

## **Pentecost Sunday**

**Acts 2:1-21**

Tom Yacomeni

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In 1996, thirty years ago or so, people living in the cold, remote villages of Baffin Island - the Inuit community in north-eastern Canada - were suffering terribly as a people. The suicide rate was sky-high; many were addicted to drugs and alcohol; they had lost their identity as a people, the economy was failing, and it was a real struggle. People there described the situation as descending into total horror. But there was a little tiny Anglican church there, in a village called Pond Inlet, and the members began to pray and to cry out to God to do something. One of the ministers of the church there is called Harry Tullagak, and he said that the prayers they gave were more like wailing - wailing in the churches over the pain that the community was experiencing.

But then one day, after they had prayed for some time, something extraordinary started to happen. People in the community started feeling drawn to come to the church, and even as villagers made their way along the road, something started to happen to them. They felt convicted of their sin, and many wanted to come and find a way through that. Many turned to Christ and experienced God's presence and fresh hope. And it affected the community so much that they enlisted the help of the Canadian police, because the locals decided to make a huge bonfire of all the unhelpful materials that they had and all the excess alcohol that they didn't want any more. The caring spirit of the community started to revive, and life began to improve. God was on the move in that community.

And then some months later, one particular Sunday, an evangelist called Billy Arnakook came to speak. During the service they were worshipping, just like we have this morning, but people started to hear something extraordinary. They started to hear a low-pitched rumbling sound in the church. The guys on the sound desk naturally thought there was a technical issue, so they all rushed across to sort it all out - much as we would do here - but they couldn't find the issue. They ended up switching off the whole power supply to the sound system, but the noise continued to get louder and louder. They didn't know what was going on. It was a total mystery. But then they realised that something like a Pentecost moment was happening in this church.

It was a holy moment. It was just like what they had been praying for - for the Lord to visit them in power. The sound of that violent wind that came through the church lasted for several minutes. A holy awe descended on all the people. They didn't know what to make of it; it was very unusual. But that day marked a new revival in that area. It spread God's hope throughout many other towns in that northern Arctic region. And Pastor Harry, who was there, said, "The fruit has been beautiful over these years. We have an almighty and all-forgiving God. It's been wonderful to see him moving in our community." And so there was a community now with hope, where only they had had despair before. And that all came after a long time of faithful prayer - faithful people lifting up their concerns for their community to the Lord, faithfully, over years.

And I wonder if you know that every week faithful people meet together to pray for this church and for this community of Weston. Every week there are people praying for you here this morning. Groups meet on Saturday mornings at 8 a.m. and Wednesday at 8 a.m. as well, praying every week, week in, week out, for the Holy Spirit to come. Everybody is welcome. And when Mims and I first came to look and see if God was calling us to come to this area of Weston - just to serve here - my friend sent me a text message one time and he said this: "Look for the golden seam. Look for the golden seam." And I said, "What do you mean by that?" And he meant: look for those praying people. Are there people who are praying in this church for the Holy Spirit to come and change the community and transform it? Because that is what will make all the difference. That is where the real riches are found. And I am pleased to say there are people who are praying in this church. This is a praying church. I'm delighted. There is a golden seam here that runs throughout this community. Weston is blessed by having people that pray.

Because where the Holy Spirit is welcomed and encouraged, there is hope - hope of freedom and joy and peace. And despite all that is going on in the world, where there are people praying, there is hope in each community. God does wonderful things through the church as people are touched by his grace and healing and wholeness. And I think in the months and years to come this will be increasingly important for us, because we will need to pull together as a community. We will need to cry out for God's Spirit to come more and more. It's the only way I think we are going to be able to navigate all the challenges and complexities that the world will be throwing at us. It's getting more and more complex every day; it's getting more and more worrying every day. What's the antidote to that? Cry out for God to come. He will bring his peace and his hope and his wholeness. Despite all that's going on out there, we will know the peace of God at work in us.

And in our reading from Acts 2, the writer Luke tells us:

#### **Acts 2:1**

**“<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.”**

They had experienced lots of trauma: Jesus had died, then he had risen, then he had ascended. They didn't know where they were, but he had told them to stay together. They weren't just sticking close because they felt safer together in that room, but because Jesus had instructed them. He said this:

#### **Luke 24:49**

**“<sup>49</sup> ‘...stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”**

And then in Acts chapter 1, it tells us they all joined constantly in prayer, both men and women. So, there were people praying for that time.

And they waited and they prayed. They waited and they prayed. For ten days they were waiting and praying after Jesus had given them that instruction. I don't know if you would be anything like me, but if I were given an instruction - "Wait until you are clothed with power from on high" - I would say, "Fine. What's the date?" I'd want to put it in my diary; I'd want to know exactly when it would be. I like to have everything planned. But Jesus just told them to wait. They had to trust; they had to learn how to wait patiently and trust in the Lord. So, they did that - they waited and they prayed. They went through the process of choosing another apostle to replace Judas the betrayer, so they had that to do. They probably made preparations for the upcoming festival: the festival of Pentecost - in Jewish tradition it's Shavuot, what was called the festival of weeks. It was a harvest festival. It celebrated, in Jewish tradition, the giving of the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai. That's what they were remembering, preparing to remember. It was a festival time in Jerusalem.

