

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.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Almost three thousand years ago, a man named Elijah was serving as God's prophet in the land of Israel. In a rather spectacular display, Elijah faced off against 850 pagan prophets in a contest to see whose God was better. Elijah's God—our God—won and Elijah had the prophets of the false gods put to death.

Now when the queen of Israel heard that Elijah had killed all of those prophets, she wasn't very happy. She sent a messenger to Elijah to let him know that he would be dead in less than twenty-four hours. Elijah was afraid. He ran for his life, and God led him to a mountain and told him, **"Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."** Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave (1 Kg 19). And then God comforted him and instructed him.

I think there are some parallels between the experience Elijah had that day on the mountain and the experience the disciples had on Pentecost. We don't hear about any earthquakes on Pentecost, but we do have a sound like the rushing of a violent wind and something that looked like fire separating into individual flames and coming to rest on Jesus' disciples. So what's going on? A few weeks ago, we heard the promise that Jesus made to His disciples the night before He died, that after He had left them He and the Father would send them the Holy Spirit who would help them, teach them, and guide them in the truth. Later on, Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came to them.

Ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were gathered together when suddenly they heard the sound of the wind and they saw the fire. And then, we're told, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and He enabled them to start speaking in other languages.

Pentecost was one of the three major festivals for the Jews when all the men were required to make a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem. And as the disciples started speaking in these languages as the Holy Spirit enabled them, a crowd began to gather to listen. What amazed the crowd was that even though there were people there from all over the world—Asia and Europe and Africa—all of them hear the disciples speaking in their own languages.

As far as Sunday School lessons go, you can't do a whole lot better than Pentecost. The miraculous sound of the wind, flames landing on people but not burning them up, and the disciple's speaking in all those different languages... it's spectacular and fantastic! But remember how with Elijah on the mountain, those fantastic and spectacular things, the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, weren't the main deal? It's kind of the same thing with Pentecost. The wind and the fire and the speaking in tongues as amazing and wonderful as all of that is wouldn't give us much reason to be celebrating Pentecost still today. What really made Pentecost spectacular, was the message that the disciples were sharing. They were proclaiming the wonders of God.

That was what Jesus had told them to do that Thursday night before He was crucified. We saw it in our Gospel lesson this morning. **When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.** And that was exactly what they did. No sooner had they been filled with the Spirit than they began to testify.

Here we are, six thousand miles away from Jerusalem, almost two thousand years later celebrating that remarkable, fantastic day because of the message that the disciples shared that day and because they shared that message. Because *they* shared it and because people they shared it with shared it and so on and so forth again and again until that declaration of the wonders of God made it down through the ages and around the planet and finally somebody shared it with you and with me.

The truth of the Gospel. The powerful Word of God was shared with us and through that message, God poured out the Spirit of Truth into our hearts as well. So now, just like those Jerusalem disciples, we are able to testify to the truth. What is truth? That's a question we've been looking at these past seven weeks since Easter Sunday. Each week we've taken a look at a part of the truth that God shares with us in His Word, a truth which we call the gospel, the good news.

Ultimately, that's what our celebration of Pentecost is all about. It's about the gospel. It's about the Holy Spirit filling the hearts of disciples and bringing them a full understanding of the gospel, inspiring them to write the New Testament Scriptures so that gospel message would be preserved, and then sending them out to testify to that message throughout the world. But before He sent the disciples out into the world, he brought the world to them that day in Jerusalem. People from every nation under the sky heard the Gospel message that day and over 3000 of them believed and were baptized.

In a sense, God has brought the world to us as well. And He's given us those same wonderful truths of the gospel to share with them. I'm going to encourage you to get out there this week and do that. Share the gospel with someone. Go tell someone about the wonders of God.

Other than Peter's speech, we don't have much of a record of what it is that the disciples were saying that day as they declared the wonders of God. But given what they had experienced over the last three years and especially what they had seen in the last two months. I think we have a pretty good idea what their message would have been and it's the same as ours today.

The core of their message was that pure gospel truth: that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

They would have told them about how Jesus had come to them and said, "Peace be with you!" And they could have explained how that peace was possible through Jesus. How even though we haven't lived up to God's expectations for us He has shown us mercy. Instead of exacting on us the punishment we deserve for our sins, He sent His Son Jesus to endure that punishment for us, taking away our sin and our guilt, and filling us with the peace that comes with knowing, "I'm good with God. Through Jesus I have a right relationship with my Father in heaven."

And not only that, but we also have this awesome relationship now with our fellow Christians. God has blessed us with a family of believers to love and support us and whom we can love and support. Today we get to welcome some new members into our little local family of believers here at Shepherd of the Hills. And we look forward to the opportunities we'll have to get to know you guys better, to grow with you as we worship God and study His Word together, and to work alongside each other in our shared vision of connecting to God, connecting to people, and connecting other people with God.

And the wonders of God's blessings go beyond what He has already given us. Jesus also promises that He will continue be with us throughout our lives here on earth, will continue

sending His Holy Spirit to us through the Word and Sacraments, and finally Jesus also promises that he will come again in glory to bring us home with Him to heaven.

That is the good news that we have been given—the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, our faithful, true, and loving Savior. And these are the days in which He is sending us out into the world to testify to that truth.

Amen.