

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

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Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[0 : 0 0] Acts chapter 2 this morning as we can continue on in our sermon series. There have been many battles in human history, but certain battles in history, the defeats or the victories have been so decisive or monumental, they are remembered for centuries, even millennia.

The Battle of Thermopylae, where the 300, it wasn't really 300, but the 300 Spartans took on all of Persia, the Battle of Agincourt, Waterloo, the Battle of the Bulge, Hiroshima and Nagasaki dropping the bomb on the two cities.

Here in Canada we remember Vimy and Passchendaele and Dieppe as nation-defining battles that prove the might and resolve of a young country. All such battles are remembered as having era-defining significance, and they did more than just change the fortunes of a war, but in some cases changed civilization completely.

I open with this because I want to ask the following question. How expansive, how era-defining, how much did it change civilization, the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

The victory that is the Gospel, the good news that Jesus lived and He died and He rose again. He ascended into heaven and one day He will come back again to judge the living and the dead.

[1 : 3 9] The good news of Christ whereby all evil and all sin, all brokenness, all death forever defeated, never to come back and wage war again.

A victory so complete that in it Christ redeems and restores and reconciles all things, that even creation itself will be renewed.

You read more about that in Colossians 1, verse 20. How expansive, how era-defining, how civilization-changing was the victory of Christ on the cross.

Acts chapter 2 opens with the descending of the promised Holy Spirit that would clothe the disciples with power so that they would be witnesses to His victory, continuing the very ministry of Christ Himself.

And we'll see that what happens in Acts chapter 2 is in a sense the outpouring or the outworking of the victory of Christ that will have reverberations all throughout the centuries, all throughout the millennia, into the future until Christ returns.

[2 : 5 2] In fact, it will define human history. We'll look at two ways that the Holy Spirit, through God's people, will change history through the victory of Christ.

That through the victory of Christ and the descending of the Holy Spirit, God's people will experience a new life. And then also, God's people will experience a new family.

Only two points today. No three-pointer. That's okay. We're going to keep things a bit short with the kids outside. So, let's look at it right away. Let's jump in. How the Holy Spirit, how the victory of Christ through the Holy Spirit will cause God's people to experience a new life.

I'll just say this before we jump in. Acts chapter 2 might be the most symbolically rich chapter in all of the Bible.

The allusions to the Old Testament, the subtleties, the words that are used to tip us off to something greater and bigger that is happening.

[3 : 59] It is all through Acts chapter 2. It was, and I'm not just saying this, it was very difficult to cut certain things out and to keep things somewhat concise for this morning because it is so richly packed with allusions and symbols and scripture references that if you dig a bit deeper, I mean, it's a remarkable chapter, Acts chapter 2.

But we'll let's, that's my little kind of riff about it. We'll jump in verse 1 and we'll read verses 1 to 4 and we'll see how this new life comes about.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they, the disciples, the followers of Jesus, were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Holy Spirit has ascended and the language that is used here is that of wind and fire. Notice that on one hand, the language is, it's literal. The Bible isn't communicating something in strictly metaphor that this is a literal telling of what is happening.

[5 : 29] We'll see later on that the, it's not just kind of like a group experience, but the neighboring, the crowds in the city, the folks from all different lands, they're hearing something that's happening and they're not sure what it is, but something clearly is going down.

But, it's also language that is couched in very, I'd say symbolic language, typological language, that is throughout all of Scripture.

So what do I mean by this? Wind and fire are throughout Scripture. They are used as symbols to describe aspects of God's Spirit interacting with humanity.

Luke wants us to ask the question, where have we seen this before? When wind comes in, when fire comes in, does it jog our memory to something in the Old Testament that might tip us off to what Luke is trying to communicate to us?

So, I think to really dive into our text, we need to explore the Scriptures and find instances whereby we see God's Spirit described as wind and fire.

[6 : 43] So, let's look first at wind. Recall how God made man and breathed His breath into His nostrils. Genesis chapter 2, to give mankind life.

That was not an act to simply fill lungs, but it envisions God giving life, fullness of life, mental, physical, rational, spiritual life to His creation, mankind.