But the disciples didn't know how long they would have to wait - maybe beyond that time. I wonder what they were thinking as they continued to pray and wait patiently. For many days it would have seemed very quiet, nothing happening. Did any of them start to get fidgety? I would be fidgety. I think I'd be fiddling around: "How long will we have to wait? Bills don't just pay themselves." But then suddenly everything changed. Suddenly the Holy Spirit came. So, it was a change from "patiently" to "suddenly."

That wonderful word in the text - "suddenly." At the New Wine leadership day recently here in this church: everybody was given a copy of a book by Mark Batterson. It's called *Gradually, Then Suddenly* - gradually then suddenly. And Mark argues that incredible change often comes suddenly, after patient prayer and persistent preparation over many years. We can be waiting patiently, praying, not knowing when it is the time and date that the Lord has set - but then suddenly everything changes.

Luke is the only gospel writer to use that Greek word *aphnō* (af'-no)<sup>1</sup> - "suddenly" - and it means completely unexpectedly, out of nowhere. He uses the word again when Paul and Silas are in prison and suddenly there is a great earthquake which smashes open the prison doors and they are freed. The disciples' patient, prayerful obedience was suddenly rewarded.

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<sup>1</sup> ἄφνω - <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g869/niv/tr/0-1/>

And it's an extraordinary thing when God comes in his time, in his moment, in his 'kairos'<sup>2</sup> time - *suddenly* he comes. And will we be alert to it? *Suddenly* the Holy Spirit came like wind and fire. And instead of that terrifying cloud and fire that kept the people away from Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law to Moses, this Pentecost wind and fire was different. Everything had changed. This was for all those present inside the room. There was an empowerment of everyone present; there was no separation anymore. This was for all the people. Tongues of fire and the sound of the rushing wind - the power of the Holy Spirit blew them out of the doors: changed people, bold in their hearts with love for people, fire in their souls.

And so, what was the effect that people observed as they were filled with the Holy Spirit? Well, three things I want to pick up on today that happened to them - which can be summarised with the letter E. These are perhaps the primary ways we should think about sharing the good news, being evangelistic about what God has done for us in our day.

Firstly, they were **enabled**. The text tells us they were enabled to share the wonders of God with enthusiasm as well. They were **enthusiastic** about it, and it needed an **explanation**. So let me just focus on those for a moment.

## 1) Enabled

It says in the text:

### Acts 2:4

**"4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."**

This wasn't just about speaking in angelic tongues or a prayer language, but more about them being able to cross cultural barriers and ethnic barriers - to speak in the languages of peoples from all around who had gathered for this festival in Jerusalem.

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<sup>2</sup> **καῖρός**- <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2540/niv/tr/0-1/>

And I wonder if you have ever wondered why the writer Luke brings that long list of all the sorts of visitors to Jerusalem who came and heard the disciples. Well, the answer is that you just have to plot them on a map, where they came from. If you centre it on Jerusalem and then plot where that list of origins falls, it's actually all around - all around the compass points: north, south, east, west: *everywhere*. Luke is making the point that these people were from all over the world. And instead of that Babel curse of language barriers and ethnic division, **Spirit-filled Christianity is uniting. It brings everyone together. It is for all people. It's inclusive. Jesus died and rose again to bring forgiveness and hope to everyone - whatever your background and origin, including you and me - as we simply call on his name today.** And Peter said to the crowd a little later on:

### Acts 2:39

**“<sup>39</sup>The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”**

This is for everyone. It's an incredible Pentecost open door.

So, if you pray to be filled with the Spirit, you are also therefore praying for love for all peoples and nations. It goes with the territory. And so we have to, as Christians, resist protectionist nationalism. We have to resist that, because our faith is for all people, whatever their background and ethnicity. The first thing the Holy Spirit does is to enable us to love all sorts of people - all sorts of people we wouldn't otherwise mix with - to celebrate and honour them. That's the Holy Spirit crossing cultures and different barriers.

## 2) Enthusiasm

And then the second thing that happened to the disciples was that they were filled with enthusiasm. "Enthusiasm" comes from 'entheos' (ἐνθεος), which means "filled with God" (cf. Romans 8:11). They were so enthusiastic, some people thought they were drunk - but it was only nine o'clock in the morning. Being enthusiastic is so counter-British, isn't it? "These wretched enthusiasts." But actually, what we find here is really enthusiastic disciples. They were propelled out with joy. In verse 11, Luke describes the crowd:

### Acts 2:11

**"11' ...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"**

So, Spirit-filled Christians declare the wonders of God - that word in Greek, *megaleios*<sup>3</sup> - the 'mega' stuff of God, the 'mega' things he has done. I love the translation. I looked it up for different ways you can translate that word: the magnificent, excellent, splendid, wonderful, fantastic, amazing, beautiful, incredible things he has done. Insert your own superlatives for what God has done.

