

**5/19 Pentecost**

**Acts 2:1-4**

- 1 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.**

**Special Music: "Spirit Lead Me" Michael Ketterer and Influence Music**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABWnLjXer10>



## **THE TOUCH OF THE SPIRIT**

There was a gentle breeze pushing through the upper room where the men and women were gathered. The table had been prepared with food for the celebration of the Feast of Weeks, and the conversation among those in the room was light and wafted with the spirit of community. The events of the last few weeks lingered in their minds as they shared their experiences with one another, as well as catching up on the daily preparations and activities as each had gone about taking care of their responsibilities. Agendas were discussed. Opinions expressed. There was even the occasional raised voice of disagreement. After all, these people were more familiar with each other than with their own families. The situations and difficulties that they had recently faced had been overwhelming, but proved to bring about a bond between them that would never be broken.

In one corner of the room near a window, with a small candle providing a dim light, Matthias sat on a stool in self-contemplation. He felt... awkward, out of place. He was still trying to figure out his new role in the gathered group. Trying not to be too obvious, he glanced around the room at the others gathered there. Matthew was comforting Mary, the mother, as best as he could. She had struggled with everything that had transpired and was desperately trying to understand why everything had happened the way it did. Matthew had changed so much over the last couple of years, going from being an uncaring collector of taxes to this compassionate caretaker of the Master's mother.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were debating with Andrew about whether or not they should consider returning to Galilee and resume their lives as fishermen. It was really just a casual conversation. They each knew that they would never be the same, that their roles had been redefined by the circumstances that had whirled around them like a cyclone during this defining moment of humanity's history; prophecies fulfilled, people raised from the dead, lepers that were healed, and the resurrection of Christ himself. No, they knew in their hearts that they would never return to fishing unless it was like the Master said, that they become fishers of men.

Bartholomew, the Zealot Simon, Nathaniel, and Philip were actively engaged with Thomas regarding how they were going to convince people of the events that they had experienced. Thomas was animated as he said "Yes, I touched the wounds in his hands and side and know that it was hands and side of the Master, but how do I convince those who haven't had that experience? Without physical evidence, how do I explain to them the miracle that has occurred? There must be a way!"

Thaddaeus and James, the son of Alphaeus, were laughing about the baker whom they had bought bread from that very day, and how they had watched as a basket of flour fell from a shelf and landed on the baker's apprentice, leaving him white as a ghost, dust filling the air. Several men and women around them were delighted by the story and laughed along with them.

Peter moved from group to group, engaging everyone in quiet conversation and trying to bring focus to the feast that they were about to begin celebrating.

Everyone seemed a little nervous and apprehensive, not quite understanding what their next step should be. But Peter's practicality kicked in to remind them that they were all still Jews and the feast that they were here to celebrate was a fixed event in their traditions and their Master would have been the first to tell them to honor that tradition. The Feast of Pentecost was upon them, and they should lay their apprehensions aside as they gathered in community to share in the table of thanksgiving.

But Matthias still felt out of place, not really engaged with the others. He wasn't quite sure what was expected of him. The other Apostles had drawn lots to decide between him and Joseph as to who would replace Judas, the one who had betrayed the Master and then died when he fell upon a rock in a field he had purchased with his silver. Matthias felt like a replacement soldier for one who had run in cowardice from battle. Just as Thomas was now recognized as the doubting disciple as he continued to question each experience they encountered, and Peter remembered as redeemed from his poor choices, would he, Matthias always be thought of as the replacement for the one who would ever be remembered as the great betrayer? How does one step into that kind of role among these eleven great men specifically chosen by the Master. Yes, he had been a follower of the Jesus since the time of John the Baptist, but he had never been part of the inner circle of twelve. Yet, here he was, expected to insert himself into an empty slot within this group and perform like he had always been there. It was difficult and confusing.

**Peter called out in a loud voice, “Come everyone, come to the table. It is time for us to feast in the presence of God. This table of Pentecost, this Feast of Firstfruits, the celebration of Harvest in upon us. Gather close as we sing and pray to our God and thank him for all the glorious bounty that we have received.”**

**The muttering in the room trailed away as everyone moved to the table and gathered with hands clenched. Matthias joined the others and found a place between Andrew and Thaddeus who both slapped him on the shoulder in brotherly love. Each one bowed their head expecting Peter to begin reciting the words for the feast in a thankful prayer for the food and wine as the candles were lit and the celebration commenced.**

