



A Pentecost People! (Acts 2:1-21)

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THE INTRODUCTION

On this Sunday, we commemorate the arrival of the Holy Spirit in our midst (Acts 2:1-4). We remember that Pentecost is the day believers began proclaiming the Good News that “God has made Jesus, the one who was crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Such powerful proclamation was public and disruptive. It moved people to pay attention (Acts 2:5-8) and weakened the control and influence of an elite powerful few over the masses (Acts 2:42, 42-47; 4:1-4). Most importantly, it transformed the proclaimers from a motley band of spineless disciples (Lk 22:61-62; 24:5-12; 36-42) to a diverse and powerful people who grab the attention of everyone in their proximity.

BACKGROUND OF PENTECOST AND TEXTUAL NOTES

Acts 2 is set in the time of the Jewish Pentecost holiday, known as the Feast of Weeks. This holiday occurs 50 days after Passover within Judaism. In ancient Judaism, it was an agricultural holiday, celebrating the wheat harvest (Jer 5:24, Deut 16:9-11, Isa 9:2). It was a time when the first fruits of the harvest were presented to God in the Temple and the Israelites celebrated in communal meals and festivities (Lev 23:9-14; Num 28:26; Exod 23:16). By the time of Jesus and the disciples in the first century, Jews from all over the Diaspora, living both inside and outside Palestine, gathered in Jerusalem annually for the celebration.

As faithful Jews, the disciples of Jesus also gathered in Jerusalem (Lk 24:52-53; Acts 1:12). Yet, their purpose is not just to observe a Jewish feast day. They gathered because they remembered what Jesus told them before he ascended into heaven: “You all will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).



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However, what is that power and what is its purpose? When the spirit comes in Acts 2:4, it is not accompanied by a single, quiet moment, rather there were many sounds and divine acts of authority on display.

THREE FOCUS POINTS ON THE THREE SOUNDS OF ACTS 2:1-21

- *Point 1* - First, there is a sound like a violent wind (Acts 2:2). Luke describes the descent of fiery tongues on each person as a sign of God's presence (Acts 2:3). In that moment, God is present among God's people in the form of the Holy Spirit (Exod 19:18, 24:17; 1 Kgs 18:38; 19:11-13).
- *Point 2* - Second, there are the sounds of many tongues or languages spoken inside the community of believers (Acts 2:4, 6). It is reminiscent of the tower of Babel in which the consequence of unified human pride is language confusion and diffusion (Gen. 11:1, 4, 6-9). Yet, the eruption of many languages in Acts 2 seems to reverse the consequences of Babel. Now many languages are the result of unified human humility, faithful prayer, and expectation (Acts 2:16-21).
- *Point 3* - Third, sound is situated outside the community of believers. Sounds like this bring different peoples together (Acts 2:8-11). The rhetorical force of God-language draws their attention, arrests their consciousness, and compels them to act contrary to their original intentions (Acts 2:5-6). In this moment, readers encounter the capacity of God's power and sound to spark curiosity and shake the comfort level of onlookers.

Within the noise, there was coherence (Acts 2:5-8). Within the noise, there was clarity. Within the noise, there was a change of perspective. Within the noise, there was a focused message and a power that transgressed and transformed social convention. It was a power that shifted the very moral and religious fabric of everything in its vicinity.

As AMEs, we are a people of Pentecost. Indeed, our very foundation as a church and people is rooted in a power that animates us to “make a ruckus” when injustice prevails and the power of God is denied. While rehearsing the events surrounding the forced removal of Bishop Richard Allen and those African American church leaders with him from St. George's Church, Bishop Allen states: “By this time prayer was over and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church. This raised a great excitement and inquiry among the citizens, in so much that I believe they were ashamed of their conduct. But my dear Lord was with us, and we were filled with fresh vigor ...”

Bishop Allen's comments should remind us who we are as a Church. Just as our founder and his companions were filled with “fresh vigor” to stand for right to the point it shamed wrongdoers, we too are to welcome the fresh gift of God's life and power in our midst.



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The spirit of our Church is defined by making sounds that turn the world upside down when it is not right, just, fair, equitable, or kind.

- We make sounds in our neighborhoods when our people are mistreated, ignored, and erased.
- We make sounds when we are attacked, denied basic rights, and our humanity questioned.
- We make sounds when the powerful hurt the powerless and when those in need are not served.
- We walk out of institutions that do not value our bodies, giftings, and support and we create our own institutions to serve our people and our communities.

THE APPLICATION

- We are a Pentecost people. Acts 2 reminds us that we encounter the same Good News the bystanders of Jerusalem heard standing outside the assembly of believers. Within the sound of many voices and languages, they heard one message about “the mighty acts of God” (Acts 2:11).
- Are we committed to a Pentecostal power that calls our congregations to be at the forefront of change in our communities?
- Have we diminished the calling of Pentecost because we want what is comfortable and familiar rather than the wildfire of God that not only sets us ablaze but every person fortunate enough to be near us?

THE CONCLUSION/THE CHARGE

- Hear the Good News, my AME sisters and brothers! We are a Pentecost People! God has done mighty things in many sounds through our ancestors from the bible and Our Church.
- What sound will you and your congregation make now? What sound will you and your organization make in the future?
- Pentecost Sunday demands we ring with a sound that ignites change and shifts the rhythms of our neighborhoods, schools, communities, people, and institutions to look more like the power and affirmation of God.



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