

LETTING GOD FLOW

Acts 2:1-21

Intro

One of the quick ways that Pentecost is understood is as the ‘birthday of the church’. Why? This is the day that the Spirit of God came upon the followers of Jesus so as to empower and embolden them to step out into their worlds and fulfill the call of the Great Commission and ‘make disciples of all nations’.

So yes, Pentecost is the beginning of the church.

However, one of the things that has always left me unsettled about leaving the description of Pentecost as merely a birthday celebration is that it feels like something that you are invited to, you head to for a few hours, and even have a good time, but then head home, not really affected (let alone affecting others) beyond the fact that you enjoyed yourself.

But Pentecost is so much more than singing Happy Birthday to someone else, and then having a piece of cake that is way too big.

At least it should be.

Pentecost is the day when we are able to recognize that the sacrifice that was made on a cross, which grants the opportunity to free all people from the burden of sin that we carry, also comes with responsibilities. These responsibilities are to be carried by all of God’s people and this amazingly diverse group of people are empowered through the Spirit of God to live lives, both in word and action, that declare the truth that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is not some sort of eternal ‘get out of jail free’ card.

It is a sacrifice that calls us to action and through the movement of God’s Spirit we are granted all that we will need to share the truth of Jesus, and allow his light to shine forth. Regardless of who you are or how the world may view you, you are blessed in ways to allow the light of God to shine. The scripture reads this way.

Acts 2:1-21

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

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

and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, 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. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The 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.’

“Letting God Flow”

Pentecost is one of those days on the liturgical calendar when you’re pretty sure you know what you’re going to hear when you come to church. On Christmas, you hear about the baby being born. On Easter you hear about Jesus rising from the dead. On Pentecost, you know that you are going to hear about the Spirit of God coming like a rush of wind and that individuals from a multitude of homelands and cultures are able to understand what is being said by the followers of Jesus in their own language (which is more than a little miracle considering the Galilean disciples, more likely than not, wouldn’t know how to speak a single word of those foreign languages).

The way that we have this miraculous event explained to us is through a listing of a multitude of locations. Some of them are familiar to our ears. Many are not. But regardless of whether or not we recognize the names, what those 17 verbal landmine opportunities provide for us is one picture of how much greater the call of being church with one another is than just the little corner that we know.

Think about it, with whom did the church start? With a group of people from a small community of an occupied country that was considered kind of backwater by the folks who lived in the ‘refined’ city of Jerusalem.

And yet, it was through these individuals that God worked so that the message of Jesus Christ spread to so much of the known world. This life giving message of Jesus connected all of these individuals.

As I said a moment ago, it can be real easy to get caught up in the belief that the church is the little corner of the world that we know.

It’s this sanctuary.

It’s the ministries and missions that we are involved in and committed to.

It’s the people whom we have met.

But what our passage reminds us is that the church was never meant to be confined to what we know. It was meant to head out into the world so that all the world might realize that in Christ they are one.

As a community of faith we recognize that this needs to be a part of our identity. What we have struggled with, especially as a variety of important and very integrated families have moved away (for a variety of reasons) is 'how'. Well, here are some of those ways.

We've started by having a variety of ways that we might be able to come together. Dinner on the 5's, the softball picnics, and the small groups that we have are all opportunities where we are encouraging the community to gather around the table and get to know one another (or know one another in new ways). The Spirit of God is flowing.

I know, that isn't heading out...but it's a step toward it and here's how: when you begin to see connections between yourself and those who are inside the church, it makes it all that much easier to serve with one another when the opportunities to serve others (both inside and beyond the walls) avail themselves.

And those opportunities are developing: whether it's working with HOPE FORCE (we will be hosting a reservist training here at the church in March of 2018), the elementary school across the parking lot (are you interested in working with children who need a little extra help?), or mission work (the Noxen trip can be thought of immediately, but are there ways to serve those even closer?), there will be ways to plug in. And we need to feel that leading and respond to it so that we do plug in...because that is who we are called to become as the church. The Spirit of God is flowing.

The Nursery School is already realizing what can happen when gathering together so as to reach out and serve manifests itself. A couple of years ago the school was struggling mightily both in terms of registration and its finances. As a congregation we talked and prayed about what that meant, and there was a collective response that the school is an important part of this church's ministry to the community. By fostering a sense of connectedness, the word of mouth about the school has become incredibly positive, the registrations are way up, and the financial responsibilities are able to be handled. It will never be what it was 20 years ago, but we aren't trying to be what we were.

Rather, we are pushing toward what God would have us become and how God would have us serve in the community today. The Spirit of God is flowing.

The last thing that I would like to talk about is something that we started just a few weeks ago: we have started praying with one another in worship. Now that might not seem like a ridiculously huge thing, but it's taking the issues that are 'out there', which come with us 'in here' and putting them out there so that we might be able to support one another in the world's that we are now corporately a part of. Sharing, real sharing is beginning to occur.

The Spirit is flowing, we are feeling that movement and we are beginning to respond.

Look, I am certainly not saying that we have it all figured out: we certainly don't. But the seeds of God's Spirit are beginning to grow and flow and allow us to appreciate that no matter where we came from, we are a part of the family of God. In becoming that family, in renewing our understanding of who God has called us to be, we are empowering, encouraging, and supporting each other to serve as we are being led.

We might not know how the Spirit of God is going to move. There might even be times when we really don't know how God might be able to work through us. But if we open ourselves to allowing God in,

then what happens is that people are able to hear in their own dialect and tongue the truth that is found in Jesus Christ...and respond to it.

Sons and daughters of the Living God in this community of faith here at Three Bridges, each of us have not only been called to gather together as family so that we might be empowered to move beyond these church walls, and beyond the walls that allow us to feel comfortable to proclaim the truth of the living God. In and through the Spirit of God you will be blessed so as to allow that light to shine. Be open to it, and then let God flow.

In your home and at your work, let God flow! In your school and with your friends, let God flow! When you're comfortable, and absolutely when you're uncomfortable, let God flow. Regardless of who you are or how the world may view you, you are blessed in ways to allow the light of God to shine. Pentecost is not just a birthday party: let God flow!

After Sermon Prayer

God Your Spirit has come into the world, and if we are open to it, we are able to acknowledge that it has come into our lives as well. God, help us to be open to all of the ways that You are moving in the world so that we might use the blessings You have bestowed us with to be a blessing unto others and allow Your light to shine. Lord, help us to let You flow! It is in Jesus' name that we do pray. Amen.