**Suddenly, a shrieking wind blew through the room, extinguishing the candles and leaving them all in darkness. A couple of young boys that had been assigned to meet the needs of the gathering, hurriedly tried to relight the candles and lamps in the room, but the wind refused to allow them to do so as it rushed around the room, forming eddies with screeching whines bringing chaos and confusion to the gathered believers. Everyone clenched the hands of their neighbor harder as their shouts and voices mixed with the shrill whistle of the wind.**

**Someone shouted, “Look, there, above the middle of the table. Look everyone!” Everyone’s attention was now focused on a single flame resting above the middle of the table, seemingly unaffected by the wind that still screamed through the windows and tormented their ears. The flame flickered with a brilliant intensity, the movement did not seem to be attributable to the**

rushing air. Then the flame split and there were two identical flames that in turn split again. The flames continued to separate until there was a flame over everyone gathered in the room. And then, the tongues of flame slowly descended and came to rest on each of the people there. Everyone began to speak at once as the chaos of the wind slowed, allowing them to hear each other, which only added to the confusion as those present began to speak in tongues that were not native to them. But they all seemed to understand one another.

Outside, in the street, people had heard the shrieks, groans, and commotion and they quickly gathered around the building, watching as the wind rushed through the windows, and listening to the shouts coming from inside the room. They could see the flames dancing beyond the windows and feared that there might be a fire that would spread to other buildings.

Crowds began to gather and stare in amazement at the spectacle. The people that gathered were from many different nations, each shouting excitedly in their own language and pointing up the activity occurring in the upstairs room. Each heard the commotion and saw the flames through the windows of the building and were struck with awe when they realized that they could understand the loud shouts in their own native languages. The people in the street started shouting themselves, screaming “What is happening?” “What does it mean?” Others tried to calm the crowd by saying “Don’t worry about it. They are all just drunk from the festival wine! There’s nothing to worry about.”

Matthias watched as Peter stepped onto the balcony and began to speak, preaching the words of Christ’s resurrection, the story of redemption and

salvation found through the Master, the Messiah, The Christ. Even though they came from so many different lands, every person understood the words that Peter spoke. The response was beyond belief as thousands were brought into the fold of Christ.

Matthias realized that he had not just been a watcher of these events, but an active participant. He had experienced the very same indwelling of the flame, the Holy Spirit, the helper that the Master had promised. He no longer felt like a cog out of place. He had become an integral and welcomed part of the Body of the Master. The message that Peter was preaching was the same message that he himself would be preaching, the message that he would bring to God's children, who were so in need of this missive of hope and deliverance. His path became clear, and his vision unfolded. The process of redemption had been made complete as the Holy Spirit came to dwell in him as a light and a guide for the road that God had laid out before him.

When Christians talk about Pentecost, they are almost always referring to this moment in Jerusalem, when the twelve gathered in the upper room (newest among them being Matthias who had been chosen to replace Judas Iscariot). There were far more than the twelve apostles there to experience the miracle of the gift of the Holy Spirit from God. We need to remember that the reason they had gathered was to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost and were not prepared for this gift that God was about to bestow on them. They had been told that something was coming, but not exactly what or when to expect it. So, this experience comes as a total surprise to everyone there. Jesus spoke in John 14:26 saying:

**But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**

This feast that they were preparing for was a long-held Jewish tradition and known as the Feast of Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Harvest, or the Feast of Latter Firstfruits, which was always celebrated on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Passover. The word Pentecost is Greek for 50<sup>th</sup>. It is first celebrated in Leviticus 23 and it is a celebration of Thanksgiving for all the provisions that God had provided for his people, much like our own Thanksgiving, but more formal with specified sacrifices and burnt offerings. But the intent was the same, giving thanks to God for all the benefits that he had bestowed on the people. But, as Christians, we have managed to lose the importance of the Feast of Pentecost to the miracle of the events in Jerusalem during the feast. You could say that we



have appropriated the Jewish Holiday of Pentecost and Christianized it. But I really think that we need to keep both events in context and realize the importance of each without letting one overshadow the other.

While it is true that there is a spectacle nature to the miracle that occurred, I don't think that we should elevate the spectacle, but rather embrace the miracle. It is too easy to get wrapped up in the visual nature of the image presented and forget the purpose of the gift. In other words, let's not confuse the wrapping paper with the gift. I don't think that the awe provoking nature of that miracle should overshadow the intent of the Feast of Weeks, a time dedicated to thanksgiving and praise of God as our benefactor and the source of our joy, nor should it become more important of than the gift of the Holy Spirit which gives us another reason to be thankful during this festive Jewish holiday.

