

Pentecost (2024)

When I was in the second grade (just a few years ago!), I fell into the fireplace in our front room. Actually, it was my hand that went into the hot coals as I was adding a log.

It was a painful experience, and I began whooping around the house ‘like a wild Indian’, to use my parents’ expression.

I must have been loud, very loud, because our closest neighbor who lived an eighth of a mile down the road, showed up with a shotgun. He thought we were being robbed.

Apparently, sound travels farther than you might think.

And that is exactly what seems to have happened “when the Day of Pentecost was fully come”. The sound from that Upper Room travelled.

This great Jewish festival drew who-knows-how-many thousands of Jews from throughout the Roman Empire. The streets were filled with people who had come to this celebration.

Then all of sudden there was this commotion coming from the second story of the building where Jesus' people were gathered.

Perhaps the windows were open. Regardless, those down below heard all this noise, people talking and who knows what else. They began to gather. As far as we know, no one showed up with a shotgun, but their curiosity was piqued.

“What was going on? What did it mean?”

Some began to make a joke out of it. “These people have gotten into some wine!” they said.

Unphased, Peter, the spokesman for the group, seized the moment for the Gospel.

Perhaps from a balcony, he began to tell the group that had assembled: **“These men aren’t drunk . . . it’s only nine o’clock in the morning!”**

He then went on to explain what in fact had happened. Words written many years earlier by the prophet Joel had come true:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, 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: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days my Spirit . . .”

At the end of the day, an astonishing 3000 came to Christian faith and were baptized.

Let me pause here and make a practical application.

Peter seized the moment. He took the accusation that those in the Upper Room were drunk and turned it around for the Gospel.

There will be times in our lives when the interest of those outside the church will be piqued by something, good or bad, that happens.

For example, a few years ago, the nation was shocked when a lone shooter entered a black church in Charleston and gunned down six women and three men. The incident could have given rise to racial hatred and violence, but the surviving members of that church turned it around to point people to Jesus.

They did not deny that something dreadfully wicked had taken place, but instead of fanning the fire of racial hatred, they spoke of forgiveness and love. News broadcasters and people at large were dumbfounded.

Hopefully, none of us will have to go through what these dear followers of Christ went through, but there will be opportunities for witness. Let's seize those moments for the Gospel as they did and as Peter did. ///

There is so much to say about Pentecost it is hard to know on what to focus.

Let me begin by reminding you of the background of this festival. It was indeed a Jewish one before it was a Christian.

It had two focuses, the first was agricultural. Two loaves of bread from the newly harvested barley were offered to God. In that way, this festival had something in common with our Thanksgiving.

But secondly it commemorated one of God's mighty acts in history, the giving of the Law at Sinai.

Remember how the Law came. It came amid a lot of noise, smoke and fire, up there on the mountain. In the account Luke gives in Acts, these same signs were present in the Upper Room. But instead of God's people receiving tables of stone, they received God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit.

One of the offices of the Holy Spirit is to write the real intent of the Law on the heart, and that is what we see happening on the first Christian Pentecost. The Old Covenant is giving way to a better one.

What this means to us is that we are never alone. Whatever the circumstance, God is with us and in us. God's Spirit – the third Person of the Trinity -- which fell on select people in the days of old is now the possession of all of God's people.

Don't ever think your life is without meaning and purpose. It is not. Not only do you

have a divine mission, you have God's power to carry it out.

So, we need to view what happened on that first Christian Pentecost in light of what had gone before . . . in light of its Old Testament roots.

A second thing we should not miss from the Pentecost event is the phenomena of people hearing the wonderful words of God in their own language.

Take a journey with me back to Genesis. Remember the story of the Tower of Babel. What happened?

The people attempted to build a ziggurat to heaven, but it was never completed. In the end, different groups found themselves unable to understand other groups. They separated.

What is pictured here is the fragmentation of human society, one of the effects of that thing we call the Fall.

Now, let's go back to that first Christian Pentecost. Here we find a reversal of Babel. Instead of people being scattered, we find them coming together.

Instead of tongues being confused, there is a reintegration of language.

What man could not do for himself – bridge the gap between heaven and earth -- God has done.

He has done so in Jesus, the God-Man. And now by the power of the Spirit, this union of heaven and earth is being extended to all of Jesus' people.

The world torn apart by human sin and rebellion is being put back together. God's plan

for restoring all things to Himself is going forward.

God with us and God's power is what we celebrate at Pentecost. So, wear your red joyfully this morning.

Before I close, I wish to make one last observation: Obedience is the pathway to blessing. We are told that on that first Christian Pentecost Jesus' people **“were all with one accord in one place.”**

They did what Jesus told them to do just prior to His ascension 10 days earlier: They returned to Jerusalem and waited.

If Jesus' first followers had failed to listen to their Lord and had gone off on their own and tried to do Kingdom work under their own steam, it would not have worked. Almost certainly there would be no Christian Church today.

But they did nothing of the kind. They stayed together and were obedient. In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say:

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

Obedience to our Lord's commands is the pathway to blessing. It is the mark that God's Spirit is indeed at work in our lives.

Sometimes people will ask me about how they can know what God wants them to do. What do I tell them? ///

Begin with the things that are plain in the scriptures, such things as:

Love God. Love neighbor. Practice forgiveness. Seek justice. Be a peacemaker.

Look after the weak and those who have no helper. Pray. Don't neglect public worship. Be a witness.

Obedience, doing those things we know to be right and good, is where the Christian life begins and is the pathway to blessing. It is in this venue that the Spirit works. Begin here and you will know more and more of God. Jesus will manifest Himself to you.

Today is Pentecost. We celebrate God's awesome presence and power among us. As we do, let us cry out:

“Spirit of the Living God, fall on me. Point me in the direction I should go. Stay with me when the pathway is twisted, dark and hard. Lead me safely home.”