

“A Mighty Wind”

Acts 2:1-13

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.” (ESV)

Those of you who have been around for awhile know that as far as my preaching schedule and even the worship schedule, I try to stick more or less to the church calendar or the church year. Over the history of the church a calendar has been developed. That calendar follows a certain rhythm. It begins with Advent, which everyone is familiar with—Christmas—and it goes through to Lent and to Holy Week and to Easter. Unfortunately we usually stop at Easter. Most churches do. One of the reasons I try to emphasize the church calendar is because it not only gives us a rhythm for life and ministry, but it also helps us to avoid error. We’re always tempted to focus on some things and avoid others. To that end, today we’re celebrating (and I guarantee most of you didn’t know) one of the most holy days in the church calendar. In fact the day that we’re celebrating here today is as important as Easter morning. Do you believe that? Today is Pentecost Sunday. Why is Pentecost so important? Pentecost is important because Pentecost is not only the birth of the church, but Pentecost is the day in the Book of Acts in which Jesus sent His promised Spirit, that the Holy Spirit would come and the Holy Spirit would not only convert people, but would empower them for the ministry and the mission He’d given to them to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and we hardly ever recognize it. There’s a practical reason we don’t celebrate Pentecost more often. I’m going to be completely honest with you. The reason we don’t put more focus in most churches, on Pentecost is because most years it falls on the same day as Mother’s Day. One of them is optional and one of them carries the death penalty, so which one do you think I usually choose? Even so, it’s an extremely important day because it gets us talking about the work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Most churches fall into one of two categories. One category of churches tends to focus so intensely on the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit, they end up neglecting sound doctrine. On the other hand (I’m going to give you a test after this), there are churches who spend so much of their time focusing on sound doctrine, they neglect the work of the Holy Spirit. If you have your pencils, here’s your test. Pass / Fail. Which one do you think we are? That was a pretty easy test, wasn’t it?

Today we’re going to look at Acts chapter 2. It’s a corrective to both extremes, which is why it’s important to continue to look at the church calendar the way things come up.

In fact, by way of a side note, there will be a Sunday School class based on the church calendar.

This morning, as we look at this passage in Acts we’re going to look at three things. We’re going to look at the power at Pentecost. That’s number one. The second thing we’re going to look at is the purpose of Pentecost. And the third thing we’re going to look at briefly is responding to the Spirit. How do you respond to the Holy Spirit?

Before I jump into the text I have to give you some background. If you’re reading the Book of Acts you have to keep in mind that the Book of Acts was also written by Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke. I don’t know who made the decision to put the Bible together – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and then the Book of Acts. It would have been much simpler if it were Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke because Luke and Acts should be back to back. They should be right beside each other because where Luke leaves off, Acts picks up. Let me read to you the last thing that Jesus says to his disciples in the Book of Luke.

^{24:46} and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (ESV)

First Jesus tells them their mission. It is to preach the Gospel to all the world starting at Jerusalem. The second thing that He tells them is to wait. “You have to wait until I send the Spirit to you.” That’s important because you cannot force the work of the Holy Spirit. The way you deal with it is you have to wait and you have to pray. They had been waiting and praying for about forty days. Jesus was with them for about forty days, and toward the end, right when He was going to ascend they started to get a little squirrely again and Jesus had to reassure them of what He was talking about. In Acts chapter 1 verse 4 He said, “Do not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the promise from the Father you heard from Me. John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they come together they ask, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons, but the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to all the ends of the earth.”

He promises that the Spirit is going to come. “The Spirit will come. The Spirit will empower you to take the Gospel to all the ends of the earth.” Then in the passage I read, we now begin to talk about the power of the Holy Spirit which begins by saying, “Now when Pentecost had come and they were all together in one place.”

