

PENTECOST is often considered the birth-day of the church—a celebration of that day when “the church” was born by the power of the Holy Spirit... when God’s life-giving breath / power exploded through Jesus’ followers, and they “officially” began the work they were called to do—sharing the good news of Jesus and the new life that comes through him... proclaiming the forgiveness of sins... making disciples of all nations...

PENTECOST is the day we celebrate the mysterious “outpouring” of the Holy Spirit—a.k.a. the Paraclete... the Comforter / Helper... the Advocate... the Spirit of Truth...

As the story is told in Acts, chapter 2—thousands were in Jerusalem for the Festival of Weeks—a celebration of the day God gave Moses the 10 Commandments at Mt. Sinai. Jesus’ disciples were there, too—gathered together “*in one place*”... as Jesus had told them to do. And suddenly... it happened...

There was a great noise—“*the sound of a violent rushing wind*”... and before they knew it, a mighty wind had blown through the whole house... kindling sparks that burst into what looked like “*flames as of fire*”... and they were filled—every one of them—with the Holy Spirit... the life-giving / transforming breath of God. And immediately that breath came back out in a cacophony of speech... as they all began to speak in foreign languages they didn’t even know they knew. It was God’s mighty Spirit at work... turning timid, silent disciples into power-filled witnesses...

People from all over the known world / from the four corners of the globe gathered around... standing in the doorways / looking in the windows... surprised to hear people speaking in their own languages. They *expected* to find more of their “own kind”—Parthians / Elamites / Cappadocians / Libyans / and the rest. What they found, instead, were a bunch of Galileans ... all speaking / telling about God’s mighty acts of power.

Instead of scattering... people came together. Instead of confusion... the gospel was heard clearly and understood. Instead of being a barrier that divided... the variety of languages allowed the Good News to be heard by everyone!

Of course, it all confused the listeners (and probably the speakers, too!). They were caught up in the middle of something that was unexplainable. “*What does this mean?*” they asked one another. (I’m pretty sure were would have asked the same question).

And since they couldn’t explain it, some in the crowd scoffed—“*They’ve had too much wine!*” But Peter boldly stood up and spoke. “*No, they are not drunk, as you think.*” And then he delivered one of the most powerful sermons ever preached, putting meaning to this strange event for the crowd who was there.

What does this mean, you ask? Let me tell you what it means. You know that prophecy recorded in Joel... when God said, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams...” That is what is happening now! God has given us the Holy Spirit! And nothing will ever be the same again!

That day 3000 people confessed Christ and were baptized... and BOOM!.. the church was born!

What happened that day was an invasion of power from on high... as forceful and mysterious as the wind. What happened that day was that Jesus’ followers received power from on high... and by that power, proceeded to turn the world upside down. What started in that “one place” spread across the city of Jerusalem and beyond—to Athens and to Rome and to Alexandria. It spread across nations... across countries... across cultures / languages. It all happened by the power of the Holy Spirit!

But does the Holy Spirit still act with such wild, special effects? Clearly... the answer is “no.” And maybe that’s part of the problem when it comes to this mysterious third person of the Trinity and our celebration of PENTECOST.

What does PENTECOST mean for us today?

Is it just a remembrance of this incredible event? Or is it more?

When you think about it, PENTECOST really should be the 3rd great holy-day of the church – next to Christmas and Easter. Shouldn’t we celebrate God’s ongoing presence and power through the Holy Spirit as much if not more than the birth and then the death / resurrection of the Son—the second person of the Trinity?

Yet the truth is – most of us treat PENTECOST as just another Sunday. I wonder why? Maybe because we are not quite sure what to make of the Holy Spirit... or the Spirit’s presence / work in our lives or in the life of the church.

We believe *in* the Holy Spirit. But what, really, does that mean—for us / for “the church” / for the world? What do we / should we expect of the Holy Spirit – today?

