.

I want to suggest that as Christians we need to constantly seek to recapture what Pentecost signified. vibrant intimacy with God and joyous worship that flows out of such intimacy.

Of course we need to be on our guard with such a subjective expression that we don't do that at the expense of diligence in God's word, that we don't do that at the expense of both personal holiness and corporate holiness.

Well finally Pentecost is a stunning reminder isn't it of the extraordinary grace and mercy of God. These tongues of fire might have consumed that crowd that gathered that day, might have consumed the very stones of Jerusalem.

[22 : 49] The Son of God had been crucified, had been killed at the urging of the Jews. But incredibly the tongues of fire announced to the murderers of Jesus that God was pouring out his Holy Spirit.

Pardon and forgiveness was offered to all mankind. And pardon and forgiveness is offered to all who are here tonight. All who may be here not in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

And the Lord's message is simple and it's one of repent and trust. And the gracious and the merciful God sends the gift of new life, of a new relationship with himself.

This day that we live in, this actual day and this age that we're living is, if you like, a period, a day of opportunity. It's a time of grace. Friends, don't turn away from that opportunity because as certainly as Jesus died, as certainly as he rose, as certainly as he ascended, as certainly as the Spirit came, we know as a fact that Jesus Christ is coming again, described as the day of the Lord, a time when all sin for a be and will be put to an end.

God's God's God's God's God's God's God's gracious gift of salvation.

[24 : 28] Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the extraordinary grace and mercy that you've shown us in your Son.

We thank you for his death and resurrection. we thank you for the salvation that's available through faith and trust in him. Heavenly Father, we thank you for just that extraordinary demonstration of your grace when on that day in Jerusalem, at the feast of Pentecost, you poured out your spirit.

You poured out your spirit and your believers were able to proclaim your greatness to that assembled crowd, that assembled crowd who many of them had called for Jesus to be crucified not long before.

Lord, we thank you that you are just so matchless in your grace. But Lord, we recognise that there will be a day of reckoning for sin. We thank you that we're in this time of grace.

Lord, I ask by your spirit tonight that you would deeply convict any who are here who are not in relationship with the Lord Jesus and that they would turn around from their sinful state and put their faith and trust in him.

[25 : 48] And Lord, for those who have received this wonderful gift of grace, might we be encouraged by just this wonderful event of Pentecost. Might we be joyous in our praise for you, in the wonder of being in an intimate, personal relationship with you.

And Lord, might we just have great rejoicing and also take great responsibility for the wonderful privilege of the intimacy that we share with each other in the body of Christ.

We ask these things for Christ's sake. Amen.