He breathes His breath into mankind. So, how is this connected to wind? Here in Acts 2, we have something similar happening. It says wind in Acts chapter 2, verse 2, but the other place, the only other place in Acts where the same word in the original language is used is actually in Acts chapter 17, verse 25, when the Apostle Paul is preaching to the Athenians and he says this, He, God, He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

The same word used in Acts chapter 2, wind, is the same exact word used in Acts chapter 17 for breath. This is a really interesting thing because it would seem that what Luke is pointing to isn't just this supernatural experience where wind comes in and we're like, why wind?

It seems bizarre, but he's tipping us off to something that God has done previously. This, Luke is trying to explain to us, is, what we are seeing here is a new creation happening.

[8 : 25] God is forming a new people for Himself and He is breathing His very Spirit into them. And it will animate them with divine power so that when they bear witness to Christ, it is with power.

God's Spirit is residing in mankind not so, in a very similar way to what we see in creation in Genesis chapter 2. The new and greater Adam Christ is called.

We sang those words in our second to last song or our last song that Jen and John opened with. This new Adam, this new firstborn of new creation, Christ Himself does a mighty creative work in His people by His Spirit so that they can testify about the victory of Christ and the spread of the Kingdom.

God is creating a new people. Not only do we see wind, we also see fire, another symbol throughout Scripture that represents God's presence.

Fire is another symbolic representation of God. Think of Moses at the burning bush, the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the desert or God described as a goldsmith or a refiner who refines precious metal by fire.

[9 : 52] We see that throughout Scripture as well. What is common to these examples is that fire symbolizes purification, refining as a silversmith or a goldsmith does.

It takes elements and burns away the impurities so that the pure metal remains. But really, ultimately, it represents the holiness of God.

Moses at the burning bush is told to take off your sandals. Why? Because he is standing on holy ground. The fire that represents God, the fire of God, is His holiness.

God's people are to be righteous and holy for the God they serve has made them so, has made them to be so through the forgiveness of sins at the cross of Christ.

So what is more is that at Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, it's the Jewish festival, it's actually coming up very soon on the Jewish calendar, not the Christian calendar that is.

[11 : 02] But Pentecost is also the Feast of Weeks and it was also the time that the people of Israel would celebrate the law being given to them through Moses at Mount Sinai.

It's Exodus chapter 19. And in Exodus chapter 19 verse 18 it says this, the entire mountain was covered in smoke. Why?

For God descended upon it with fire. As God gave the law to the people of Israel, He also communicated to them that He was holy and He was pure and the people were afraid.

Moses receives the law only to return to the people of Israel and to find them worshipping the idols. I mean, in many respects this is like the majority of Exodus if you read it.

It seems crazy for the people to witness such a spectacle only to get impatient and create an idol that they began to worship. So the people, we find in Exodus 19, the people of Israel, after being given the law, they do not embrace the holiness of God because their hearts, like the tablets of stone that had the law upon it, are rock hard.

[12 : 18] They can't receive. But the lives of God's people are to be marked with a growth and holiness that is animated by the Holy Spirit again, the Holy Spirit coming down who will write God's laws, God's ways, God's desires upon their heart.

And that would require a move of God's Spirit that began at Pentecost with His disciples. It's actually a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31. You start to see what I was talking about with the allusions and the references to Old Testament.

This is a very thick chapter. So Jeremiah 31, 33, I'll skip a little bit. This is the Lord speaking, I will put My law within them and I will write it on their hearts.

And it continues on, For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Conviction of and freedom from sin is the destiny of the believer.

It is what God is doing through His Spirit at work in our hearts, hearts of rock of stone to hearts of flesh. There's a deep humility that recognizes that we are powerless to live a godly life apart from God's work, His Spirit.

[13 : 38] And on the flip side, there's a deep thankfulness that we, that He, rather, has shown grace to us. This unmerited favor and kindness from on high by giving us new hearts.

So, friends, I mean, in short, we see that through the Holy Spirit, God is fashioning both a new creation, it tips us off with the wind coming in and all that the wind represents, but it also means that God here is making us holy through what Christ has done on the cross, giving us hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone.

doesn't mean necessarily we're perfect. It means, in a sense, that God has done something that we cannot do and, in a sense, we need to live into holiness and righteousness by His strength.

But this is what God is up to in verses 1-4. Let me ask you a question. Is this not what the human heart longs for? Is this not the answer to the deep meaning crisis of our age?