The word John uses for the Holy Spirit, in his Gospel, is most often translated “Advocate” or “Helper” or “Comforter” or “Counselor”... We like those names for God’s mysterious Spirit... because they tell us that we can count on the Spirit to come to our defense... to speak on our behalf... to ease our distress / pain... to encourage us along the way... to come to us in times of trouble ... to remind us of Jesus’ promises... to be with us—through the good and bad—always... to pray for us when we don’t have the words the pray...

But the Holy Spirit isn’t always comforting, is she?! From our own experience, we know...

Sometimes the Holy Spirit is unsettling. The Spirit blows where she wills...

Sometimes the Spirit shakes things up... disrupts our comfortable lives and ways of being...

Sometimes the Spirit pushes us past the boundaries / barriers we have so carefully put in place... to open us up to new understandings / new ways of being... to widen the circle...

Sometimes the Spirit comes alongside us to help us remember / understand the truth of Jesus’ words / actions... to strengthen / equip us for the work that needs to be done—to prompt us / provoke us to action... to send us out...

Sometimes the Spirit confronts the world (and us!) with the error of our ways... testifying to the “truth”—the “truth” that Jesus taught / lived / the “truth” Jesus is—and pushing us to do the same... to speak that “truth” in the face of the world’s lies (as Jesus did)... to call into question the values and practices and divisive / destructive / hurtful rhetoric of this world.

What if the Spirit’s work, right now, is to light a fire within and under us... to agitate / push rather than to comfort... to remind us that we have a story to tell / work to do... to move us to action?

“Go, make disciples of all nations...” Jesus said. “Love you enemies; pray for those who hurt you.” “Love one another as I have loved you.” This work / ministry we are called to... is inherently hard... and disruptive... at times even dangerous in this world of ours (it was for Jesus). That’s why Jesus doesn’t send us out alone—he gives us his Spirit who comes alongside us—to equip us and encourage us... to strengthen

us and push / provoke us... and yes, of course, to comfort us and help us (when needed)... ALL to enable us to *be* the church today!

Dear friends, “the church” is not about us—it is about God’s ongoing mission in the world. “The church” does not exist for itself—but for those who do not yet know / belong.

PENTECOST is not just the birth-day of “the church”... It is more than that. PENTECOST is a celebration of the mysterious / powerful movement of God... that launched a great movement that changed the course of human history... It is a celebration of the mysterious / powerful movement of God... in us / the church / the world – today!

Do we still believe in a God who acts in powerful, unpredictable, unexplainable ways?

Do we still believe in a God who blows in and through us, setting our hearts on fire... igniting (re-igniting) the flame of faith within?

Do we still believe in a God who has the power to transform us... to empower us / embolden us to what we could never do on our own (or would want to)?

Do we expect... or even want... God to act like this?! Or has God become, for us, the One we simply address our prayers to—not really expecting God to enter into our lives and change them? Or, perhaps, secretly hoping that God won’t enter into our lives and disrupt things... to transform us and this world?

Do we want to be a part of what God is doing?

Are we open to the Spirit’s nudge (or push)?

Or would we rather close the doors / windows and keep the windy Spirit out? To stay *where* we are... *as* we are?

Dear friends, PENTECOST is a call to action! The Spirit of God wasn’t just active on that windy / fiery day way back when. That same Spirit is still present and active—here and now—coming to us in / through the waters of baptism... working in / through us, each and every day.

Sometimes that Spirit makes itself known in a powerful way—like a wild, rushing wind / dancing flames of fire. *Sometimes* that Spirit comes more quietly—like a gentle breeze.

Either way... I continue to pray: *“Come, Holy Spirit, come! Make your presence known. Blow in and through us – disrupt our comfortable lives... reignite the flame of our faith / our passion for your work... transform us from within... spur us to action... push us past the fears that hold us back... and lead us—out into the world... to the places / people who need to hear the good news of God’s mighty acts of power! Make us bold in our witness... courageous and daring in the ministries you call us to be part of.”*