

Pentecost: Wind, Fire, Words

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Acts 2:1–21

Pentecost. Fifty. Fifty days after the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread there was the harvest festival. The ingathering of the winter wheat. And the celebration of the giving of the Torah to Moses on the mountain accompanied by wind and fire.

Fifty days after the Jesus' passover from death to life comes the harvest, the ingathering of the first fruits. Three thousand baptized and added to the number of the disciples in one day. And again there is wind and fire. The wind is heard; the fire is seen. The wind is the breath of the crucified, risen, and now reigning Lord Jesus blowing out over His Church, filling it with His breath and His words. There is proclamation in all the known languages and dialects of the Mediterranean world, from the mouth of simple Galileans who had never taken a language course before. Everyone heard the good news of Jesus in his own language and dialect. "For you." In your ears, no doubt about it.

And there was fire. Tongues of fire were seen resting on each of the 120 gathered disciples, including Mary, the mother of Jesus. John the Baptizer had told them, "I baptize you with water, but the One who is coming, who is greater than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This now is the completion of their baptism with the promised fire of the Holy Spirit.

Fire goes back to Moses and the burning bush. There Christ appeared to Moses in a bush that was on fire but did not burn up. A Gospel fire. So also here at Pentecost. Tongues of fire rested on each one of the believers, a visible sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and they in turn spoke in tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Those who heard it were bewildered, amazed, astonished, and even perplexed. "What does this mean?" they wondered. Good question. It's not every day that you get wind and fire from heaven. In fact, only this day. Some were less charitable and mocked the disciples. "They are filled with new wine," they said, in what is easily one of the dumber remarks recorded in Scripture. I know a thing or two about languages, and I know a thing or two about wine. And

I can tell you with great certainty that one's language skills do not improve with wine. Including one's native tongue.

Peter explains, quoting from the prophet Joel. This is the same Peter who barely opened his mouth when asked by a servant girl if he was one of Jesus' disciples. Now, fifty days later, Peter speaks openly and boldly to thousands, some of whom are hostile, most of whom are bewildered, amazed, astonished, and perplexed. Two things embolden Peter. He had seen the risen Lord. And He had the Holy Spirit.

These are the last days, Peter says quoting Joel, when God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. The last days are the Holy Spirit's days, and so Pentecost begins the time of the Holy Spirit. What began with the Father at Christmas – Of the Father's Love Begotten – and continued with the Son through Holy Week and Easter – Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – now carries on with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

This is the Spirit who raised up the dry bones of Israel in the vision of Ezekiel. "Can these bones live?" is the question. And the answer is, "Indeed they can, with the word and breath of God blowing upon them." As God breathed into the first man and made him a "living being," so the Spirit breathes life wherever and whenever He blows like the wind. You can't see the wind but you can hear it. You can't see the Spirit but you can hear the Word, and where the Word is preached and heard, there the Spirit is at work.

"He will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment," Jesus told them. "Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged." Sin, righteousness, and judgment – that's what the Holy Spirit is about, and any spirit that is not about those things is not the Holy Spirit.

He will convict the world of Sin. Not simply "sins," as discreet bad thoughts, words, and deeds. But capital S Sin. The corruption that goes to the very core of our humanity and renders everything we do sinful no matter how good it may appear to us. The Spirit is not some heavenly principle whose office you get called to when your bad. That's not the way He deals with Sin. Symptoms are one thing, but diagnosing the disease is another. We sin because we have Sin. We are Sin-full, and as a result, everything we think, do, and say, no matter how beautiful, wonderful, and nice, is full of Sin. That's what the world needs convicting of, and we do too. Constantly. Or we will begin to justify ourselves, the very thing that renders Jesus'

work useless to us, because if you can justify yourself and your actions, what point is there in being justified for Jesus' sake.

He will convict the world of righteousness. Jesus goes to the Father, glorifying our humanity at the Father's right hand. But we can't follow Him. Not the way we are. Sin is what we have; righteousness is what we lack, and we are naked without it. We need to be clothed, covered in a righteousness that is not our own.