The first question you need to ask is, “What is the significance of Pentecost?” Pentecost was a Jewish holiday. Pentecost comes from the word “Pente;” it’s fifty. Basically all it means is “fifty” because Pentecost took place fifty days after the last Sabbath on the Passover. It’s as simple as that. But it gets a little bit more confusing when you’re reading your Bible because oftentimes when you’ll read your Bible you’ll come across the phrase, “it’s the feast of weeks.” The “feast of weeks” is also Pentecost because it was seven weeks after what we know as Easter, what the Jewish folk would know as Passover. Then there’s another aspect. It’s also called “the feast of first fruits.” You thought I was finished talking about stewardship, didn’t you? I’m never finished talking about stewardship. It was called “the feast of first fruits” because also at this time of year would be the time that the Jews would devote the first fruits of their harvest to the Lord. So later on you’re going to read there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven there. Almost by definition if someone was celebrating Pentecost they were devout. The reason you know they were devout is because it would have cost them. They were coming to celebrate, but part of their celebration was giving God the first fruits of all of their labor. If you’re not devout you don’t do that. So we read later that there were devout Jews from every place under heaven. That’s the sort of chronological timeline.

The next question is, “Who were ‘they’?” That’s the big debate in Bible scholarship. It says, “When Pentecost had arrived they were all together in one place.” Who were ‘they’? Most commentators, in fact almost every commentator I’ve read, said that “they who were gathered at Pentecost in that one place” were the 120 folk that were in the upper room. I don’t think that’s correct. You can thank one of my professors at FSU, Bruce Bair, for that. I majored in English and I spent most of my time studying Renaissance Drama. Professor Bair taught Milton, among other things. Every week he would give us a quiz. The quiz was nothing more and nothing less than his picking a passage out of “Paradise Lost” from which he would point out a pronoun: “he, she, it, you, they.” The whole quiz was that we had to find the antecedent of that pronoun. In other words, whenever you read the word “him” or “he” or “they” it always points back to something. So if you want to have a fun Sunday afternoon, I guarantee it will take you hours, just open “Paradise Lost,” pick any random pronoun, and spend the rest of the day trying to find the antecedent. It’s a lot easier here. When you’re reading through your Bible and you come across a “they,” find the antecedent by looking back to the last proper noun or the last thing that was referred to. If you do that it helps you understand who was actually in the room, but also it helps you understand the importance of who was in the room and what was going on when they were empowered. If you look at verse 26 of chapter 1 it says,

²⁶ *And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (ESV)*

And then the very next thing,

^{2:1} *When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. (ESV)*

Remember Judas was put on permanent DL [Disabled List (sports term)]. He was gone. They had to replace Judas, so they do it with Matthias. In the New Testament, in the original languages, it wouldn’t have had chapter markers. It would have just run right together. So the antecedent to “they” is the eleven apostles. At the very least, the eleven apostles were all together in one place. Then something happened, something unexpected. Something they prayed for and waited for, but I don’t know that they were ready for it. Let me read it to you.

¹ . . . *they were all together in one place.* ² *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.* ³ *And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.* ⁴ *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (ESV)*

So they’re sitting in there and the Spirit shows up. You have three evidences of the Spirit’s showing up. The first evidence was the sound of a mighty rushing wind. Then the second was the fire. First fire appeared then tongues spit out onto each person. Then the last sign of the Spirit’s presence, and this sign is always present, I’ll make that clear later, is proclamation or utterance. So it’s wind, fire, and proclamation. Let’s talk about wind for a minute.

