

Gifts of the Spirit

Acts 2:1-21

Happy Birthday, Church! That's right, today is our birthday! Today we celebrate the day the church was born by the power of the Holy Spirit! Today we celebrate the day when God's power exploded through the church and officially began its mission of making disciples.

Thousands of people were in Jerusalem celebrating the day that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments! It was the Festival Day of Weeks. According to Jewish tradition, the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai fifty days after leaving Egypt, so the Festival of Weeks came to commemorate the giving of the law. The Disciples were gathered together in a house. Suddenly, it happened. Wind and fire swept through the disciples. Everybody was amazed and astonished. Many thought a fraternity party was taking place even though it was only 9 o'clock in the morning. A huge crowd gathered around Peter as he preached and said, "God has given us the Holy Spirit!" Three thousand people confessed Christ and were baptized. Boom – the church was born! Happy Birthday, Church!

Now, if Christ-followers were really serious about all of this, those who attend worship on Pentecost Sunday would wear party hats and blow noise makers, pass out cake, and have a big party. The Day of Pentecost would be the third great holiday of the church, next to Christmas and Easter. But most churches treat it as just another Sunday. Unfortunately, this says a lot about the attitude of the modern church.

In the reading for last week from the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus tells the Disciples that they will receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes to them. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise just prior to his Ascension into Heaven.

As the disciples are gathered together in this one place they begin to talk 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.

Now 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? And how is it that we who are hearing are understanding?"

One of the lessons of Pentecost is that when "God happens," it will be something astonishing, like Pentecost itself. If we want to see some genuine "Acts of God" in our midst, we need to be prepared for some amazement, some confusion. Indeed, we might all hear the same words – each in our own language – but we will not all hear and understand exactly the same meaning. The problem with life, and faith, and following Jesus is always, "What does this mean?" God speaks to each one of us, and we each understand, but so often

each of us has differing understandings of what God wants in the same situations. You see, God meets us in the messiness of different languages and does not ask us to speak God's language. Instead, God chooses to speak our many languages. Are we ever beyond the need for re-energizing? Is the Church ever beyond the point of Spiritual reanimation? Is there ever a time when we do NOT need a new Pentecost?

Today, on this Day of Pentecost, I would urge you to be cautious: Don't let Pentecost be just another date on the liturgical calendar, a festival day where red clothing, paraments, and flowers are the big deal. The Spirit is present and accounted for, so let that mighty-wind wash over you and all God's people.

We, you and I, have prayed for at least two years for God to guide us, to lead us in the direction First Presbyterian Church in Thomasville should go. I have prayed for new energy, for the fire of the Holy Spirit to burn in this place that others might be led to discipleship in this place.

Today I call upon the Pentecostal Spirit to fill us with life anew.