And it's especially hitting people in my age group, the 18 to 35, actually I'm not 35, I'm 37, but, you know, round down, okay? Where we desire our best selves, but have no idea what that really means or where to find it.

[15 : 02] There's a deep meaning crisis. And my guess is it's not just hitting my demographic, it's actually something that is all across the board. Where do we find meaning?

What does meaning look like? And also, to know freedom from the pursuit of finding our belonging our meaning in people, places, or things.

Things that change. Things that can't be relied upon for ultimate meaning because they change. the Father, God, through Christ, the Son, and by the Holy Spirit gives us real meaning by making a way for us to know Him, live as He created us to live and share in the ultimate ministry as we bear witness to the risen Christ, to His victory, to the spreading of His kingdom by His strength.

But there is more than just the experience of new life that the Spirit gives. He also gives us a new family that transcends all ordinary barriers of belonging.

So look with me, this is our second point, how the Spirit helps us to experience a new family. Look at verses 5 to 13. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

[16 : 33] I'll just, I mean, I've referenced it, but I'll just bring a bit more clarity. There are three big feasts in the Jewish calendar in the first century, and the three big feasts required a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

And this is a feast, the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Booths. So you have an influx of people, Jews from all over the known world, but also God-fearers, so non-Jews that believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So Jerusalem is filled right now with pilgrims. Let's continue. We'll start again in verse 5. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

And at the sound that is the wind and the fire 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 language?

[17 : 38] Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya, belonging to Cyrene, Romans, Jews and proselytites, 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? And we'll pause there. Clearly this wasn't some kind of group hallucination by the disciples.

The city heard something. There was a buzz about the city after what had taken place with the descending of the Holy Spirit.

And it's remarkable because they're Galileans. I mean, we don't really see this and it's not really a great thing to talk about small towns as being backwater because the fact is people of remote work, they're moving all over the place, everywhere has internet.

But Galilee was a place that was, I mean, it was backwater. It was non-educated by and large and it was seen as, in a sense, Galileans were suspect.

[18 : 53] There were, you don't start a movement in the Galilee. And yet, it's these Galileans who are proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

The good news, the mighty works of God himself, verse 11, they're bearing witness to Jesus and his victory. And they're doing so in the various language, languages of everybody that was present.

It was very likely that the majority of the people there could speak Latin or common Greek or Aramaic or Hebrew, all or some or one or the other.

Language of commerce, language of religion. I mean, there would have been some form of common communication and yet, that's not what happens here. What's communicated, the gospel, is communicated in the heart language of all these people.

That God, in his, by his spirit, is meeting people directly where they're at. It really is a remarkable thing and that's why, in a sense, the history of Christianity has always been about translating the Bible into other languages because people need to know the word of God in their heart, their heart language.

[20 : 17] language. So, we have nations, a list of nations. We have a list, or we have a common tongue, so to speak.

People are understanding one another. And again, like in the, in the, in the first point I made, Luke wants us to ask the question, where have we seen this before? Is there anywhere else in the scriptures where there's a list of nations, a common tongue, and once again we discover that God is at work doing a new thing that is also very ancient.

So, turn with me to Genesis 10 and 11. Well, you don't have to turn there, I'll sum it up. In Genesis 10, it follows immediately after the flood, Noah and the flood.

And in Genesis 10, we have a fairly expansive list of what is called, in theology, the table of nations. And this isn't some kind of perfectly accurate historical, demographic study that the Bible is putting forward to us.

But rather, it is how the scripture communicates to us how humanity became increasingly divided and alienated from one another.

[21 : 30] This was not a part of God's good design, but a consequence of sin and societal disintegration that comes as a result of it. Immediately following this table of nations that's not so similar, that's not so different than our kind of table of nations in chapter 2.

We have Genesis chapter 11, which is a very famous story. Whether you know the Bible or not, I'm sure everybody has heard of the Tower of Babel. It's a very famous story and in it, I'll sum it up, there is, there's lots to be said of the story, but notice how humanity attempts to remedy the problem of division in the temple with the Tower of Babel, not by repentance and humility, but leaning into their prideful sin.

And in a sense, using their God-given gifts of ingenuity and rationality and brilliance, not to glorify God, but to glorify themselves.

They seek to supplant God as Creator and Lord by building this tower up into the cosmos in a sense so they can take the very rightful place in their minds of God.

