

The Holy Spirit Inspires Jesus' Followers

Purpose

To affirm the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the world.

Hearing the Word

The Scripture for this lesson is printed below.

Acts 2:1-21 (NIV)

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

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

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!"

12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

14 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; listen carefully to what I say.

15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Acts 2:1-21 (KJV)

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

DAILY BIBLE STUDY

May 25	Numbers 11:24-29
May 26	Joel 2:28-32
May 27	Romans 8:12-17
May 28	1 Corinthians 1:1-9
May 29	1 Timothy 2:1-7; John 3:16
May 30	Acts 2:1-13
May 31	Acts 2:14-21

Seeing the Need

Happy Pentecost! Maybe you wore red today, the official color of Pentecost, which is also known as the birthday of the church. Pentecost is the Greek name for the Jewish festival called Shavuoth (shav-u-OT). It celebrates the grain harvest and the occasion of God giving the Law, or Torah, to the children of Israel. The word Shavuoth means “weeks.” There were seven weeks between the second day of Passover and this festival.

In New Testament times, Jews came from all over the region to offer their grain offerings to God in the Temple in a time of wonderful celebration. That’s why Jerusalem was full of “pious Jews from

every nation under heaven” on the occasion Acts 2 describes (verse 5). They were pilgrims, ready to be part of something important in the Jewish faith.

Christians claim the Day of Pentecost for what it means in the Greek language: 50 days. Fifty days after Easter, after Jesus had ascended to heaven, the disciples had returned to Jerusalem and were waiting for the Holy Spirit Jesus had promised would come and give them power to be his witnesses “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). We recognize this day as the birthday of the church, because it was on that day that the disciples changed from being the followers of Christ to being the witnesses of Christ.

How could or should you celebrate today? Wear red, the color symbolizing the power of the Spirit! Release doves, if you have any, or recognize the symbol of the dove as the Holy Spirit descending. Recall that the Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:10). Sing the praises of the Spirit with hymns and songs for this day, and do so with joy, enthusiasm, and inspiration. This is the day of the coming of the Spirit to the followers of Jesus!

Inspiration

I was a Latin major in college and have always loved to find out the origins of words. Many of the words we use today commonly hold much more power and significance if we keep in mind their origins.

Take the words inspire or inspiration,

for example. They come from a Latin word that means “to breathe in.” (Respiration means “to breathe again.”) We lay upon the word inspire pretty powerful and weighty values. When we say that someone is inspired, we suggest that they are changed or empowered to do something they otherwise would not do. An inspiration gives someone an idea or a resolve to do something important. When we talk about an inspired idea, we refer to something out of the ordinary, something special.

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we receive a special kind of inspiration. The breath of God is breathed on us, into us, and the powerful presence of God’s Spirit with us gives us the imagination and the power to do what God calls us to do. It fills us with resolve and insight and the assurance that this direction, this action, these words, are of God.

The opposite of inspiration is exhaustion. You know the feeling of having no energy or vitality left and the heavy exhale that comes with that feeling. But we never talk about the exhaustion of the Holy Spirit. How the Spirit inspires is the real mystery. We can read about the Spirit coming upon different prophets in the Old Testament or the Spirit coming upon Mary to create the new life who would bring salvation to the world. What does this power and inspiration look like? It’s certainly tough to describe.

But Luke tried to do just that in the account we read from Acts 2. Notice the images: “Suddenly” (verse 2). It was a

powerful moment, not a gradual strengthening.’ A sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind” (verse 2). There is a real power! This wasn’t the soft breeze of a nice summer day. It was like a North Dakota afternoon, with howling winds! As the disciples looked around, Luke says that “they saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them” (verse 3). It was a supernatural moment, God-given, and could happen only because the Spirit had come.

Some people may spend a great deal of time trying to explain these happenings out of a natural world phenomenon. But I say, let this moment on Pentecost Day belong to the power of God to transform these people into confident and strong individuals, ready to be evangelists (“a publisher of good tidings” or “one who brings good news”).

Luke explains not just that this happened but the effect of the coming of the Spirit: “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak” (verse 4). They did this, not because they had studied, but because the Holy Spirit enabled them.

These early followers of Jesus were not highly educated, literary scholars. They were fishermen or held other physically demanding jobs. But they were suddenly and powerfully transformed so that a dozen or more different languages came out of their mouths. That effect, we will soon find, became only another

cause to a greater purpose that day.

When have you felt inspired? What were you able to do because the inspiration was in you?

The Mighty Works of God

Most all pastors think they are good public speakers and can preach well. The proof of that, of course, actually rests in the ears of the congregation. However, before I became a pastor, I studied speech; won awards in high school for radio broadcasting, speech, and debate; and have tried to continue to hone that important craft. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively is vital.

When my son Aaron was in eighth grade, we went to his spring band concert. Suddenly, he stood in the spotlight behind the microphone, where he was transformed into a poised, articulate, excellent speaker who introduced the next piece the band would play. I’ll never forget the way our son, with absolutely no coaching or training from the master, managed to sound like an experienced, professional emcee, with no gaffs and no misspeaking, nothing but a mighty performance.

