

Rev. Thomas Emery
“Pentecost and You” Acts 2:1-21
Salem Presbyterian Church
Sunday, May 19, 2013

On the Day of Pentecost, the Disciples were all together in one place confused, unmotivated, and fearful of the Romans and political correctness, when suddenly the Holy Spirit came like the rush of a mighty wind. Above every head there appeared a tongue of fire, and these largely uneducated Galilean followers of Jesus began speaking in other languages. News of what was happening spread quickly. Jews from all over that part of the world had crowded into Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks). Curious crowds gathered outside the house where the Disciples were staying. Each listened with amazement to the Disciples testifying in their own language telling them to repent and be baptized. The baptism that Peter calls for is to be more than a superficial experience. A great tragedy for many of us who have been baptized and who are pretty good church people, is that sometimes we have not allowed Christ to rule supreme over all aspects of our lives.

TEACHING POINTS

Teaching Point One: *The Gift of the Holy Spirit is available to each of us today.* Pentecost is a time of praying for the Spirit to fall on each of us and on our church afresh so that we, too, may be transformed, and so that we may be a blessing to others. That is the promise we have from Christ, "I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever." (John 14:16). Our entire outlook on life will be changed. At Pentecost, they went from a meaningless life to one of rich fulfillment, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is what made it possible. In spite of what we might consider to be excessive enthusiasm on the part of some believers, the Holy Spirit is none other than the Spirit of Jesus Christ, himself, in our hearts today. We may not get up and dance around or speak in tongues, but when we experience His presence, there will be feelings of release from the cares of this world and renewed hope.

Teaching Point Two: *The Holy Spirit gives us the power to communicate.* Peter was transformed when the Holy Spirit came upon him. George Carlin said a few years ago: "Scientists have just discovered a cure for apathy. However, no one has shown the slightest interest." Today we celebrate God's answer to apathy - the explosive power of the Holy Spirit. One of Simon Peter's friends probably came up to him after that first sermon and slapped him on the back and said, "I didn't know you had it in you." And Peter probably replied, "It wasn't me; it was the Holy Spirit." Peter was a new person: he had been transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Teaching Point Three: *The Holy Spirit empowers us to serve!* Some people who have an experience of the Spirit in their lives focus on the experience, and not on the call of God to service. The Holy Spirit did not come

on the believers so they could sit around and congratulate themselves on their piety. The Holy Spirit did not come on them so they could form an exclusive club "where only those who had the same experience would be welcome." The Holy Spirit came to them so that they could continue the work that Jesus had begun, and we are to do the same. Serving is the real sign of the Holy Spirit.

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability (Acts 2:3-4 NRSV).

ACTION POINT

You may know the story of Constantine, the Roman Emperor, who became a Christian. Having taken this step, he wanted everybody else to become a Christian as well. He took his soldiers out into the river to have them baptized. As they were baptized, however, he had them hold their right arms out of the water. He wanted them to become Christians, but he didn't want them to become so Christian that they would quit killing people with their swords. Likewise, most of us hold back from totally yielding our will to God.

The enormously successful book, *I'm O.K., You're O.K.*, written by the famous psychiatrist, Tom Harris, says that there are **three reasons** why people change. **First**, people change when it is "More Painful to Remain" as they are than to change. Perhaps, you are in a life situation that is very painful to you. You cannot imagine being in that situation for the rest of your life. So, you make a change. Why? Because it is more painful to stay stuck where you are than to change. According to the book, a **second** reason for change is when we find ourselves at the "Point of Despair." Perhaps we suddenly come to the realization that we are about to lose our marriage, our job, or our health. At that point, we may change. Perhaps, you have heard people say, "I had to reach rock bottom, before I could take hold of my life."

But there is also **third** motive for change. Harris calls it the "Eureka Stage." That is, some people change, because they discover much to their surprise that there is something better that they have been missing. Of course, this is the message of the Gospel. The world needs to be led to discover that God offers a richer and fuller life to all who will freely receive it. Those who heard Peter preach his sermon knew that they had found something that would make their lives more joyous, more purposeful, more livable. "Eureka!" This was it.

Life became fulfilling to the Disciples, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is what made it real. On the Day of Pentecost, the converts asked, "What shall we do?" "Repent," Peter answered. "Be baptized. Receive the Holy Spirit." Each of those are steps you and I need to take daily in our Christian walk. They are the key to a life that is full, rich, and eternal. Church attendance doesn't get you into heaven, but a changed heart does. Is your will truly yielded to Christ?