Why is wind one of the things that shows up here? If you look throughout the whole Old Testament, and even in the New Testament, the word for “wind” and the word for “spirit” are the same. In Hebrew the word for wind is “ruach” and the word for spirit is “ruach.” In the New Testament “pneuma” is wind and “pneuma” is spirit. When you look through the Old Testament you can see where God acts and what His Spirit does. In the Old Testament the primary job of the Spirit, and in the New, is to bring things to life. It’s to make things new; it’s to create. So when you look, for example, at Genesis chapter 1 (it’s easy to pass over), but there’s this chaos. Then it says, “But the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” Why? Because the Spirit of God is getting ready to create all things. Then in chapter 2 when Adam is created he’s basically inanimate. He’s like Gumby. He’s just there. It says that God breathed into his nostrils the life-giving Spirit. But the only way Adam would have life is if God breathed His Spirit into him and gave him life. One of the primary jobs of the Holy Spirit is to give life. It’s to create and to make all things new. It’s not only that in the Old Testament but it’s the same way in the New Testament as well. If you are a Christian, the reason you are a Christian primarily is not because you decided to trust Jesus, it’s because God decided to breathe life into you. Have you ever noticed when I pray I’m constantly praying that God would open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf? That’s God the Holy Spirit I’m imploring to come and make people alive. When you read the book of Ezekiel and you get to the valley of dry bones—it’s a famous story—and yet what is it that actually brings those bones to life and makes them new? It’s the Spirit of God blowing through like a wind. One of the primary purposes of the Spirit of God is to make things new and to make things alive. If you stop there it would almost be easy enough to think that the Holy Spirit is just God’s errand boy, that God the

Father is in heaven and He says, “You know, I’d like to make Tommy Allen alive. Why don’t you just go breathe on him.” But nothing could be farther from the truth because the next thing that we see is that was manifested was fire, tongues of flame.

What does fire mean when you begin to talk about God? Fire actually connotes in the Bible the very presence of God Himself. In the Old Testament, Abraham in Genesis chapter 15 is worried that he would have to go through this covenant ceremony with God. He has a dream and what does he see going through the pieces? He sees a smoking oven and a pillar of fire. When Moses is confronted by God in the desert, what does he see? A burning bush, God’s fire. Israel’s led through the desert how? By a pillar of fire. Finally when God delivered the law to Israel, remember they couldn’t go near the mountain or touch the mountain because God had come down on the mountain in a consuming fire. The Holy Spirit isn’t just God’s errand boy. The Holy Spirit is God Himself. So think about the importance of that. When we neglect the ministry of the Holy Spirit what you’re neglecting is the very ministry of God Himself because the Holy Spirit is God.

The last thing you see there is utterance. They spoke. I’m going to make the case to you that the filling of the Holy Spirit always issues forth in proclamation. Before I talk about what they spoke, let’s talk about being filled by the Holy Spirit quickly. What does it mean to be “filled by the Holy Spirit”? Peter tells the crowd later as he’s preaching a sermon to them on the basis of what they’d just seen. At the end of that sermon they say, “What are we supposed to do now?” Peter says to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” What does it mean to receive the Holy Spirit? You receive the Holy Spirit by putting your faith in Jesus. The reason you even put your faith in Jesus is because the Spirit is already at work. But that’s not the only way He manifests Himself. The Spirit also manifests Himself to empower people for certain tasks. If you are a Christian you are filled with the Holy Spirit. What’s happening here and what happens throughout the rest of the Bible is that God also comes to people and empowers them for specific tasks. He empowers them to do certain things. You remember I preached about Saul last year? God’s Spirit comes upon Saul and Saul was empowered for this task of taking on the Philistines. If you remember, what’s the first thing he did when the Spirit empowered him? He prophesied; he preached. The same thing happened with David. As you go through here you see the Holy Spirit filling people and empowering them for specific tasks. But the tasks that are specific, and the task that is general, in large part are the same. Whenever you see the filling of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the thing that always accompanies it is a proclamation of the Gospel. Proclamation of the Gospel always accompanies being filled with the Holy Spirit. Not everyone believes that. Some people think when you receive the Spirit, what it means is that you speak in tongues, things that people can’t understand as in I Corinthians 14. What’s happening in I Corinthians 14 about people praying in tongues is not what’s happening here. If you’re filled with the Holy Spirit you will utter; you will proclaim. I’ve had times over the course of my life where people come to me and they ask, “Tommy, are you filled with the Holy Spirit?” I say, “Well, yeah.” They ask, “I mean really filled. Like, have you spoken in tongues?” I say, “Yeah.” They say, “Tell me.” As soon as they say that I talk to them about the story of Patty and Maria.