The clothing analogy is an easy one to understand. You have clothes for all sorts of occasions. Work clothes, party clothes, beach clothes, casual clothes, formal clothes. Clothes appropriate for the occasion. We need a change of clothing. Our righteousness won't cut it. Like the man in the parable of the king's son's wedding who appeared without the proper wedding suit, we may not appear before God clothed in our own attempts at holiness. Adam and Eve tried to sew their own clothing to cover themselves, but self-stitched fig leaves are as effective as the figs leaves of our own works. Ultimately God must provide the clothing, in their case, skins. They were covered in sacrifice. In our case, Christ, and His righteousness, through which the Father looks at us.

To be baptized is to be clothed with Christ, to wear Jesus like a sacrificial suit. That's the Spirit's work as well. He clothes us with the robes of Christ's righteousness. Only dressed like that may you appear before the Father. Not your righteousness, Christ's righteousness. Like Jacob who disguised himself to feel and smell like his brother Esau to obtain the blessing from his father Isaac, so we are covered with Christ and obtain the Father's blessing.

Christ became our Sin so that we might become His Righteousness. That's the great exchange of which the Holy Spirit is the arbiter. Our Sin for Jesus' Righteousness. By this you stand justified before God – your Sin is covered, Christ's Righteousness is yours.

He will convict the world concerning judgment. The collision of Sin and Righteousness bring about a "crisis," a judgment. "The ruler of this world is judged." He was sentenced on the cross where Jesus become our Sin so that baptized into Him, we would become His Righteousness. The devil would love for you not to believe this, to reject this, to attempt to justify your self with your piety, your good works for others, your prayers, something you do that obligates God to you.

Sin, righteousness, judgment. The three things the world does not believe. The three things the Holy Spirit seeks to convict the world of. And He uses but one tool to accomplish it – the

Word. When we think of the Holy Spirit, we tend to think of anything but the Word. Speaking in tongues. People acting weird. Tent and stadium revivals. Pentecostal churches. A lot of that is man's attempt to recreate that unique Pentecost Day 2000 years ago when every language of the Mediterranean world heard the good news of Jesus and 3000 were baptized into His death and life. You can't recreate the unique events – Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection, ascension. You can celebrate them – Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension. And you can receive the gifts that the Word delivers, but you can't recreate these singular events. They are once for all time.

And so it is with Pentecost. The wind, the tongues of fire, the miracle of languages were the Church's great grand opening, the balloons and fireworks that marked the public opening of Christ's end times embassy on earth. That's what the church actually is. It's a foreign embassy, "in the world yet not of the world," proclaiming the reign of Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the Spirit is the Divine Ambassador sent to preach Christ crucified, risen, and reigning.

Our large catechism speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit under the third article of the Creed:

This, now, is the article which must ever be and remain in operation. For creation we have received; redemption, too, is finished But the Holy Spirit carries on His work without ceasing to the last day. And for that purpose He has appointed a congregation upon earth by which He speaks and does everything. For He has not yet brought together all His Christian Church nor dispensed forgiveness. Therefore we believe in Him who through the Word daily brings us into the fellowship of this Christian Church, and through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins bestows, increases, and strengthens faith, in order that when He has accomplished it all, and we abide therein, and die to the world and to all evil, He may finally make us perfectly and forever holy; which now we expect in faith through the Word. (Large Catechism, Article 3)

We don't hear a mighty wind blowing through our building, nor do we see tongues of fire resting on everyone. We do hear the Gospel in more than one language but it takes a native born Chinese pastor to do that. Wouldn't it be great if we could forego all that and everyone simply heard in their own language? The ongoing work of Pentecost is not in wind, fire, and miraculous languages but in Word and Baptism and Supper. At the close of Pentecost, Luke notes: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the communion, to the Breaking of the Bread and the prayers."

Pentecost. Fifty days. The ingathering, the Word, the Church. You are a part of it – called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, kept in the faith by the Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit, warm our cold and lifeless hearts with your Gospel fire.

Come, Holy Spirit, rattle our dry and dusty bones and make them live.

Come, Holy Spirit, loosen our tongues to speak the good news of Jesus.

Come, Holy Spirit, quench our fevered thirst with the waters of Baptism.

Come, Holy Spirit, satisfy our hunger for righteousness with the Body and Blood of our Savior.

Come, Holy Spirit, put the good news of Jesus into our ears, our minds, our hearts that we may hear it, comprehend it, and believe it.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in them the fire of your love.

In the Name of Jesus,

Amen

SOURCE

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