

Sermon Series: “When the Spirit Moves”
Spirit Poured Out
Acts 2:1-21
May 23, 2021

Acts 2:1-21

^{2:1} When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that 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. ¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to

blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Sermon: *Spirit Poured Out*

The scene is Konitsa, Greece.

Homiletics editor Timothy Merrill and family are seated in a plaza and hope to order some food. The following is in Merrill's own words.

Generally, we had found that people had a smattering of English and usually we could communicate what we wanted. But not in Konitsa, and especially not when we had dinner that evening at an outdoor table in the village square.

A kindly, old gentleman waited on us, appearing from the little dilapidated restaurant on the edge of the square. His face was round and cheeky, and his full mustache was draped over his mouth like a walrus. He wore a dark, food-stained vest over a blousy white shirt. He had a little pad in his hand and a pencil poised to take our order.

The menu was in Greek. And we didn't have a handy-dandy guidebook to explain a thing. We decided on Greek salads, but we wanted only two. We thought the boys could share one, and Jeanie and I could share the other. We didn't want four plates of something we didn't like.

He beamed and nodded his head. "Yes, yes," and off he went.

A few minutes later he reappeared with two plates, and we saw that he had prepared tasty little hamburgers with fries. Perhaps he thought this is all that Americans eat. In any case, we were delighted at our good fortune and appreciated the fact that we had not been given minnows on a skewer or something with the eyes still in it. And the fact that we appeared pleased with the food also pleased him very much.

So, we asked him to bring us two more such plates.

And this is where the trouble began.

The poor man, who moments ago had been beaming, now was frowning and concerned. We held up two fingers. Then four fingers, pointing to the boys and ourselves.

Then I intervened: "WE WANT TWO PLATES -- HAMBURGERS!"

The old man stared at me.

"Honey, why are you shouting?"

I turned to Jeanie. "Huh?"

"You're shouting. He can hear you."

I tried again: "We lika da food. Two more theese." And I pointed to the plates.

"Honey."

"Whaaaat?"

"Now you're talking in a stupid accent. I don't even understand you."

"I'm just trying to keep it simple. We like. Two plates. Yum-yum. More."

"You can't expect him to understand English that's not even English."

She turned to the proprietor and said, "Thank you for the food. We would like two more of the same."

I said, "Like he understood what you said."

"Probably not, but at least I didn't yell and I spoke good English. Let's see what happens."

Five minutes later, the chef delivered two more plates of hamburgers and fries to our table.

Timothy Merrill couldn't communicate well with the waiter. It took the intervention of his wife to communicate in a calm voice.

In our Scripture for today, the Holy Spirit comes into the lives of the disciples to intervene in such a way to allow communication with one another.

Imagine the awe and excitement the disciples and those around them felt when suddenly that great rush of wind came. And in the aftermath came the tongues of fire settling on each person and then ability to communicate with each other. People from different areas of the known world come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Shavuot or the harvest festival, or the feast of weeks. Shavuot occurs 50 days after the Passover. This day also celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses.

But at this particular feast time comes the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that allows each person to understand what the other is saying. It is like having a Babel fish in their ears.

In his satirical science fiction novel, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams writes about the Babel fish:

"The Babel fish is small, yellow and leech-like, and probably the oddest thing in the Universe. It feeds on brainwave energy received not from its own carrier but from those around it. It absorbs all unconscious mental frequencies from this brainwave energy to nourish itself with. It then excretes into the mind of its carrier a telepathic matrix formed by combining the conscious thought frequencies with nerve signals picked up from the speech centers of the brain which has supplied them. The practical upshot of all this is that if you stick a Babel fish in your ear you can instantly understand anything said to you in any form of language. The speech patterns you actually hear decode the brainwave matrix which has been fed into your mind by your Babel fish."

You might think the Babel fish would be a boon to human communication, but in fact -- as Adams tells the tale -- it caused no end of difficulties: "Meanwhile, the poor Babel fish, by effectively removing all barriers between communications, has caused more and bloodier wars than anything else in existence."

