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"THE MEANING OF PENTECOST"

Acts 2:1-36

Though we're a week away from Pentecost Sunday, today I want to tackle the key NT text about it from the Acts of the Apostles and focus on its meaning. Most everyone recognizes the importance of Christmas, Easter Sunday and Good Friday. We don't put as much emphasis on Pentecost Sunday, but it is no less important! Pentecost also known as the Feast of Weeks was one of three annual Jewish pilgrimage festivals mentioned in the Torah. It took place fifty days after Passover, hence it's name Pentecost from "pent" meaning fifty. Agriculturally it celebrated the end of the wheat harvest. Theologically Pentecost celebrated God's gift of the law to the Hebrew people on Mt. Sinai. We heard 2 weeks ago that during his last resurrection appearance the Risen Christ promised his followers, "you will receive power when the HS has come upon you." That promise was fulfilled on Pentecost.

The Pentecost event is described in Acts 2:1-13; (p.119 NT)

Luke tells us that Jesus' followers met together in Jerusalem. If they met in a private home, the descent of the Holy Spirit soon drove them into a more public area, perhaps the temple courts. Jesus' disciples heard the sound of a great wind. The Hebrew word "*ruach*" means both "wind" and "spirit" and in the OT wind sometimes signified the presence of God's Spirit.

The disciples also experienced a flame-like reality which rested on each of their heads. God's self-revelation in the OT sometimes employed fire, as for example at the burning bush and on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 3:2-3; 19:13). John the Baptist had forecast that the Messiah would baptize "with the HS and with fire" (Luke 3:16-27). When Luke says the tongues like fire separated and came to rest on each of them, he is telling us God poured out his Holy Spirit on each of Jesus' followers. We read in v.4 – "All of them were filled with the HS and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." With Jewish pilgrims from all parts of the Roman Empire and beyond in the Holy City, Luke comments that passersby heard Jesus' Galilean disciples

speaking in their own local dialect. This was not simply a miracle of *hearing*, but also of *speaking* as the HS gave the disciples the ability to speak in foreign languages in which they had no formal knowledge or training! Luke takes pains to describe many of the places from which these Jewish pilgrims had come. His list includes various places both within and beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The hearers were surprised that Galileans were speaking these foreign dialects!

This miracle begins the fulfillment of Christ's command to the apostles that they function as his witnesses first in Jerusalem. At the same time, because of the presence of Jewish pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire and beyond, this is a representative fulfillment of the Risen Christ's command that his disciples would be his "witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth," beginning their world evangelization project. Pentecost is the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) in reverse. Because of human pride people lost their ability to speak with one another. They had no common language because they disregarded God's will. Luke records here how God desires to re-create humankind

in one great family, united in one covenant of love through JC, speaking one universal language of the HS of God.

Peter's Pentecost Sermon explains the meaning of the Pentecost Event; read Acts 2:14-36. Peter explained this miraculous ability to speak foreign languages was the direct fulfillment of words written by the Prophet Joel centuries earlier. In that passage God promises, "in the last days . . . I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." Joel said that God would pour out his Spirit, not just upon key leaders - prophets, priests, and kings as in the past, but on all (believing) people! The Greek verb used here translated "pour out" suggests an unprecedented deluge, a tidal wave of God's Spirit falling on these Christians. The passage ends as Joel tells us the giving of the Spirit inaugurates the end times and promises, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Later in his sermon Peter calls Jesus "Lord", so his statement here promises those who call on the name of Jesus, with faith, will be saved.

Peter tells this Jewish crowd that they shared in the responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion when their leaders delivered

Jesus up to the Romans. While acknowledging their freedom to act, Peter also says Jesus' death was also "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge (*prognosis*) of God." So Peter affirms human freedom within the context of the greater freedom and power of God to order things according to His will.

Peter also affirms that the deluge of the HS poured out on these individuals is the result of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Explaining that Jesus' resurrection was forecast in the Hebrew OT, Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-11. In that ancient prayer King David confidently expressed his hope that God "will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One experience corruption." Since the location of David's tomb was well known at that time, people assumed David's corpse had decomposed and that he had entered the land of the dead. So Peter concluded that in Ps. 16 David wasn't speaking about himself, but of his future royal descendant, the Messiah.

Near the end of his sermon Peter says of the Risen Christ, "having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear." So the Risen

Christ is the one who poured out the Holy Spirit on his followers!

NT scholar David G. Peterson comments, “What the crowd at Pentecost could *see and hear* were signs of Jesus’ exaltation to the position of absolute glory, power, and authority in the universe. As the dispenser of the Spirit, he was now acting with ‘*the Father*’, sharing fully in his heavenly rule” (p.151; Pillar NT Commentary; Acts; c.2009; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans).

The power that Jesus promised us in the Holy Spirit and that his disciples experienced on Pentecost is simply this – the fact of Jesus’ Lordship over all of life. In his earthly ministry Jesus was anointed by Holy Spirit and lived in the Spirit, signaling a distinction between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. At the same time there is a very close connection in the NT between the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. In his letters Paul uses the terms “Spirit, Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ” interchangeably (Rom. 8:1-11) as he does the phrases “in Christ and in the Spirit” and “Christ in you and the Spirit in you.” The Apostle Paul even says in his 2nd Letter to the Church in Corinth (3:17), “Now the Lord is the Spirit . . .”

British NT scholar Alan Richardson writes, “. . . the Gospels represent the Spirit as operating upon Jesus and Jesus as working by the Spirit. It was necessary therefore to draw a distinction between Christ and the Spirit, particularly during the days of his flesh. But after the resurrection this distinction becomes blurred, and the NT writers do not attempt to distinguish between the operation of the Risen Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit” (p.121; An Intro. to the New Testament; c.1958; New York; Harper & Row). What this means is that one way of understanding the Holy Spirit is as the ongoing presence of the Risen Christ himself in His church.

From the teaching of the earthly Jesus, the Holy Spirit’s central mission is to bear witness to Christ (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:14) and thus to work within us, to help us come to personal faith in the Risen One. As Jeff has already reminded us, the Spirit doesn’t call attention to Himself but shines the spotlight on Jesus and for that reason is “the Shy Member of the Trinity.”

The indwelling of the Spirit brings us the confidence that the Risen Christ lives and is the unique Savior and Lord – master,

owner, and ruler of all of life, including our lives. The Spirit provides us hope that Jesus Christ is able to take a broken life and make it whole. The Spirit provides us with the conviction that the Risen Lord is able to grant meaning to our lives. The Holy Spirit convinces us that God's love for all humankind in Christ Jesus isn't just a general truth, but that God's love in Christ is intended for each of us individually!

Many make the story of Pentecost about the power of the HS released into our lives as followers of Jesus. And that's true. But the Spirit is always linked to the Risen Christ, helping us accept Christ's Lordship and grow in our relationship with Christ. In the words of my mentor Earl Palmer, the power of the Holy Spirit "is not so much an ingredient within me, but it is something much better. It is the power that is set loose in me knowing how strong and how immense is the authority that Christ has. That is the power I have as a Christian. Not so much an ingredient in me but a confidence in Christ. It is His power. It is His authority."

And that is the meaning of Pentecost.

Let us pray: Gracious and Loving God, we thank You for sending Christ Jesus to redeem us with his sinless life, vicarious death, and glorious resurrection and ascension, and for the Holy Spirit who bears powerful witness within us of the truth of the gospel and that it is a truth which is for each of us personally. Grant that we may each continue to grow in faith in Christ the Lord, bearing glad witness in what we say and do, and seek to serve him each day. Through Christ the Lord we pray. Amen.