

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*¹⁷ “ ‘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.*

*¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

*¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

*²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

*²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ (Acts 2:1-21)*

Pentecost is About Proclamation

We talk a lot about “proclaiming the gospel” in our church. What does that word “proclaim” mean? Is it one of those church words that you just blip over whenever I say it? I hope not. I only use the word because I think that most of you understand the same thing that I do when I say it. But I spent a minute looking the word up this week. My online dictionary says that it means “to announce officially or publicly.” I think that fits in pretty well with what we mean when we say that we proclaim that gospel. We announce publicly that Jesus is our Savior and we do it officially. God appointed us to make that announcement. My online dictionary goes on to say that the word means “to declare something one considers important with due emphasis.” I think that’s a pretty good description, too, of what we do. What is more important to us than knowing what Jesus did for us? Than knowing that through that good news we will reach eternal life? Hopefully, we declare it with due emphasis. I hope the whole world can see how important this truth is to us. Why am I making such a big deal about this today? Because today we are celebrating the Festival of Pentecost. And **Pentecost is all about proclamation.**

I.

That was the whole point of that day and all the miracles that happened. Everything God did that day culminated in the sermon Peter preached and the 3,000 people who believed his words. **Pentecost is about proclamation to those who will listen.**

The Jewish holiday of Pentecost was really a harvest festival. Three times a year, every Jewish male was supposed to come to Jerusalem to celebrate a festival in God's temple there. Pentecost was one of those three pilgrim feasts. So God chose to give his Holy Spirit on a day when he knew that Jerusalem would be filled with pilgrims. By this time, the Jewish diaspora had already begun. For generations already, Jewish people had been leaving Israel and establishing Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean world. Do you know what happens when people move to a new country? Their children learn to speak the language of the people there. Their grandchildren often forget the language of their ancestors. The Jews may have preserved Hebrew or Aramaic as a worship language, just as many Jewish people do today. But their children worked and played in the language of whatever spot they happened to settle in. So God chose a day when communication was difficult to do this miracle.

It was all part of a plan. On the appointed day, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in power. There was the sound of a rushing wind and then tongues of fire appeared over the heads of the apostles. Jesus had promised that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, and this was the fulfillment of that promise. Then instantly, the apostles could speak in languages they had never studied. And it wasn't just one language. They could speak many. A crowd gathered to see what was happening and they were amazed. They said, **"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"**

Pentecost is all about proclamation. It's all about communication. So God did a miracle of communication on that day. He enabled Peter to get up and explain what had happened and talk about Jesus and apparently, while he did it, the other disciples translated his words into all those other languages. They heard the wonders of God, they heard about Jesus in the language they knew best.

God did that so that they could understand the good news. In a sense, you can think of the Old Testament as the time when God the Father was preparing the world to receive his Son. He controlled all things so that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. You can think of the gospels and the epistles as the story of Jesus' life and work – his death and resurrection for us. You can think the book of Acts and all the history of the New Testament church as the story of the Holy Spirit. He came on the Church in power so that we could proclaim the gospel to all nations. Now, that outline is an oversimplification. But it shows how the whole Trinity worked together to make sure that we know about Jesus, because that is the only way to heaven.

On the day of Pentecost, God began the work of the New Testament Church. Jesus had told his disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. Pentecost was the day that power came. And it has never left the church. Now, for the apostles, that power brought the ability to do miracles. Not just speaking in languages they never learned, but also healing and other extraordinary things. Today, God has withdrawn those visible gifts. But the power of the Holy Spirit is still essential to our work. We can do nothing without him. Where is his power? In the gospel of Jesus Christ. You see that already on the day of Pentecost. It wasn't the tongues of fire that made 3,000 converts that day. It wasn't even the amazing nature of their ability to speak all those languages. They heard that and then asked, **"What does this mean?"** The 3,000 converts came when Peter stood up and proclaimed Christ to them. The power is in the gospel. That power we still have today.

Jesus lived in our place. That's the gospel. His perfect life replaces all that is wrong with my life. I can't go one day, one hour, one minute without sinning. Even if I think I've managed sixty seconds without a sinful word or deed or thought or feeling, my heart is still corrupted by sin. That sin contaminates even my best efforts. I can't ever get rid of it. I have to fight the Old Man inside of me every moment that I live. That sinner inside me deserves death and hell. But Jesus was perfect in my place. And Jesus died and paid for what the sinner earns me over and over again. He suffered the death and the hell. So now, you and I will never have to. That's the gospel. And Jesus rose to proclaim that God's justice is satisfied. Death has lost and we will live forever with him. Our souls go to heaven when we die and our bodies rise on Judgment Day to live with Christ forever. That's the gospel.