And God, in His kindness, confuses their languages, the Scriptures say. And it's kindness because left to their own devices, the consequences of their idolatrous pride would have completely destroyed them.

[23 : 09] God confuses their languages. So in short, Genesis 11 is the seemingly irreparable division of humanity that has marked our race throughout all of history.

So go with me back to Acts chapter 2. What are we seeing here? We're seeing, in a sense, the reversal of Babel whereby God solves the problem of sin and death that divides and He unites humanity once again but not through their prideful idolatry whereby they try to ascend to heaven but instead God Himself descends to them to where they are at in their brokenness, in their various languages, in their disunity, the Holy Spirit descends upon them and they hear in their own tongue the mighty works of God.

He meets humanity where they are at in their own language as they are seeking the Lord in Jerusalem. Israel, the people of God, is expanded now to not just be comprised of one ethnicity but people from all nations and tongues, all backgrounds and classes, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, old and young, men and women so that this table of nations, so to speak, isn't some expansive list of everybody who lived in every last corner of the world but it represents all of humanity and they are hearing the good news of Christ.

In weeks to come we will see that Peter will preach a barn burner of a sermon by the strength of the Holy Spirit and they will hear it and be cut to the heart.

They will come to faith, 3,000 of them. God calls this his family. This is the family of God.

[25 : 08] The gospel unites mankind by breaking down the one thing that truly separates us and divides us, sin and evil, death and destruction.

He eliminates the wall that separates his people, Israel, from all the other Gentiles. We try desperately to unite through alliances, trade deals, affinity groups, politics, whatever it may be but unity without repentance and righteousness will result in tribalism and division.

We need to be careful about this. It will achieve actually the opposite of what we ultimately desire. Why? Because we will unite ultimately not around something but against something.

We will almost always define ourselves by what we are not. And that's not to say politics isn't important. That's not to say that alliances or affinity groups are garbage.

That's not what I'm saying at all. But when they become the chief mechanism by which we find our camaraderie with other human beings, it's a problem.

[26 : 27] St. Paul says as much in Ephesians chapter 2 and 3 where he says that the hostility that divided people has been abolished and destroyed by Christ so that all who are united to Christ are called brothers and sisters with one another that we now are united to one another.

There are a lot of different people in this congregation with a lot of different backgrounds and different experiences and things that aren't common with other people.

And yet because we are united with Christ if you have put your faith and trust and hope in Christ you now call each other brothers and sisters. See the Bible uses familial language to communicate unity.

You might not have the greatest relationship with your family members but you cannot not be members of your family. People try to say I'm like I'm de-parenting my parent or whatever it is but you can't.

You come from your parent. You are related to your brother and sister. You have cousins that you might never see but you share some kind of DNA with them. You cannot not be a part of your family.

[27 : 44] The family that Christ is making is a family that is united by Him. By the cross. By the victory of Christ. This means we have people in our congregation who will disagree about all sorts of views on education or politics or that have different likes and passions and tastes and styles but are all united together in humility by God's Spirit through the cross marked by the very righteousness of Christ.

Only the gospel truly unites. I'll end with this. The victory of Christ through the cross was the most decisive victory of all time that has defined the world like nothing else that came before or will come after.

It is the ultimate victory. So a question to you. Will you humbly embrace Christ? Will you trust that He will give you the promised Holy Spirit in your heart if you've yet to experience salvation?

Will you trust Him that He will continually fill you up by His Spirit to give you strength to bear witness to Him? To sanctify you? That is to help you grow in holiness.

to say yes to goodness and no to sin. To unite you with those in this church this morning that are very different than you. Friends, this is the victory that was won on the cross of Calvary.

[29 : 19] This is the victory that has been changing the world not perfectly because we're imperfect people but has been changing the world for 2,000 years. Friends, will you enjoy this victory?

Will you live into this victory and walk in this victory? Let's pray. God in heaven, we thank You for sending Your Son to die on our behalf.

We thank You that the promise of the Holy Spirit is ours because Your Son ascended so the Holy Spirit could be sent down. And Lord, we thank You that from the very get-go of Your church we see in it new life and a new family that is offered to us.

Lord, help us to be real about our hang-ups and our sin. Help us to be humble. Help us to always choose to lean into the victory that You've already won rather than try to fight a victory that we can't hope to win.

We ask this in Christ's mighty name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.