Everyone in the place did not have a Babel fish. Rather the Holy Spirit infused their hearts and souls. The Holy Spirit begins to work a change on this gathering of people. The Church is born. The Greek word for "church" is *ekklesia*, which means "gathering or assembly." The Holy Spirit is working to assemble the gathered people to become a force in the world.

Remember that Jesus said wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes and then get going. Acts shares the story of the Church in motion to share the Good News of Jesus.

Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah when they were traveling around Caesarea. Jesus shared his vision of what a Messiah was about, and Peter protested. Jesus had to put Peter back in his place. Peter told Jesus

that he would not betray Jesus. Peter betrays Jesus. Peter probably watches the crucifixion of Jesus from a long distance. Now the Holy Spirit was empowering Peter to stand up and preach. It was like a fire was lit under him, or maybe it was the tongue of fire that settled upon him. Peter was ready to go and talk about Jesus.

Peter needed to crush the idea that people experiencing the Holy Spirit were filled with wine. It was too early in the morning. Will Willimon shares that Peter says, "We are not drunk ... yet." In order to get the crowd on board with what's going on, Peter shares his understanding through a sermon illustration about the prophet Joel.

Peter cites the profoundly inclusive prophecy of the ninth-century BC prophet Joel to describe the true nature of the new age that has now dawned with the Holy Spirit's arrival. The Joel text goes beyond the boundaries of nationality and geography to declare that there no longer will be any spiritual distinctions between men and women, old and young, servants and free or a special, spiritually gifted priesthood and the common laity. According to Joel's prophecy, which Peter invokes as evidence of the new age that has now begun, all are eligible to "prophesy" -- to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The gift at Pentecost is the stunning message of true equality and reciprocity among all people in the Spirit.

It is the next verses that Peter proclaims the heart of his message,

²² "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— ²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

It is through Jesus that salvation comes to people who call upon him. Salvation literally means "healing or wholeness." People who are broken by life events are in need of healing. People who are broken by prejudice and

discrimination are in need of healing. People who have done terrible things to other people are in need of healing.

This small gathering of people will ultimately bring the church to the whole world.

Today's date of May 23rd is also known as Heritage Sunday in the United Methodist Church. Our church is a part of the movement started by those disciples who realized that in the midst of diverse background people could come together for the cause of Jesus Christ.

It was over 53 years ago that the Holy Spirit brought together two denominations to enhance the work of the church:

The United Methodist Church was officially formed on April 23, 1968 with the unification of the Methodist Church, the Evangelical United Brethren Church, as well as the previously segregated group of African American congregations from the dissolved Central Jurisdiction.

53 years ago, 1,300 delegates and 10,000 visitors met in Dallas, Texas on April 23, 1968, to celebrate the formation of the newly constituted United Methodist Church. This merger of 10.3 million Methodists and 750,000 members of the EUB Church resulted in one of the largest Protestant denominations in the world. Flags from fifty-three countries testified to the breadth of the new reality.

Heritage Sunday also reminds us about how the Holy Spirit worked through an Anglican priest.

Aldersgate Day is celebrated on May 24 (or the Sunday closest) to commemorate the day in 1738 when John Wesley experienced assurance of his salvation. Wesley reluctantly attended a group meeting that evening on Aldersgate Street in London. As he heard a reading from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, he felt his "heart strangely warmed." Wesley wrote in his journal that at about 8:45 p.m. "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Charles Wesley only a few days before had also had a conversion experience in the same place. The building where the meetings took place

no longer exists. Aldersgate Street has been shortened by common Methodist usage to simply Aldersgate. The word has come to represent both the place and the experience.

It is the Holy Spirit that is still working today here among us.

John the Baptizer once said, "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Jesus' ascension to God allowed the Holy Spirit to come upon the disciples and those with them. The Holy Spirit poured on the group of disciples. A fire was lit that started the church. It is our job to cooperate with that Holy Spirit. It is no accident that the cross and flame are a symbol of the United Methodist Church. Let's be on fire for our Lord! Amen.