**The Holy Spirit Comes At Pentecost**

Key Verse Acts 2:4 – *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

Today, we are here to celebrate Pentecost; the day on which God poured out His gift of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the believers. This wondrous event is important for several reasons. First is that this officially marked the beginning of the church, the gathering of all who confess Jesus as Lord and our Messiah. Secondly, the coming of the Holy Spirit was in fulfilment of Jesus’ promise to them to give them a counsellor who would dwell within them forever. Lastly, it is through the Holy Spirit that they were emboldened and empowered to be His witnesses by testifying to Jesus’ death and resurrection to the people. It is through the Spirit that many would join them after their hearts were convicted by their message and repented of their sins. I pray that the Holy Spirit may enable us to declare the wonders of God with power and to see God’s great vision for all people of the world.

**Part 1: All Of Them Were Filled With the Holy Spirit**

May we read verse 1 together; ***“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.”*** For the last two weeks, we have learned about what the believers did while waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the appointment of Matthias and constant prayer fellowship, they grew closer together as they reflected deeper upon the Word of God. Despite the uncertainties of what lay ahead, they had great joy in their hearts and renewed purpose through Jesus’ Great Commission where He called on them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the very ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

But before we proceed any further, we need to pay special attention to the timing of this momentous event. The day of Pentecost (also known as the Feast of Weeks) was one of the three main Jewish holidays that Jewish people gathered for. It fell on the fiftieth day after Passover and was celebrated according to Moses’ law by the special service of offering the first fruits of the wheat harvest in the form of two loaves of bread (Lev 23:15-22). Moreover, it also commemorated when God gave the law to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. For the Jews, following the law meant everything to them and they did their utmost to avoid breaking them as they believed absolute obedience to God’s laws was the way to be righteous before Him. However, Jesus came into the world to show us that the only way to God goes through Him (John 14:6). It is Jesus who revealed God’s immense love and the grace of forgiveness to us. Through His death and resurrection at Passover, Jesus gave new meaning to the holiday by giving up His life to pay for our sins. And just as Jesus gave new meaning to Passover, He did the same for Pentecost through the gift of the Spirit. So let us delve deeper into the passage and really appreciate the significance of all this.

Let’s look at verse 2. ***“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.”*** The Holy Spirit is compared to the blowing of a violent wind. Even though we cannot see the wind, we know it is there by seeing how it influences and changes everything else around us. Jesus Himself compared the Holy Spirit to a life-giving wind by saying, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). In both Hebrew (“ruach”), and Greek (“pneuma”), the same word refers to wind, spirit and breath. It was only after God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life that man became a living being (Gen 2:7). In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives birth to a new spiritual life in those who believe in Jesus (John 3:5,6). While it may appear invisible to the naked eye, we see the Spirit’s presence through the change that takes place in us when we believe in Christ. And whether it is subtle like a gentle breeze or powerful like a hurricane, the change is all for the best for we now bear Christ within us.

May we read verse 3 together; ***“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”*** What first started as a mighty gust of wind had now become brilliant flames that rested on each and every one of the believers. Although the Holy Spirit is one, He was given to each of the apostles individually. He came to them as tongues of fire. Yet His manifestation as tongues of fire has even deeper meaning. Fire represents the holiness of God. Jesus had said that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). The Holy Spirit baptizes with holy fire (Luke 3:16) that cleanses and purifies our hearts from all sin and iniquity. This reminds us of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah met the Holy God personally, he realized that he was a man of unclean lips who spoke unbelieving words. He knew he deserved God’s punishment and could not bear to be in his presence. Then an angel took a live coal from the holy fire and touched his lips (Isaiah 6:7). His lips were cleansed and his sins atoned for. God raised Isaiah to become a powerful servant of God and deliver His words to His people Israel, the main emphasis being the coming Messiah. In life we struggle and suffer a lot due to our sins, our unbelief and our fear that these prevent us from ever being worthy of being in His presence. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon us as tongues of fire, our hearts are purified as all these impurities and imperfections burn away just as how a refiner’s fire removes impurities, leaving only the purest minerals. I pray God may truly purify all our hearts and consciences so we may serve Him in the same manner.

As amazing as it was to have flames suddenly appear above you, nothing could have prepared them for what happened next; ***“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (verse 4)***. Jesus once taught that mouth speaks from the overflow of what is stored in the heart (Luke 6:45). The apostle’s hearts were filled with the Spirit and the result was them praising God only this time they did it in many different languages. Even though they were country bumpkins from the backwater regions of Israel, they suddenly could speak in all the major languages of their region. However, even though they all spoke different languages, the message was clear and the same as always. All the people gathered were amazed that they heard the wonders of God being declared in their own language; Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs all heard God’s glory professed in a way that spoke to them personally.