Do we find it just a coincidence that God chose this holy time of thanksgiving known as the Feast of Weeks as the appropriate moment to bring the gift of the Holy Spirit to his children? Scholars tell us that Jesus remained on earth for 40 days after the resurrection. There is that mystic number 40 again. Forty days of rain for Noah. Forty years of wandering in the desert for Moses and the Children of Isarel. Forty days in the wilderness for Jesus before he started his ministry. Forty is a significant number in the Bible. So, I am not surprised by this number of days between the resurrection and the ascension of Christ which occurred at the Mount of Olives.

When we think about the timing of the Lord's Supper at the beginning of Passover, the Crucifixion, and three days in the grave, and we compare that with

**the 50 days from Passover to the Feast of Pentecost, that really only leaves a couple of days for the disciples to get organized, get a new apostle appointed, and complete preparations for the feast.**

**Everything came together at the Feast of Pentecost as the followers of Christ gathered in that upper room, not anticipating the arrival of this game-changing gift from God, but to celebrate the annual feast of thankfulness. We can start to realize just how perfect God's timing is. When all the preparations were finished, when the followers all gathered, when the table was served, when fellowship commenced, that... that was the perfect moment for God to present his precious gift to the believers gathered in that room.**

**And yes, that event was spectacular. The wrapping paper was beyond awesome, the presentation astonishing, but it didn't even come close to the overwhelming and all-encompassing nature of the gift itself.**

**Consider that these precious followers of Jesus Christ had to have been feeling some sense of abandonment. First, their precious Lord, master, teacher, and friend, had died the most gruesome of deaths. And although he had been raised from the dead, he had recently returned to his father, leaving them to try and figure out their next steps. I'm sure that they must have felt like they were in a boat that had lost its anchor; that the floor beneath them had shifted; that the rug had been pulled from beneath their feet. "If Jesus isn't here to tell us what we need to do, then we should decide what to do ourselves! We need to replace Judas! We need to get ready for Pentecost! We need to make plans for how to proceed! We need to figure out the best way to spread the word! Jesus isn't**

around, so I guess we need to roll the dice, use the magic 8-ball, flip the coin to figure out next move.”

**But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**

Isn't that just like us? We can be so impatient. We think that it is up to us to fill the gap while waiting on Jesus. We think, “If God won't tell us what to do on our timeline, we will just do it ourselves and hope that he is happy with our decisions.” The deadlines imposed on us by people often overshadow our desire to be patient. God's plans are not our plans. The old Yiddish proverb is so poignant in this conversation. “Man plans. God laughs.” In Jeremiah 29:11 we read: **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

Take a deep breath. Pause. Spend time in prayer believing that all will be revealed when the God is ready to reveal it. God did not call us to assume to understand what he needs from us and his purpose for our lives. He is quite willing to reveal his plans for us as they need to unfold. We get so focused on thinking that God wants us to do things for him, that we forget that he wants to do things through us. Again, take a deep breath. Pause. Pray. Be patient and wait.

God has his own way of revealing his desires to us, and yes, the Holy Spirit is our primary compass in the search for God's guidance. Have you ever had the experience of trying to assemble something from IKEA without looking at the

directions? “Come on, I know how to use tools and I know what this thing is supposed to look like when it is finished, and I know what it is supposed to do, so I don’t need the ridiculous instructions semi-translated from Chinese.” If I don’t pay attention to those instructions, I often get the doors backwards or the screw holes don’t line up like I think they should. My patience quickly runs thin when I don’t take time to thoroughly read the directions, as badly as I think they are written. And then I realize what should have been a thirty-minute job has turned into an all-day affair.

The very same thing happens when we feel pressured to get something done and don’t wait for God’s instructions, the guidance the Holy Spirit. But trying to stay ahead of God is like a dog straining against a leash. Things are just simpler and calmer, and the results so much better when we don’t pull against the leash, when we don’t try to drag God to where we want him to be, but let him lead us to where we need to be.

**But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**

I can’t promise you tongues of fire or Holy winds. I can’t promise that you will suddenly start speaking new languages. I can’t promise you that thousands of people will be brought into a right relationship with God by the words you speak. What I can promise you, is that when you wait on God to tell you where you need to be and what you need to do, you will be fulfilled in ways you never

thought were possible. There is no greater privilege than to be a willing servant of the Creator of the universe, with our eyes and ears open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we fulfill what God has called us to do.

This week of Pentecost, this feast of thanksgiving, let us all take the time to pray and engage with God in a way that allows the Holy Spirit to guide us, as he points the way to our true purpose. Let us have the patience to wait on that guidance and avoid the temptation to pull against the leash. Let us be grateful that God has kept his promise of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each of us, our compass that always points to God's purpose for us.

**But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**

God bless you all,

**AMEN**

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