

**Sermon for Sunday, May 27, 2012**  
**Dr. Dan Doriani**  
**Pentecost**  
**Acts 2:5-11, 22-24, 37-41**

*2:5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*

*6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. 7 Utterly amazed they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?"*

*8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"*

*2:22 Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

*2:36 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' 37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

*38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. 39 And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." 40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

We are familiar with license plates that jam a statement of one's essence into six capital letters."MY TOYZ" equals I'm rich and this vehicle is proof. Wouldn't it be fun to get a vanity plate that almost makes sense? RU BLGM. The first letters mean "Are you". But BLGM? Bubblegum? Blue Game? Bulgarian, with typo? What? Imagine people at lights, rolling down windows: "You have to tell me what it means!"

Today is Pentecost Sunday and it probably gets the same response: "You have to tell me what it means." But to explain Pentecost, we have to take one step back, since Pentecost depends on Jesus' ministry and it also poses the question: what does it mean? Jesus' first disciples couldn't see why he had to die. When he did die on a cross, like a wretched criminal, it seemed to discredit him. Then witnesses reported that they had seen him alive, resurrected. What did it mean?

Imagine how the crowd at the first Pentecost felt about this. They knew about Jesus' signs and wonders. Some witnessed the crucifixion; some had agreed that he deserved to die (2:23). Could he be alive? What might it mean?

Meanwhile, Jesus met with the disciples for forty days, then ordered them to wait in Jerusalem till they received the Holy Spirit (1:8). The Spirit came with power on Pentecost Sunday. By God's providence the disciples were ready to speak and the crowds ready to listen. So what happened and why?

## 1. The Spirit comes (2:1-21)

The night before his crucifixion, Jesus made two promises about the Spirit: First, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Spirit will remind disciples of the spiritual things they most need to remember.

Jesus added that the Spirit "will testify about me" (15:26). Indeed, when "the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth (16:13).

Fifty days after Easter, Israel celebrated the religious festival called Pentecost. That day Jesus sent his Spirit, as promised. "Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled what looked like tongues of fire. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:2-4).

The Spirit came as fire because fire is a symbol of cleansing and judgment. Just as wind blows away chaff – all that is worthless. The signs say the Lord has come to the disciples to grant God's power. The Lord comes as fire to purify; as wind to blow away chaff and to blow God's truth into our spirit.

The first Pentecost was the beginning of a new level of the Spirit's work. On that day, Jesus gave his Spirit to the church. That day, thousands of people came to faith in Jesus. Jesus always attracted crowds, but they didn't really understand him and genuine disciples were few. On Pentecost, the Spirit brought thousand to repentance and faith in Jesus.

It started when the Spirit empowered the disciples to speak in other languages (2:4). They declared "the wonders of God" (2:11). Pentecost was a great festival, so Jews from all over the world were at hand. They had many native tongues. As the disciples spoke, everyone heard them in their native languages, the tongues of Parthia, Mesopotamia, Judea, Egypt, Rome. The people asked, "What does this mean?" (2:12).

### What it means

Some witnesses scoffed at the apostles: "They've had too much wine." That's preposterous and Peter dismissed it. It was 9 a.m. In that culture, most had not even had breakfast - and no one drinks wine before breakfast. Besides drunkards lose the ability to speak; they don't gain new languages (2:13-15).

Jesus said the disciples would receive power from on high and they now receive that power. The Spirit had empowered Jesus for ministry; this day He empowered the church. The prophet Joel foretold this. In the past, God gave his Spirit to anointed leaders – prophets, priests, kings, judges. Now the Spirit comes to all: to men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile, leaders and servants. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (2:17).

The phrase "last days" doesn't mean the end of time, but the time when God redeems his people. The apostles declare the wonders of God in every tongue because people from every nation need to hear of Jesus and his resurrection. Now "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (2:19-21). This is "the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). Human languages always divide mankind. Now Jesus offers to unite mankind, people of every language. This begins the age of the Spirit who testifies to Jesus.

Peter quotes Joel because he warned Israel of impending punishment for sin. Yet they can escape that judgment: "Return to me with all your heart with fasting, weeping and mourning. Return to the Lord, for

he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity."

If Israel repents, the Lord will restore them. Then "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:25-32). Now, Peter declares, *we* turn to the Lord by looking to Jesus.

### **The core: Pentecost proves that Jesus the crucified is alive (2:22-24)**

Jesus' miracles proved that he is God's man: He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute, strength to broken bodies. One Jewish leader said, "No one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). These were public events. Everyone knew Jesus was a great prophet.

Everyone also knew that Jesus was executed. Peter says: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (2:22-23). Peter says the people are responsible for Jesus' death, even as God's hand is in it.

A double truth is in the apostle's mind. From one perspective, Jesus' death is a crime and a tragedy, the judicial murder of an innocent man. Yet it also happened by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. God knew and planned this, yet the people freely chose to betray Jesus and kill him. Peter knew that most of the people in his audience were not there when Jesus died. Yet he says, "You with the help of wicked men put him to death." Why "You"? Two reasons: First, we all commit the same kinds of sins.