As the disciples and others were filled with the Holy Spirit that morning, they too suddenly became experts in speaking, particularly in foreign languages. This is not what today we sometimes refer to as “speaking in tongues.” The latter refers to those who are “caught up in the Spirit” and begin to say things that no one can understand. That indeed is one of the

spiritual gifts the New Testament names, and it too is pretty mysterious.

The tongues of the disciples that Pentecost Day caused a sense of mystery among the crowds of Jews who had come for the festival, not because they were strange and unknown but because the disciples were speaking to all of these people in their own languages. They could understand what the disciples were saying. The reaction was surprise and amazement.

Luke took the time to list the different nations, cultures, and languages represented in Jerusalem that day. That the followers of Jesus were able to speak to the crowd in those distinct languages and the crowd was able to understand them was a true miracle of God. However, when we realize the message that was spoken that day in all those different languages, we then are met face to face with the overwhelming holy significance of the coming of the Spirit.

“We hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” (verse 11). The reason the disciples were given this gift was so that those gathered would first be amazed at the ability of the disciples and then overwhelmed by hearing of God’s mighty acts.

It is appropriate on this Pentecost Day to ask what “mighty works of God” we have shared lately. How often do we tend to keep quiet about those miracles, those occasions when we have experienced the hand of God or known the power of the

Spirit in our lives? How willing are we to speak with others about how God’s love has transformed our lives and how God is using us to transform the lives of others?

We may use the cultural substitutions of saying, “Boy, I was lucky,” “As luck would have it,” or “It was an amazing coincidence.” It’s more than a pity when disciples of Jesus attribute what happens to the mighty works of fate, luck, or happenstance.

Do you believe God through the Holy Spirit is active in your life? Do you trust that God is guiding and leading you and opening paths to deeper faith and to miracles in your life? If we believe this, we must not keep our mouths closed and simply let the mighty works of God—in and through us—go by in silence.

The world needs to know of the power, love, and incredible grace of our God who will not let us go or simply sit by idly. God is intimately involved in our lives and loves this world. We should claim the power of the Spirit, especially this Pentecost Day, and recommit ourselves to declaring the mighty works of God.

Where in your life has God been at work this week?

Know This!

She’s my mother, so I think she signed a contract that she has to do it. The tag-team that includes her and my wife does a pretty great job of lifting me up and encouraging me in my life’s work. In their gentle but firm ways, they remind me of what I should already know. When I am

faced with a large challenge or a larger disappointment, they manage to bring the best word to me and help me see a new path through or around what is in front of me. They are blessings, women who speak truth and inspiration that transform my life on a regular basis.

We come to the climax of Acts 2 when Peter takes the stage. First, recall precisely who this Peter was. Peter was a fisherman in Galilee, at that time pretty much a backwater, as uncultured and hillbilly land as you could get. When Jesus initially called Peter to follow him, Peter questioned Jesus' advice to take his fishing boat out a little farther in order to catch fish. "Their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting" (Luke 5:6). Peter was often hard-headed and slow to understand what Jesus said.

On the evening before Jesus was crucified, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62). After Jesus' resurrection and appearance to the disciples, Peter decided to go back to fishing (John 21:1-3), until Jesus caught him again and set him on the path as a leader of this new faith. Peter went on to become a leader in the early church, just not the one we would likely have picked.

What we see that morning, after the disciples had been proclaiming the mighty works of God to the vast crowd, is a transformation. Almost before our eyes as we read, we see a fisherman become a prophet. Peter began to speak, and the words were different than any other speech he had ever made. He spoke with

authority, passion, and spiritual power.

I love his first words: "Know this! Listen carefully to my words!" (Acts 2:14). Peter had a message for the crowd, and he presented it with a presence that went beyond catching their attention. His sermon, when completed, yielded "about three thousand people into the community on that day" (verse 41).

What did Peter say that was so captivating? He reminded them of the prophet Joel and the promise that God would "pour out [God's] Spirit on all people" (verse 17). The pouring of the Spirit was what the people were seeing before their very eyes. Not only that, Peter shared the incredibly good news that all who called upon the Lord would be saved, that is, brought into God's arms and restored to the relationship God desires for us.

This Pentecost event, Peter seems to have said, is transformed from the celebration of a harvest or the giving of the Law to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. It utterly transforms and changes all that has been. It offers new life, new hope, new power, and a new relationship with God as was promised through the prophet, now come to reality.

"Know this!" is the clarion call of Pentecost. Know that the Spirit of God has come, and all that you have ever hoped for in your life of faith is now reality. Know that, if a group of people from Galilee can transform that crowd, certainly God's Spirit in you can transform your world, and your life, and your future. We

are Pentecost people. Our heritage is one in which we trust in the saving grace of God, in the inspiration of God's Spirit, and in the powerful gift of Jesus Christ.

How can you carry the power of Pentecost forward throughout your life? What is one thing you can do today to

demonstrate Pentecost power?

O God who sends the Spirit, send your power and grace on me today, that I may speak of your love to my world; in Jesus' name. Amen.