



“The Rush of the Spirit”

Preaching Text: Acts 2:1-21
19 May 2013: Day of Pentecost
FUMC, Arlington, Texas

The day of Pentecost has come and the story before us today is from Acts. Acts is about mission: about speaking, about proclaiming the good news to all people everywhere. The day of Pentecost is about the gift of the Holy Spirit which similar to many things that happen to us—love of parents, respect of neighbors or teachers, and joy and happiness in life—is a pure gift. We don’t earn it and we cannot claim we deserve it. It is a gift. Did I say it was a gift?

As forebears of John Wesley, we know that God offers us salvation as a gift. And although we cannot buy salvation, we still have a part. Paul writes as much to Philippi: “Therefore, my beloved . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Accordingly most of our salvation has to do with what God does—not what we do. Yet God does not save us against our wills. Rather, God invites us into the kingdom; God never forces or coerces us.

Hear our text for Pentecost Sunday, Acts 2:1-21:

[2:1] When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. [2] And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [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.

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

[14] But 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.

[15] Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

[16] No, 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.
- [18] Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
- [19] And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
- [20] The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
- [21] Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2:1-21).

This text is so rich that I want to shrink it to four distinct particulars that may help us understand what the spirit and us can do through mutual cooperation. **First**, those earliest Christians were obedient. Most of us like to think we are in control, don't we? We do not like others telling us what to do. We are fiercely independent and autonomous people, aren't we? And yet, notice that while Jesus was staying with the disciples, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for God's promise (Acts 1:4). Sometimes obedience takes funny twists, as when Neil Marten, a member of the British Parliament, was once giving a group of citizens a guided tour of Parliament. During the course of the visit, the group happened to meet Lord Hailsham, then Lord Chancellor, wearing all the regalia of his office. Hailsham recognized Marten among the group and cried out, "Neil!" Not daring to question or disobey the "command," the entire assembly of visitors promptly fell to their knees (*Today in the Word*, July 30, 1993).

The disciple's obedience was not strictly a reaction to a word. Rather they made a genuine decision. After all Jesus had been taken from them and they risked their lives to follow Jesus. Thus, their obedience to remain in Jerusalem was one of obedient courage. If they had not waited in Jerusalem for the promise of God, then



who knows what might have happened? First, those early Christians were obedient people. It may cut against our grain, but obedience is a hallmark of the Christian life.

Second, these people were united in fellowship. The word we translate as “fellowship” comes from a Greek word “koininia” and concerns an ideal state of community that the Holy Spirit fosters within the Christian Church. It basically means “with one mind” or “with one purpose or impulse.” It is a togetherness that is forged partly by the spirit of God, but also by the willingness of people to live in love and charity with one another.

Sometimes we get the idea that fellowship is frivolous or just fun and games, but remember this quotation from John Wesley: “I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field.” To place fellowship within a grouping of Christ, the Bible, and the mission field suggests the prominence of fellowship to Wesley.

Third, when Luke writes that those assembled “called on the name of the Lord” Luke means that praying was an essential element of the earliest church. If we were honest, we might confess that too often our prayers are simply appeals to God to do something specific for us. Examples of this might be the healing of a sick person, or sending rain in a drought, or preventing the outbreak of war. These are not bad things, but they reflect that we understand prayer is only for us to use in a time of dire need. How many of us thank God for daily bread in a simple table grace before eating? Our most apt prayers are those that correspond to God’s intention for life: for peace and for the divine help necessary to obey Christ’s bidding. We pray for God’s will on earth as it is in heaven. Our prayers could be consistent with a life of prayer couldn’t they? Do we commit ourselves to the thing for which we pray that God will produce? Praying was an essential element of the earliest church.

Last, the early church planned. Waiting obediently, enjoying unifying fellowship together, and praying never excludes the need for the church to take care of business.



When Judas “euphemistically bowed out” of his role, the apostles replaced him in a “Jerusalem-minute” with Matthias (Acts 1:26). As Luke notes “the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons (Acts 1:15), which constitutes the number of Jews necessary to form a new community. Also, Peter uses his authority to cite the Hebrew scripture in interpreting Judas’ death—which is something we do to this day. We plan worship and execute it—in the best sense of the word we hope.

If we can **plan** along with our imitation of the early church’s discipline of **waiting obediently, enjoying unifying fellowship together, and praying**, then perhaps the Holy Spirit will continue to move us fruitfully into the world.

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A Crow, half-dead with thirst, came upon a Pitcher which had once been full of water; but when the Crow put its beak into the mouth of the Pitcher he found that only very little water was left in it, and that he could not reach far enough down to get at it. He tried, and he tried, but at last had to give up in despair. Then a thought came to him, and he took a pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher.

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