

The New Community Of The Holy Spirit

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] The part of Acts that we're going to look at is Acts chapter 2, and it has to do with that moment when I noticed that David is going to preach to you on Sunday on Acts chapter 1.

So, I'm grateful that, I'm sorry that I can't hear him first, but nevertheless I'll proceed on Acts chapter 2, and just the first 13 verses.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place, and suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

[1 : 24] Now, there were staying at Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

And when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Utterly amazed, they asked, Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language, Carthians, Medes, and Elamites, Residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, Visitors from Rome, Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs.

We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues. Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, What does this mean?

Some, however, made fun of them and said, They have had too much wine. Now, the picture is a very important picture.

[3 : 13] I mean, if you remember the person of Jesus Christ, who, you know, his birth in Bethlehem, the time that he was in the temple, you remember his baptism when John came along and baptized him and the Holy Spirit as a dove descended on him.

And then you remember the parables by which he taught. And you remember what he called the signs, which were the miracles that he performed.

And then you remember the, what is it they called it that happened up on the mountain?

The Mount of Transfiguration. And you remember that. And you remember his, then you remember his trial and his death and his resurrection and his ascension.

I'm just putting these all down just because I want you to have the sort of whole sweep of the life of Jesus in front of you. Now, mostly when we read the Bible, most of the New Testament is given up to this story.

[4 : 58] There are four Gospels that tell this story. And the epistles are commentary on this story.

And this story all took place within just a few more than 30 years. that's the whole picture of Jesus' life and ministry here on earth.

From the Annunciation, the Magnificat of last Friday night, which you may have heard right through the story.

and then today we come to what in a sense is the last sort of moment in Jesus' activities.

activities, it's the great sort of transition where you move from the ministry of Jesus as it is portrayed here to something which is entirely different.

[6 : 06] After this, Jesus does not appear. We say he has ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of God. and there has been left, as you might say, from looking at this, there has been left a great vacuum.

And how is that vacuum to be filled? Where are the miracles going to come from? Where is the teaching going to come from?

How is this going to continue? And nobody knows how it's going to work. I keep wondering if there's a page, too, but I guess there is under here somewhere. I'll get to it.

Okay. So, what you have here is the transition from the life and ministry of Jesus historically here on earth to the continuing ministry of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and by the apostles.

So that the book of Acts should be called, as John Stott suggests in his commentary, the works and words of Jesus through the Holy Spirit by the apostles.

[7 : 34] So then you have a whole new community. and this community is the community in which the work of Jesus continues by the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

This is finished. The story is over. He has ascended into heaven. He is seated on the right hand of God. He is the one who ever liveth to make intercession for us.

He is our humanity seated at the right hand of God, which is in a sense what humanity ultimately is all about.

If you want to understand what it is to be a human being, you have to see it in the person of Jesus who lived and died and rose and ascended.

And he did that not just because he was a peculiar person, but because he was the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

[8 : 41] He is the one who shows us what the ultimate destiny of humankind is all about. And what's left in this vacuum is the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

that's what's happening right here, right now, is the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We call that community which Jesus, which the Holy Spirit creates, we call that the church, we call it an apostolic community because it's a community that is committed to the testimony of the apostles to the life of Jesus and to understanding the Old Testament as it finds expression in the life of Jesus.

So, this is a very important and unique event that takes place and that we read about at least briefly because the disciples were all met together in an upper room and they were praying.

And it says, when the Pentecost came, they were all together in one place and suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were sitting.

[10 : 25] So, you see symbolically, as it were, what the what is going to be characteristic of this community of the apostles that is left.

And what I want to show you, this is hard to draw, but I'm going to draw it anyway because you have to interpret it. But this is a cloud and this is wind, you see, coming like this.

So, how do you draw the wind? You can't. So, that's how I'm drawing it. So, that's the wind. Now, look at the text again and you'll see that what happened in that room, it says, suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven.

Now, it doesn't say that the wind started to blow. And it doesn't say that it says that there was something like this.

It was, they use a simile here. it was like it. It was the sound like the blowing of the wind. And nobody, you know, nobody's hair was ruffled by it.

[11 : 50] It was a sound they heard. And the only thing they could compare it to in their experience was the wind. And the wind becomes, for this new community, the wind becomes, in a sense, the symbol or the expression of power.

And it's a, you know that the word spirit and the word wind are the same thing in the New Testament. And, I don't know how much French you know, nor do I know how much I know, but you know that in French a tire that is full of air is called a canoe.

And you've got four panoes on your car. and they support your car simply by air pressure in the panoes.

Well, that's the word, that's the Greek word for spirit. And so that this is the new community of the Holy Spirit and the power is demonstrated by something which sounded like wind.