- Judas betrayed Jesus out of greed; we are prone to greed.
- Peter betrayed Jesus out of fear; we are prone to fear.
- Pilate betrayed Jesus out of cowardice; we're prone to cowardice, especially if alone.
- The priests betrayed Jesus out of envy; we are prone to envy.
- The leaders wanted to keep their position and privileges. We commit the same kinds of sins. Therefore "You."

Second, our sins made Jesus' sacrifice necessary. Whether we're born in 300 or 2000, whether in Finland, Ghana or Canada, we contribute to Jesus' death. When humans rebel against God, He has no obligation to rescue and restore us. He could let us go. Yet once God resolved to intervene, it had to end in Jesus' death and resurrection. When he resolved to rescue us, he resolved to die the death we deserve, as our substitute.

Once he died, his resurrection was also inevitable. Peter said, "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (2:24). The term translated agony usually describes the pangs of a woman in labor. A woman in labor can't resist the birth of her child; the grave can't hold Jesus. Death cannot prevent the rebirth, the new life, of Jesus.

This is the start of Peter's sermon and we see in the sermon itself what the Spirit does. Just weeks ago, Peter was falling asleep when it was essential that he stay awake, then swearing he had never heard of Jesus. This Peter was a changed man. Before he wouldn't say a word; now he won't stop talking – that's the work of the Spirit.

People ask about this all the time: "I came to church for ten, thirty years and never took it in: God loves us, gives us life, brings us into His family, by grace alone, by faith in Christ alone, not works. I

heard it but I didn't *get* it." What took so long? Or they say, "My marriage is rough; when I study the Bible or come to church, I hear principles that would revitalize our marriage but my husband (wife) hears nothing. I don't understand." It *is* mysterious, but 1 Cor. 2:9-14 explains:

*9 No eye has seen... no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him 10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit... 12 Now we have received... the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 14 The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them.*

The Spirit opens our mind and so gives new life. Yet we must also lay hold of this life, Scripture says in Proverbs 4:4 and Matthew 11:12. Then the Spirit will empower us.

Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke and Acts; both teach about the Spirit's work. Luke says the Spirit moved in Mary so she became pregnant and carried the Son of God in her womb (Luke 1:35). The Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism (3:22). The Spirit led Jesus' preparation for ministry and gave him power for miracles. The Spirit all came upon Jesus for his first sermon in Galilee (4:1, 14, 18). Jesus is model of Spirit-filled humanity. And he says the Father will give us the same gift.

He asks, "What father among you, if his son asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:1-13). In another setting Jesus says, "your Father in heaven gives good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:11). There is no disagreement here, for the best gift God can give is Himself - His Spirit.

Mother's Day, Father's Day – what does a mother or father most seek? A great present from the kids? No, they want sweet time with their children. Some focus on the statement that the "Father in heaven gives good gifts to those who ask Him." They say God gives *what we want* – health and prosperity. But if we ask, He gives himself. Have you ever asked, prayed for more of God's Spirit? Try it! What would happen if you did? Two things:

First, more of the power or capacity to serve God that we see in the apostles. The Spirit empowered Jesus and apostles for ministry, so He can empower us.

Second, a change in our character. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). We should ask the Lord, give me your Spirit's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness... But after we pray, we must yield for we can grieve the Spirit and resist the Spirit.

## **2. Peter preaches Jesus, crucified and risen, Lord and Christ (2:25-36)**

God's Spirit empowers us for our God-given work. God called Peter as apostle and herald of Christ, so Peter preaches Christ. Follow the remainder of his message on Pentecost. He says the events of Pentecost fulfill a prophecy of David who said, "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Yet, Peter says, David's tomb is well-known. His bones did decay (2:27-29). Therefore, he concludes, David spoke as a prophet. When he said, "No decay" he spoke of his descendant, Jesus' promise to sit on his throne forever (2 Sam 7). As promised, God raised Jesus, David's son, to life, as the crowd knew (2:32).

Time fails for me to explore Peter's entire message. But this is clear: The risen Jesus is now exalted to the Father's right hand (2:33-35). From that position, he sent his Spirit that day. Then Peter drops the hammer: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." The crowd is culpable for Jesus' death.

When the people heard this, they did not protest – "Not me. How can you..." They were cut to the heart, convicted of their sin. They felt anguish, sorrow. But sorrow doesn't necessarily heal relationships with God or man. Conviction must lead to action. So they asked Peter, "What shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." We know repentance is necessary. But let's define it. Repentance includes a feeling of sorrow, but it's more. It's a change of mind, of beliefs and attitudes.

Repentance is grief and sorrow for sin. The repentant turn from sin to God. There is a positive program. There is new life. And there is baptism with water as the symbol of cleansing from sin and allegiance to God, in the name of Jesus. Peter invited the crowd to claim Jesus even as he claimed them.