That message makes all the difference in the world because it has the power of the Holy Spirit built into it. Through that message, you and I came to faith and through it our faith continues and grows. Through that message, God gives us the power to turn from sin and live for him. That message is what the Holy Spirit came

on the Church to proclaim. Our mission is to proclaim it until Christ returns, to all those who will listen, wherever and whenever we find them. That's what today tells us.

II.

But not everyone will listen to that message. We see that already on the day of Pentecost. God did those amazing miracles, and it was clear what was happening, but some people weren't impressed. They made fun of them and said, "**They have had too much wine.**" That reaction is almost as amazing as the miracle itself. I mean, wouldn't you love to see a miracle like this? I would. I've dreamed all my life of seeing the things God did in the Bible. But we don't get to see things like that. These people did. And this is how some of them reacted. What did the disciples do about that? They simply proclaimed the truth. **Pentecost is about proclamation even to those who will mock.**

That's still true today. There are still miracles in the world today. I've prayed for people who the doctors said were going to die and they lived. I can tell you about people whose recoveries even doctors and nurses were calling miracles. God still works. And I can tell you about people that I never thought were going to accept the message I was sharing with them who went on to be pillars of their churches. God still works. The truth is, every one of us here today is a miracle. One of our seminary professors once warned us about getting too down about the people who don't come to church. He counseled us rather to rejoice at every one who is here because it's a miracle every time you come. It's a miracle first of all that you have the faith to want to be here. And it's a miracle of God's grace that you overcome all the obstacles that the world throws in your way, all the laziness and distaste that your sinful flesh feels about coming here, and all the efforts of the devil to stop you.

But people without faith don't see those things as miracles. To them, there's always some other explanation, no matter how ridiculous it is. In the end, unbelievers would rather mock our faith than seriously think about the message God has given us. What are we supposed to do? Exactly what Peter and the apostles did: keep on proclaiming the truth about Jesus because everyone starts out as an unbeliever. You and I started out as unbelievers, and there simply is no way to know who is going to believe our message or when. So we just trust God's power and we keep talking about Jesus, keep explaining what he did for us, keep holding out that good news. And the Holy Spirit will do his work. He will bring to faith all those who are elected to faith. He will strengthen in faith all his children who already have faith. And he will even harden those who refuse to believe and make their judgment that much more horrible.

Now, is that judgment a good thing? Of course, from our perspective, it isn't. I don't ever want to send anyone to hell and I certainly don't want to harden anybody in their unbelief. But at the same time, we pray every Sunday, "Thy will be done." Part of God's will is that unbelievers go to hell. As a believer, I want all that God says to come true, even the hard parts. But always, of course, my hope is that the testimony about Christ will cause people to believe. And sometimes, even those people who mocked and ridiculed our faith experience God's grace. The thief on the cross started out mocking Jesus and in the end, he defended Jesus and asked him to remember him when he came into his kingdom. How did Jesus respond? "No way – no mocker like you will ever get in"? Not at all. He said, "**Today, you will be with me in paradise.**" The gospel is the power of God and it can and does convert people who have nothing but ridicule in their hearts for Christ.

But then why do some believe and others don't? That's a tough question. The answer is not very satisfying to my human intellect. The answer is that we don't get to ask this question. God allows us to ask two different, separate questions. Why do some people believe? Because the Holy Spirit enters our hearts through the gospel and he makes us believers. We don't make a decision. We don't cooperate with God's grace. We don't even resist less than other unbelievers do. Before we come to faith, all our intellect, emotions, and will are absolutely dedicated to resisting God. But he conquers us in the gospel and makes us his. Why don't others believe? They refuse the message when it comes. God still holds it out to them. The Holy Spirit still works. God still wants them to be saved. But the fault is entirely their own stubborn hearts. How can that be, if my heart is just as stubborn as theirs before I believe and God is just as powerful with them? I don't know. You'll have to ask God when you get to heaven. But this is what the Bible always teaches.

Rather than bogging down on the part that God does not chose to explain to us, let's focus on his promises: he works through the gospel, always. You and I believe because he gave us faith. His plan to keep our faith alive for as long as we live is for us to hear that message over and over again, and to come to communion and be assured of his forgiveness. His plan to grow the church is for us to share the message,

through baptism to our own children, through our outreach efforts to people in our community, through our missions around the world. In every one of those places, it still comes down to proclamation. We proclaim and even when people mock, we go on proclaiming and we trust in the Holy Spirit to do the work he promised to do.

Today is the Festival of Pentecost. Today we are celebrating the fact that we live in the age of proclamation. All that God promised in the Old Testament has happened. Jesus came. He lived. He died. He rose. He paid for all our sins and gave us life. He has ascended into heaven to rule all things so that we can proclaim the gospel. He gave us the Holy Spirit to work through our efforts. He commands us to proclaim until he returns. He even gives us the faith and the desire to do that. Hear his promises and proclaim that good news. Amen.