When I was at Florida State, like at most universities I’m guessing, there’s a big Student Union that meets every Wednesday. I would always go down to the Student Union on Wednesdays because there was every kind of person in the world there. I would share the Gospel with people. I’d try and challenge myself. So one day I was trying to share the Gospel with a girl named Patty who was from Venezuela. She didn’t speak English and I thought, “Well, I’ll do it in Spanish.” So I’m laboring along trying to tell her about Jesus in Spanish and I was stumbling. At some point out of the corner of my eye I saw a woman walk by who appeared to be Hispanic. It was in Florida so there was a good chance of that. As she came by I grabbed her arm and said, “Excuse me.” I asked, “Se habla Espanol?” She said, “Si.” I said, “Como se deci ‘to repent’.” She said, “Oh, it’s ‘arrepentirse’.” I said, “Gracias”. I kept sharing the Gospel with Patty, and you know who became a Christian after that conversation? Maria, who had helped me with the Spanish words. Patty eventually did, as well as did Maria’s brother. Now, you have to ask yourself, “Was that just chance? Was it chance that I was trying to tell someone about the Gospel and I was trying to speak in a language that wasn’t very familiar to me, and then a girl just happened to come by and I happened to ask her, “How do you say ‘repent’?” And she happened to listen to the whole conversation and her whole life was changed as a result of that. Is that chance? It’s the work of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit always uses means as well. So unless you’re actually uttering He’s not going to do anything. The question is, “If you really understand yourself to be a Christian and the Holy Spirit has genuinely filled you, how come you’re not proclaiming?” Some people are empowered for a special task. When we ordain ministers we pray toward that end but that doesn’t mean everyone who isn’t filled with the Holy Spirit shouldn’t be also proclaiming the Gospel because the Spirit’s filling is always accompanied by proclamation. One of the primary parts of our mission statement, our vision, is “gathering.” Are we gathering? They did. Actually let me rephrase that. God did. Jesus promised, “You’re going to preach the gospel to all nations starting at Jerusalem.” Who would have known that they would have never had to leave Jerusalem to preach the Gospel to all nations? That’s where we get into the purpose of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “The reason I’m giving you this Spirit is for? your proclamation of the Gospel. I’m going to empower you to take it to the ends of the earth.” What happens next? Let’s look at the purpose.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” (ESV)

What is the Holy Spirit doing here? First of all, He’s arranged a meeting. It says, “There were in Jerusalem devout Jews from every nation under heaven.” Remember in the Old Testament the Jews were dispersed. Some were sent into exile in Babylonia and some into Assyria, and they were dispersed throughout all the known world. At some point some of them came back to Jerusalem

but most of them did not. So although they were still Jewish they were in some sense natives of the land where they had come from – from somewhere else in the world. The nations listed there are all the nations in the known world to them. Jews who were devout came in from all nations. [A map of the Near East projected on a screen.] If you look in the middle of the map, you'll see the star. That's Jerusalem. So from all over the known world, the nations came in to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. While they were there they hear this sound. We don't know if it was the sound of the wind or the sound of these guys preaching. Eventually we know they came outside and they began to come to hear these men preach. A couple of things happen. The first thing that happens is that they're amazed and confounded. Why? Because each of them is hearing the Gospel in his own tongue. The question people often ask, "Is it a gift of hearing? Were the apostles just preaching and they heard what God wanted them to hear?" They answer is probably not because of the comment you find in there. It says, "Are not all these speaking Galilean?" You see, Galileans –were not only from the other side of the tracks (we've talked about that), but apparently they had a very distinctive accent. It's what got Peter caught when he was following Jesus on the night before His crucifixion. Apparently Galileans were sort of like the Scottish of the New Testament. They were very guttural, they swallowed their vowels. So it was very distinctive. Now they hear these guys with thick accents all of a sudden speaking the mighty works of God in their own language, and they're confounded. But it's a good confounding because one of the things that's going on here is that the curse of sin is being reversed. In particular, the curse of sin that manifested itself at the Tower of Babel is being reversed.