And you know how powerful wind is. You know what a hurricane can do. You probably know what a typhoon can do. You've seen the terrible destructive power of the wind.

[13 : 32] But then you can also know that the wind brings new weather, the wind brings the springtime, the people are looking for a change in the season, and they watch the winds.

And so the wind is a very important constant activity across the face of the earth. There's a famous wind that is supposed to bring, what's the one off South America that they talk about all the time?

El Nino. El Nino. So it's a very strong picture of power.

And so this community is a community that has power. But there's something peculiar about this power as there is about the wind.

And that is it's very difficult to identify where it comes from and where it's going to. Remember what it says in John's Gospel?

[14 : 38] It says that the spirit is like the wind. Nobody knows where it comes from. Nobody knows where it's going to. So is everyone that is baptized with the spirit.

That this power which is present in the community is a kind of autonomous power. You know, we try to, humanly speaking, we try to say, well, this is where it comes from or this is what it comes from or if you have this you'll have it.

But we don't know where it comes from. And I must say that one of the happy things about not being the rector of this parish anymore is that I can sit back and look and I look with tremendous sense of gratitude for the work God has done in the lives of people in this parish and through the lives of people in this parish.

And I don't know that I can identify. I mean, the thing that excites me and delights me is that I don't know where that came from and I don't ultimately know what it will lead to.

But I know that the power of the Holy Spirit in the church touched and continues to touch many people's lives.

[16 : 05] There is a power which is of God and which is called the Holy Spirit. And we're told that that is the means by which the continuing work of the words and works of Jesus is being done among us.

That power is there. And that what prayer is, is keeping in touch with that power. We keep using that silly expression, you know, that, well, all you can do is pray.

It's all you ever should do. You know, it's that that puts you in touch with, I mean, it helps you to become aware, at least in some degree, of the power, the source of which you don't know, and the end result of which you don't know, but you are aware of that reality.

And so that's the first thing that characterizes the church as the community. As the community of the Holy Spirit, it has power.

Not a power over which it has control, which it likes to think it does, but a power which is present in spite of the fact that there's a lot of people.

[17 : 30] I mean, you could look at a congregation like St. John's and say, how could God do anything with them? Well, the answer is by the Holy Spirit, in spite of them.

And that's the first powerful picture that you get in Acts chapter 2. It was suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

The second thing that they saw was fire. And again, they didn't see fire.

It just says that they saw what looked like it. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire. Now, these tongues of fire were, in fact, coming down instead of up, but they were tongues of fire nevertheless.

Do you know why the bishop wears that silly little hat that he wears? Because it represents a tongue of fire, that funny hat the bishop wears.

[18 : 57] Well, or the funny hat bishops wear. all right? But the mitre, they call it.

But that's what it represents. Now, if you look at fire in the Bible, what do you think of? Well, there is a lake of everlasting fire, fire, which is the fire that never goes out, which is hell, hell fire.

We're familiar with that. You know that, you know, that fire has a powerful capacity to destroy, and yet John the Baptist said about Jesus right in the early part of Acts, in the early part of Luke, chapter 4, he said that I will baptize you with water, but there comes one after me and he will baptize you with the wind, the spirit, and the fire.

Now, what does the fire do? Well, I think that you have to understand that the fire burns and refines and makes holy.

Remember in Isaiah where it says that a seraph came with tongs and took a coal of fire off the altar and flew and touched my mouth and said that your guilt is past and your sins are forgiven.

[20 : 58] The fire has touched you. And I think that not only does God empower the community of the apostles, he also refines them with fire.

fire. And that probably is fairly unpleasant. Remember what Peter says, that the trial of your faith being much more precious than silver or gold is to be tried by fire.

So the fire which has the capacity to destroy is restrained in this setting, I think, to have only the capacity to refine and to purify and to make holy so that it is fire put to good purpose. And so that the community of the Holy Spirit is a community that is being refined by fire all the time. And that's because the demand that God has for that community. You see, I've told you this lots of times, I know, because it always impresses me, that our ambition for our self is very limited. [22 : 30] And you know, a husband or a wife, some children, a nice house, a car or two, and perhaps a cottage, and that's all I want.

You know, what else do I need? But God has far greater ambitions for you than that. and he sets the fire going to refine and to make you into the person that he wants you to be, to burn away all the wood, hay, and stubble.

Remember that powerful picture of fire in Corinthians? And he says that the Corinthians will be tested by fire. and a lot of what they have done as a church will just be blown away.

I was taking a mission down in the east, as you may know, in February, and one of the leaders of the congregation, I think, was deeply convicted by the gospel.

