

Acts 2:1-21

²When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that **I will pour out 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. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

God, whose name is love, by the power of your Holy Spirit, speak to us in the language of our hearts, that we may hear your Word with understanding and answer your call with confidence. Amen.

They were all together in one place...praying. Reminds me of Sunday morning. And then something extraordinary happened. It was an event that went beyond the possibility of literal description. Ordinary words just fail? So the author of Acts used *word images* to “paint” the scene this way:

A sound came over them and it filled the house where they were staying; the sound was like the sound of a violent wind. Then tongues, looking like fire, came upon them and touched them all, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit set their tongues free, and their voices rang out such that everyone could

understand what they were saying no matter where they had come from.

The event was completely astonishing. All who experienced it were bewildered. But as in every age down through history there are always detractors, so here too some just wrote them off as drunk.

Yet whatever it was, it was real; it was real because it changed the course of history; indeed, it set the church on fire and it grew and spread...just like fire, a holy wild fire! Jesus said they’d receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. The book of Acts is a witness to that power bearing fruit.

To the astonished queries of the devout Jews from every nation under heaven, Peter stood up to set them straight by appealing to their own sacred scriptures. Peter was claiming that the first Pentecost event was the fulfillment of prophecy, straight from the prophet, Joel: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...”

The church that was coming to birth would be an inclusive church; all flesh included. And the gift of prophecy would be handed down from generation to generation; “your sons and daughters shall prophesy.” Young men will have visions; old men will be visited by dreams. Even slaves, men *and* women, will receive the gift of prophecy through the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit was, and is, for everyone.

Yet in our culture we have this tendency to reserve gifts and benefits for those we deem deserving, which, of course, puts us in the business of judging others (this one deserves, this one doesn’t). Membership is another way to divide the “ins” and the “outs.” If we have the right connections we’re in; or the right password, or the secret handshake. It seems we like divisions.

But God doesn’t work that way. God treats everybody the same and offers grace to everyone. That’s who God is! God is love, and love does not hold back; it is not stingy, nor selective. At its best, this is the church, open, inclusive, extending love and compassion to all who come. If God extends love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness to us, how can we not do the same? It is as if God is saying to us,

‘Get rid of the fire extinguishers; let your hearts burn! Love today like there’s no tomorrow.’

So what is your vision of extravagant love? In Acts, chapter 10, a Roman centurion had a vision, and at the same time Peter had a vision. These visions were meant to draw the two men together. It led Peter to a revelation, he said, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality” (vs. 34). Thus the mission of the church was expanded to the Gentiles; it was extravagant; it was the work of the Spirit. Where is the Spirit sending us today?

Today we are not just celebrating the Pentecost event of the first century. The gift of God’s Spirit is timeless; it breaks in upon us in the eternal now. Are we tuned into it? How is the Spirit working in us...today? How are we using the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Again I invite you to imagine the Spirit flowing in you through your breath. This is a great image for us introverts. We can take in the Holy Spirit with every breath, then breathe it out to anyone as a silent gift of love. Others will not be aware of our breath prayer for them, but *we* know it, and realize we are being drawn to God in the process.

But here’s the warning label: we’re playing with fire here; the gift of the Spirit is powerful. Who knows, we might find ourselves becoming holy extroverts!

On my way home from Vermont yesterday I stopped at a gas station to use the facilities and get something for my sweet tooth which was crying out to be heard. I passed the clerk on my way to the bathroom and after a friendly greeting she said, “Will you be needing me?”

I’d never been asked that by a store clerk, so it caught me off guard, and I confessed my need for candy. She then said she had to go outside the store for a minute and would be right back to take care of me.

When I began my sweet search I was delighted to see they sold “KIND” bars which are sort of like granola bars, except they are mostly nuts and seeds. Some of them also include chocolate. Perfect!

I found one labeled “dark chocolate cherry cashew,” and another, “dark chocolate almond mint.” I took one of each to the register.

I was smiling as she rang up my purchase and after giving me my change said, “You know that’s not candy, right? Those bars are good for you.”

I said, “Well there is chocolate in them.”
She said, “But dark chocolate is good or you!”

I pumped the 2 bars into the air and said, “YES!!!”
She let out a wonderful laugh, and after wishing each other well, I headed out the door.

I left the store knowing I had been blessed. Maybe the clerk felt the same way. The Holy Spirit is alive and moving in us and in our midst every day. In the first century, Pentecost was a breath-taking event. I believe it can still take our breath away if we are open to letting it move through us.

So for the extroverts among us; you already get jazzed up by interacting with people; it feeds you. So what if you were to visualize the Spirit flowing through you in all your interactions? Would that change anything? Would you feel a different kind of power?

Pentecost happens all the time; it *is* an experience of power; it’s an experience of love and compassion; it’s an experience of intimacy with God, and through the Spirit, it is an experience of intimacy with our sisters and brothers everywhere.

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Amen.