

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.

The well known author and preacher Fred Craddock tells a rather funny story about a lecture he was giving: A few years ago, when he was on the west coast speaking at a seminary, just before the first lecture, one of the students stood up and said, "Before you speak, I need to know if you are Pentecostal."

The room grew silent. Craddock said he looked around for the Dean of the seminary! He was nowhere to be found. The student continued with his quiz right in front of everybody. Craddock was taken aback, and so he said, "Do you mean do I belong to the Pentecostal Church?" The young man replied, "No, I mean are you Pentecostal?" Craddock said, "Are you asking me if I am charismatic?" the student said, "I am asking you if you are Pentecostal." Craddock said, "Do you want to know if I speak in tongues?" He said, "I want to know if you are Pentecostal." Craddock said, "I don't know what your question is." The student said, "Obviously, you are not Pentecostal." He left.

This morning we are meeting in an American Baptist Church called Second Baptist Church. There are congregations all around our community with various worship styles. Yet every church you see has one common root – the day of Pentecost. We are all Pentecostals! And you thought we were Baptists!

Pentecost has become a Sacred Holy-day on the church calendar. Of course, Pentecost has always been a holiday. In the Old Testament, and the reason so many Jews had gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in that second chapter of Acts, was to celebrate the Jewish feast day which was a celebration of the harvest. For Israel, it was a harvest of grain. For the Church, Pentecost was a great harvest of the Spirit.

So what is Pentecost to us today? Is there any reason Pentecost should be any less of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit than it was in the time of Peter and John? Pentecost should not merely be a remembrance of something long ago, but something that is living and vibrant and relevant to us today.

Pentecost should be a rekindling, a refilling. It is a day of seeking God to empower the church again and empower the individual person again with the power of the Holy Spirit. Because of Pentecost, God's power is abundantly available to us who believe. We are not a Pentecostal

Church in name, but neither do we believe it was the intent that only Pentecostal churches be the exclusive beneficiaries of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus met with his disciples along the shore of the lake, he told them to “Feed his lambs.” Shortly after that, they went up on a hill and he ascended into heaven to be with his heavenly father. As they stood there watching and looking up into heaven, two men dressed in white – Angels, asked them, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken into heaven, will come back in the same way you seen him go into heaven.”

In Acts chapter 1:12, it says that the disciples then went into Jerusalem and went into an upper room and joined in constant prayer. I want you to notice a distinction here because we are likely to be one or the other. There are those who stand looking into the sky. There is a world around us in need of Christ, and instead, too often we are looking upward with the hope of heaven while ignoring the task Jesus issued in the Great Commission: to Go into the world and preach the gospel.

The other type is those who begin to pray and seek and explore what God wants us to do as believers. They are the ones empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach the world for Christ. Finally in God’s good time, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the people.

The following statement is from the pen of Dr. Jerry Vines (FBC Jacksonville, former Pres. SBC) “The Average Christian and the average Church are somewhere bogged down between Calvary and Pentecost. They have been to Calvary for pardon, but they have not been to Pentecost for power. Bethlehem is about “God being WITH Us”. Calvary is about “God being FOR Us.” But Pentecost is “God IN Us.” Those statements transformed my understanding of the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that the average Christian is much like the Ephesian believers when the Apostle Paul came to them in Acts 19:2 and said to them - Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

They replied that they didn’t even know that there was a Holy Spirit. Many Christians do not understand the role of the Holy Spirit and they have not appropriated the power of the Holy Spirit in their own personal life. J. B. Phillips, who gave us the familiar paraphrase of the New Testament, wrote something like this a few years ago. He said that churches today are fat and out of breath through prosperity. They are muscle-bound through over-organization. What we need today is again the wind and the flame of Pentecost.

I think all of us would agree that this is true. We need to recapture the power, which was experienced in such a mighty way when the church met together in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. But we read in the last section of today’s scripture these words: “In the last days, God says, “I will pour out my spirit on all people.” Two things stand out in the short phrase. First of all *GOD will be the one* who will pour it out. It is not a tap that we can turn on and off and control. God is the one who dispenses the Spirit. Secondly, it is done in *God’s timing*. The

disciples waited and prayed. God's spirit came upon them. I still believe to this day that God will empower Second Baptist Church when the Lord sees that we are ready. Yet in order to receive this outpouring and clear calling by God, we have to spend time in prayer and seek him in the same way the disciples went to prayer in the upper room. Like the disciples in Jerusalem, we are to wait upon the Lord, praying continuously and God will pour out his spirit on us. We are not without power for God has given us the power of the Holy Spirit. The empowerment we continue to await is that which has vision and focus on being servants of God for specific tasks.

We have been praying, "Lord, how do you want to use us? What do you want us to do?" I believe God will reveal that as we are ready. God knows when we are ready for the task.

Before Jesus left this earth, he gave several sets of instructions for the church by way of the disciples. His final instructions are found in Matthew 28:19-20: **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Make disciples. That is what we are called to do. It is a combination of leading people to repentance followed by leading them in the practice of spiritual disciplines so that they can make more disciples.

The early church was ignited because it set out to make disciples. The church in China today is ignited because they are making disciples. The church in America is dying because we have forgotten how to make disciples.

Part of the reasons disciples are not being created in the American church is because we left out the next part of the great commission. **"Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** We don't want to obey. We are afraid we might appear to be judgmental if we ask others to obey – so we have no expectation the we or others will obey.

Conclusion....

Pentecost is not over. The Holy Spirit is still at work saving people and revitalizing churches. God has not given up on his church. He wants a church that is energized and obedient. He wants a church that is willing to shed their agenda to take on the plan that God has for his people. Baptists don't talk much about the Holy Spirit and we don't seem to know much, either. The very best description of the task of the Holy Spirit I can come up with is a single word: TRANSFORM.

The Holy Spirit is in the role of transforming people into the image of Christ. As he changes us, he begins to change those around us as well. But we have to allow him to transform us and make us new.