Remember the story of the Tower of Babel? Humanity had become prideful. Humanity had become almost as if they wanted to be gods themselves. They were going to build a tower so that they could reach up to God and make a name for themselves. It was such a joke that God had to come down and see them from above and he laughed at them. What did God do as a result of that? He confounded their languages so that they couldn't communicate with one another. He said, "If I let them continue in having the same language, who knows what they'll be able to do?" So because of man's sin and because of man's pride, God confounded the languages. But because of the work of Jesus on behalf of those same sinners, Babel now is being reversed. Instead of the nations coming together as one and being confounded and sent out, the nations are actually coming in as one and the confusion now is a good confusion because instead of not knowing what's going on, now they know exactly what's going on. You see, one of the things the Holy Spirit does is He actually brings unity to the church. Now the whole church and the whole world has a common language. I don't mean English or Japanese or Chinese, I mean the common language of the church now is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I've been all over the world and I've been in some places other people probably wouldn't want to go. Every place that I've been, I've found people there who are believers in Jesus. It's amazing. What the Gospel is doing is taking that which was dispersed and that which was confused and bringing it together. What's ultimately going to happen here is that these people are going to hear the Gospel and then they're going to go back to where they came from and start their own churches. There's a big mystery how the Roman church (if you read the book of Romans) got started. It probably happened here. Devout Jews heard the Gospel. Three thousand people are converted and then they go back to Rome and they can't help but proclaim this news. Why? Because they're filled with the Holy Spirit. The beautiful thing is, as I was thinking about this, our church, First FEPC, is in almost the exact same position as this church was. Our job is to proclaim the Gospel to the nations. Years ago in the grand history of this church we had this huge emphasis on missions and we sent people out all over the world, and we still have people out all over the world. We're being obedient to the Great Commission. Thirty years ago this neighborhood was primarily Anglo. Now it's about one-half Anglo, which means the nations have now come to us. So our job is to proclaim the Gospel to the nations. The question is, "How are we going to do that? Are we going to do it?" The only way we'll be able to do it is if the Holy Spirit changes us, and the Holy Spirit gives us eyes to see the need that people have for the Gospel, from every tongue, tribe, and nation, even as they exist within blocks of our church. The question is, "What are you going to do about that?" Where's the Spirit leading you with that?

That leads to the last point. It's responding to the Spirit. Did you notice at the end of this how the responses were? There were basically two. Let me read them to you.

¹² *And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"* ¹³ *But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."* (ESV)

There are only ever two responses to the Holy Spirit. One response to the Holy Spirit is basically amazement or wondering, "What am I supposed to be doing now? Lord, what is it You would have me do?" The other response is just mocking. That's what you see here. The question is, "Which one are you?" As Presbyterians with a big engineer influence, we don't tend to be mockers but we do tend to want to control things. We want to know exactly. Things need to be done decently and things need to be done orderly, and the problem with that is that the Holy Spirit doesn't always work that way. The question is, "Are you open? How do you respond to the Spirit? Are you sensitive enough when you see the Spirit doing this or that to actually respond to it, or do you say, 'We don't do that here?'" How are you going to respond? The other question of course, for those of you who aren't Christians, "What are you going to do?" They proclaim to these men the mighty works of God. What were they talking about? They were proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus to them. What's the Gospel of Jesus? It's just this. It's that you and I are more broken and sinful than we could ever imagine and yet Jesus came down and bore our sin on the cross in our stead. Then when He arose from the dead, He ensured that if we believe we would be forgiven. Do you feel that working in your heart? If you do, please, I beg you, to embrace it. If you don't believe anything I've said this morning, that's fine, too. I'll be praying that the Spirit would open your eyes. Think about that.