He said, this church is so Mickey Mouse, you know, that there was so much sort of stuff that didn't count for anything, you know, that wasn't worth keeping, that when the fire comes along, it just destroys it.

[24 : 02] So you have this picture of the wind, which is the power, and the fire, which is the continual refining process going on in the lives of Christians and in the community of the church.

And it's a very powerful picture, I think, of how it works. So those were two things that happened. The third thing that happened, this is the fire here, the third thing that happened is that there was, I'll illustrate this so that you can see it.

You've got the picture here. Communication. We got okay, that you have, that's one of the symbols of communication in our society.

Anyway, I don't know quite how to do it, but what it says is that, and remember again, there's something, there's something peculiar about this.

It says, a sound like the blowing of the wind, what seemed to be tongues of fire. And then they all began to speak in an other tongue, or in other tongues, tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

[25 : 59] So that it was not something that people could measure, but it was something that happened. And this is the characteristic of the church, or of the community, a fellowship of the church, which is given the greatest emphasis in this passage of Scripture.

And it's given the emphasis, because most of it talks about it. It talks about it, and it talks about how the Parthians, and the Medes, and the Elamites, and the Phrygians, and the Mesopotamians, and the Judeans, and the Cappadocians, and all those people, all of them heard this thing, whatever it was, communicated, and overcame all the barriers to communication.

and people were saying, and it says it here in a way that I think maybe needs a little elucidation when it says, we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.

Your mother tongue is what that means. The language that you spoke from childhood. The language that you best understood, and they heard at the most primary level of understanding, they heard the business of the praise of God going on.

They were communicated with. And so, if you put those three things together, you see, what is to be characteristic of the community of the church is that it's to have power, the source of which and the end of which we don't know.

[27 : 58] It's to have a refining process going on in it all the time, and it's to be a place where primary, fundamental communication takes place so that people hear.

and that's what happened. You know all the barriers there are to communication in our society.

Sometimes it's difficult for husbands to talk to wives and wives to talk to husbands, and yet they're very sensitive about in the area of communication. If you're not breathing the right way, your wife is liable to say to you, his mind says to me, what's wrong with you?

I'm not there. If you happen to be looking in the wrong direction, what are you thinking about?

There's a great sensitivity.

There's a lot of communication takes place between people. But also at the kind of basic level, it's very difficult.

[29 : 15] I want to tell you that this week I went out and talked to a grade 11 and 12 class at Templeton High School where Heather Risk is a teacher and she was teaching them about

marriage and home life.

It's sort of domestic, I don't know, home life or home studies or something course that she runs for these kids out there. And she asked me to come out and talk about Christian marriage, so I went out in my dog collar and everything to talk to them.

And they obviously regarded me as a very strange fish indeed. I couldn't but communicating with them was an enormous challenge, I must say, trying to say anything to them.

And the questions they asked me and all those things that went on were just, it was a fascinating experience. I was ready to talk to them.

I had clear, definite ideas about what I wanted them to know and what I wanted to say to them. But, you know, it was very easy to acquire the sense that you might just as well have been blah, blah, blah, blah.

[30 : 31] Because what they were hearing was entirely different than what I was talking about. Their level of communication with me and mine with them was, we just weren't on the same level.

It was very interesting and very encouraging. And some of them were very kind, too, and they really reached out to me and helped me in my floundering. But it was a fascinating thing.

But, you see, in our whole world there is this whole business of information of which we have an enormous amount, but communication of which we have extraordinarily little.

And most of the communication lines have been fouled up so badly that you need specialists just to talk to you or to be able to hear you and understand what you're saying.

And so you can see that fathers can't talk to their children, husbands and wives can't talk to each other, brothers can't talk to each other, liberals can't talk to conservatives, and socialists can't talk to communists, and all these kinds of things go on.

[31 : 45] and you get barrier after barrier after barrier, and then of course on top of that nobody's listening anyway. And so you see that a society like ours is almost come to a standstill because we can't talk to each other.

We can't talk over the, because of the issues, I mean, standing up in church to preach now is a horrendous problem. The language you use may turn half the congregation off, and by the time you've opened your mouth and spoken a paragraph, you've probably turned off three-quarters of the congregation because they won't hear, except you give them certain signs that make them feel that they're one with you.

but it's a very difficult thing. So what you see in the beginning of the life of the church and the words and works of Jesus is you see that if that continues in our world, it's to continue in the company and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

And it's going to mean that at the most basic level, communication is going to take place. You're going to be able to hear. And you, I mean, there may be a lot of work to be done in overcoming the barriers, but ultimately you're going to be able to hear.

And that's going to be the work of the Holy Spirit that gives a community a language in which they can speak, a relationship which allows them to speak to one another and that this happens as the primary activity.