Do you describe things in superlatives very often? It is wonderful what the Lord has done. **What's the opposite of declaring the wonders of God? Cynicism. Scepticism. Criticism. Doom-mongering.** Bleh. That's the opposite of all that God wants to pour out through his Holy Spirit. Spirit-filled Christians must be the most enthusiastic people on the planet - not irritatingly enthusiastic, but joyful enthusiasts. I hope that this will be an enthusiastic church. You only have to look out the window on a weekend like this to see the wonderful works of Almighty God. Let's give thanks for the beauty we see around us. It's wonderful. We celebrated yesterday a funeral for Rose, and it was more of a celebration - a wonderful life lived, a joy to send her to be with the Lord. **You only have to read a few short pages of the Gospels of Matthew or Mark or Luke or John to discover that that same Creator who created all this beauty loves us so much. He's enthusiastic about us. He loves us deeply. And he gave us everything in Christ Jesus so that we can come and be reconciled into his family. He wants us to be united to him.**

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<sup>3</sup> **μεγαλειος** - <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3167/niv/tr/0-1/>

### 3) Explanation

So, the Holy Spirit enables us, he enthuses us, and, actually, the result of that is that people ask for an explanation. "What's going on? What's different? What's happening here?" Verses 12-14:

#### Acts 2:12-14

**“<sup>12</sup>Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’ <sup>13</sup>Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’ <sup>14</sup>Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you;’”**

Spirit-filled Christians look to see what God is doing and explain what's going on - what's going on in Godly terms.

You see, Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom of God. So, all those who follow Jesus become citizens of heaven. They look for his rule and his reign wherever they are. He is doing stuff wherever we are. The world can seem a pretty evil and dire place at times - you just have to watch the news and you go, "Oh..." in despair. However, there are shafts of light breaking through the clouds. The kingdom of God is coming more and more. The kingdom of God is coming until one day, when Jesus returns, the veil will be drawn back, the lights will go on fully, God's light will shine, all things will be made new. When Christ returns, in the meantime we have this promise: that the kingdom of God has come and is coming even more and more. And Jesus said,

#### Acts 2:12-14

**“<sup>18</sup>‘...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.’”**

We have to be encouraged by that.

You see, there is a movement happening all around us of what God is doing by his Holy Spirit. So, we look for what God is doing. We pray for healing. We pray for wholeness. We pray for each other to experience the kingdom of God coming. We ask in the Lord's Prayer, every time we pray it: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth" - in Weston - "as it is in heaven." That's what we're praying: that God's kingdom will come more and more. Some people will think we are just crazy or drunk or stupid or idiots. Fine, no problem. Let's carry on. I'd rather see God doing something than nothing, if we don't expect it. God's kingdom is closer than we think.

And some people will be wanting an explanation. They perceive something. They won't just think we are crazy - there'll be something going on that will make them ask, "What's going on here?" They'll be perplexed. And some will ask for an explanation. And some - like those in the crowd who listened to Peter that day - will be cut to the heart. They'll want to respond. It's the Holy Spirit at work in their hearts. They want to get right with God; they want to experience his blessing; they want to see beyond the three dimensions that we see.

So, there could be some here who know that God is poking your heart, speaking to you. Others may be sceptical all around us - and there are a lot of sceptics - but that's not going to stop you. You want to hear more about Jesus and what he could mean in your life.

Well, can I encourage you? Pentecost Sunday is a fantastic day to experience God's power. It is a wonderful time to ask him again: "Lord, would you do that in me? Would you do that in my heart? Would you save me, just like you did all those three thousand people on that first Pentecost Sunday?" It's a great day to experience forgiveness, love, hope, meaning, purpose - all these things that he wants to pour into your life.

So, the Holy Spirit enables us to become wonderful witnesses, filled with wonder. It's just such a joy to live life going, "Wow, wow, wow - all the things that you are doing, Lord!" Wonderful. Full of enthusiasm, looking for signs of the kingdom, explaining God's amazing grace to those around us as we go. Does that sound good? Who wants a bit of that?

Can I encourage you today just to invite the Holy Spirit into your heart, to ask the Lord Jesus to come and change you, to be that amazing, enthusiastic kingdom builder that he designed you to be? That the fears and worries of this world won't impinge on your joy, but instead you'll be a carrier of his hope.

## Closing Prayer

*So come, Holy Spirit. Come to us now, Lord. May you refuel us and refill us. Fill us - if it's for the first time, would you come and fill us with your Holy Spirit? For any that have never said 'yes' to you, Lord Jesus, we say 'yes' to you. We ask you to come in and make us new - make us into the people you want us to be, Lord. Sorry for the times we fail you, but today, Lord, make us new. Thank you, Lord, for the hope that is ours. Thank you, Lord, for the love that you enable us to share. I thank you that there is always more - and you are calling us today. Thank you, Lord. Amen.*



@allsaintswestonchurch



All Saints Weston Church



01225 447663

All Saints Church, Church Street, Weston, Bath, BA1 4BT  
[office@allsaintsweston.org.uk](mailto:office@allsaintsweston.org.uk)    [allsaintsweston.org.uk](http://allsaintsweston.org.uk)