Language is indispensable to our very existence. Through language, we communicate our thoughts, our needs and so much else. But it is incredibly difficult do so if you do not share the same language. This is not limited to different nations or cultures; we face the same problems when communicating across ages, gender, education etc. A good example of this is the struggles missionaries go through in sharing the Gospel with students. At times, the communication barrier seems insurmountable on both ends. But from this passage, we see how God gave the believers the gift of tongues not only for speaking but also so they may come to understand others who are far different from them as well. It would have been easy for the believers to simply keep their fellowship limited to their small group of friends and family but God’s vision for the church is far grander than that. The very same God spoke the universe into existence, spoke to His people the prophets and Scripture, and spoke through Jesus (the Incarnation of God’s Word into human flesh). Now, He gave them His Spirit so **they** could go out, speaking about Jesus for the whole world to hear and bring in all people from all nations. It is still the same to this very day so let us freely ask Him to give us His Spirit so we may declare the wonders of God in ways that all may understand and accept Christ for themselves.

**Part 2 – God Pours Out His Spirit On All The People**

When the crowd heard the multitude of languages proclaiming the greatness of God, the reaction was mixed. Some were amazed and sincerely wanted to know what it all meant while others found this all to be too much and made fun of the entire situation (12-13). These days whenever the Gospel is preached, the reaction is more of the latter than the former. It would have been easy to become discouraged and stop lest the Jewish authorities caught wind of what they were doing. However, Peter uses this moment to preach Christ and His significance with the crowd.

With all the attention on them Peter stood up, raised his voice to address the crowd. Let us not forget that that this was the same Peter who not too long ago could barely even speak when he was accused of being one of Jesus’ disciples by a little servant girl. But the Peter we witness at this moment is someone, who despite his many failures and shortcomings, received Christ’s love and forgiveness personally and could now powerfully testify to the great hope God has for all His people through His gift of the Holy Spirit. Fearlessly, he refutes the mockers’ claims of them being drunk and freely quotes from the prophet Joel:

***““‘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.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
    I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
    and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heavens above
    and signs on the earth below,
    blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
    and the moon to blood
    before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
    on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (17-21)***

Two main themes are illustrated in this quotation; the last days and prophesying. Let us look first at the last days. If this quote feels vaguely familiar, it is because Jesus said something similar in reference to the end of the age and His second coming (Luke 21:25-28). We too are living in the end times, seeing all the tragedies and turmoil in the world that are occurring as a result of this. But what appears like a time of fear and trepidation is actually a time of great hope, for the Lord has poured out His Spirit upon us. Through Him, we are able to prophesy, see visions and dream dreams. Prophesying is not just having an ability to predict things or see the future but simply to testify about the wonders God (hence sharing the same root as the word “prophet” – one sent to deliver God’s word to the people). In this sense, we are all called to prophesy by telling people about God, about Jesus and how amazing He is. As for visions, God enables us to view our lives and this world in a completely different light. Rather than solely seeking our own pleasure, we seek and desire to serve Him as He fills us with the vision of His Kingdom and all the things God plans to accomplish through the church. When these two go together, we are filled with hope. Even old men who feel like they have already lived their lives and have nothing worth dreaming about are now filled with great hope in Christ.

All in all, the speaking in tongues, the prophesying, visions and dreams are all aspects of what the Holy Spirit does. But as great as all of them are individually and collectively, they still are not why God gave Him to us. The most important thing about the Spirit is that He helps us know God. May we read John 16:13-14 together; ***“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. …and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.”*** It always amazes me that God gave us His Spirit to dwell within us and because of this we are always in His presence for He is always with us. This is true when we experience all the joys in life and more so when we endure hardships just as Romans 8:26-27 elucidate; ***“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”***

Growing up, I was very uneasy when anyone really spoke a tonne about the Holy Spirit for where I am from, there are many charismatic movements and the stories about them and the spiritual world terrified me. Even though the Spirit would convict me of my sins and remind me of God’s word, I did my best to drown His voice out by busying myself with all kinds of worldly and superficial things. But in university, when all the worldly and superficial things could not give me comfort in my time of need, God’s Spirit strengthened me and helped me know the Lord all the more. The best instance of this was the night before my Michener interview. I had failed to enter the teachers’ colleges I applied to and now only had Michener as my last chance yet it was the hardest of them all to enter. I did not know what to pray for as words continued to fail me. All I could do was literally cry out to God and as I did, I felt a strange sense of reassurance even as my body shook from nerves. Though my outer being bore every sign of fear and agitation, God calmed my heart that night and throughout the interview. It would not be the last time I faced a situation like that but I experienced firsthand how great a blessing it is to have the Spirit within me and hope He may guide me to preach the Gospel so others may know Him and experience the peace of God that transcends all understanding.

In conclusion, God graciously poured out His Spirit at Pentecost, enabling the apostles to testify to the majesty and magnificence of our Lord. This same Spirit has been poured out onto each and everyone one of us so that we may be to share this with all those around us. I pray we may always look to the Spirit for guidance in all things and teach us how to preach the Gospel in ways that all people may understand and eventually call upon Christ as well.