Peter said more and kept pleading with the crowd, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." That day about 3,000 people repented, believed and received baptism (2:40-41). Let us ask how Peter's message speaks to us, how we should respond. Three ways: First, our personal response to Jesus. Second, our understanding of God's purposes. Third, receiving the Spirit daily.

### **The Personal Response to Jesus: What shall we do?**

Some of us are in much the same position as the people listening to Peter. We have heard about Jesus, but we don't believe in him or trust him. We may think he's a great man, great teacher, great example. But the Bible says that's not enough.

A number of agnostics, doubters, seekers come here each week. I'm glad you come. Let me tell you about a seeker I'll call "Jason." He started coming when a friend invited him. He sat and listened, but didn't participate. After several months, we talked. He had never come to church before but he found it interesting. "But don't expect me to become a Christian. It's a theoretical possibility, but that's all."

I said, "Fine. Keep coming and let me know if you ever want to talk." Weeks later, we talked again. He was in dialogue with his Christians friends. He also came to a mid-week class. He said Christianity made a lot of sense. "But where do you stand personally?" I asked. He wasn't sure, so I offered him some options.

- It's interesting, but I still don't want become a Christian.
- I'm not a Christian, but I think I want to become one.
- I'm a brand a new Christian – just getting started.
- I've been a Christian for a while and getting stronger every day.

He said "I'm between 2 and 3." He was on the edge. Perhaps that's where some of you are today. Jesus compared faith to crossing a bridge. He said that whoever believes in him has "crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). There is a canyon, a chasm separating God and man. We can't go around it. A bridge must span the chasm. Jesus is that bridge. When we trust in him – we trust the bridge and walk on it – we cross from death to life. Today, we're on the side of death because we are all going to die and only God has the power to grant eternal life.

I asked Jason what he wanted to do. He said, "Maybe this will take care of itself." I said, "Maybe, but you can be sure about this if you like". How?

"Essentially, it's by praying about it sincerely. You can do that alone, with me now, or later, with one of your friends." Jason pondered that and decided he was ready to pray. We prayed something like this:

Lord Jesus, I have sinned in thought, word and deed. I've been selfish, I haven't loved others and I have doubted you, rejected you. I'm sorry for my sins. I turn from them and turn toward you in repentance and faith.

I believe that you died for me and bore the punishment my sins deserve. I believe that you rose from the dead and have power to grant eternal life. Lord I step on the bridge. I cross over from death to life. I confess you as redeemer, Lord. And I promise to serve as you give me strength, all my life. Amen.

If you are where Jason was, the same options are yours. You can pray alone at home or after church today. You can pray with a friend or family. You can pray right now or make an appointment to talk to me or another pastor.

This week a friend called: "I have tickets to a Cardinals game, first row by home plate. Can you join me?" It was a great offer, but I had to clear my schedule and say "Yes" and show up, or the offer did me no good.

The same is true of the question, "Will you marry me?" If a woman says "Yes" her "Yes" is not the basis for their relationship. The basis is their love and commitment. Yet she must say "yes" to the question.

We are in a similar situation. No one is right with God because we decide to say yes. Our decision isn't the main thing. The main thing is the work of Jesus, who died and rose because death couldn't hold him. He forgives our sins and reconciles us to God. But we have to say yes and put our faith in him.

In every good church, the multi-faceted work of Christ is presented week by week. If you know little of Christ, learn more. Read the gospels. Talk to someone at the door if you need a conversation partner. If you have been listening for a while, you need to respond - like the people who heard Peter.

Second, there is a second aim of Pentecost. The miracle of languages points us to it. Recall the tower of Babel: After the fall, humans built a city and a tower to make a name for themselves. As technology, it failed, but the Lord saw their resolve and said, "If as one people, speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing... will be impossible for them." So the Lord "confused their language so they wouldn't understand each other" (Gen 11:6, 7). Why? Because it is better for mankind to be divided than to be united against God. So the Lord scattered and divided the human race.

But now God re-unites mankind on a proper basis. On Pentecost, God called all peoples to join his family in proper unity through Christ. That is the source of all our missional work, whether local or around the world.

Third, we must remember the Spirit's daily work. Ask the Spirit to work in your life. You are free to ask him God for more of His Spirit, more capacity to serve, like the apostles. You may do that by

speaking of Jesus, but in any realm of life – your work, your daily walk. Ask God to fill you with his presence, to see your sin, to experience His love, joy and peace, every day.

Above all, hear the Spirit's testimony to Jesus. He teaches, he convicts, he guides us to the truth about Jesus – Son of God and Son of Man, attested by signs, betrayed, condemned, crucified and raised. He bore our sins, he grants us life, if we repent of sin and return to God. This is God's good gift - the Spirit that leads us to Jesus, who loves us and gave himself for us.