

The Spirit Gives Us Voice
 Rev. Frank Allen
 First Presbyterian Church, Kissimmee, Florida

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Acts 2:1-21

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.
 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

NO VOICE

Several weeks ago I lost my voice on Saturday. I asked the doctor if it would return in time for the sermon the next day. He smiled and asked if I had a good video that I could show!

In 32 years of ministry this would be the first time I would not be able to answer the bell on Sunday morning. I emailed Hal and asked if he would read my sermon should my voice not come back in time to preach. He graciously agreed.

As most of you know, my voice did not return by Sunday so I had what turned out to be a rare opportunity. I would sit in the pews and listen to my own sermon!

I had worked on that sermon all week so I thought I knew the content pretty well. But, much to my surprise sitting down and listening to the sermon made the words seem like they came from someone else. The sermon seemed fresh and new, both services!

In that sermon I noted that Peter's eloquent speech was interrupted by the coming of the Holy Spirit. And this wasn't the first time that Peter had been interrupted by the Spirit of God.

As I listened to Hal speak I wondered,
 "Is God interrupting me?
 Is there some reason that I need to hear this sermon instead of giving it voice today?"

I remembered that before the disciples could proclaim the gospel they were instructed to wait on the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Only the Spirit could give them voice.
Only the Spirit could give the message power.

Maybe that's what I needed.
Maybe I needed to sit down and shut up so that I could wait upon the coming of the Spirit.

BRINGING OUR FISH AND LOAVES TO JESUS

All of us from time to time need to have our lives interrupted by the coming of the Spirit.
I think it's a necessity.
It helps us remember that in order to proclaim God's Word we need a voice, a tongue that comes from above.

None of us can make it on our own.
All of us need God's help all the time.

Haddon Robinson, a great preacher and teacher of preachers talked about this divine voice in the preparation of sermons. Haddon said that no matter how hard we work on our sermons our efforts will never be enough.

He likened it to the disciples being charged by Jesus to feed five thousand people with only five small loaves and two small fish. It was not nearly enough to get the job done.

But, in the hands of Jesus that meager portion was enough for the multitude.

In the same way when we preachers turn our message over to Jesus through his Spirit, he multiplies our effort and creates in our listeners a hunger for what we offer.

I think that's true not only for preachers but for all who seek to follow Jesus and do God's will. We bring the best that we have, no matter how meager that may be, and the Spirit of God in Christ makes it enough.

SAILBOAT CHURCH

Joan Gray has written a book entitled, *Sailboat Church*. And in that book Joan suggests that churches should act like sailboats. We should let the wind of the Holy Spirit guide us on our journey instead of micromanaging every aspect of church life.

I like that image.

The church is not a mighty fortress.

The church is not a powerful institution that influences the course of civilization.

The church is a sailboat.

We don't have the power to move on our own, but the wind of the Spirit enables us to move in ways that are beyond our imagination. In the church it is not our job to finalize plans for the future.

Instead, it is our job to hoist the sail of faith, catch the wind of the Spirit, and go where the Spirit takes us.

In a sailboat understanding wind direction is critical.

The fun and the challenge of sailing is making quick changes in the sail in response to the ever changing wind.

And the same is true when it comes to following Christ.

The wind of the Spirit guides us and empowers us to proclaim the gospel in power.

But, the wind of the Spirit is not under our control.

And so we must be willing to change course at a moments notice in response to the prompting of the Spirit.

THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM VOICE

Those first disciples thought that they had the kingdom of God figured out. They thought the risen Christ would be coming back to restore the kingdom of God by force.

It would be a political kingdom and Israel would be restored to her rightful place of power and privilege. Before Pentecost, they even organized for this coming kingdom by electing a new apostle to take the place of Judas.

But, the coming of the Spirit changed their understanding of the kingdom completely.

When the Spirit came upon the disciples they were given a new mission.

Those hard headed disciples finally understood that the kingdom of God was not about a new political kingdom. It was about a new spiritual kingdom.

And it was the wind of the Spirit that enabled them to go in this new direction.

Before the coming of the Spirit the disciples cowered behind locked doors and seemed confused and disillusioned. After the coming of the Spirit they preached the gospel with boldness and power.

The wind of the Spirit gave them voice.

The Bible says that when the Holy Spirit came upon them like the rushing of a mighty wind, divided tongues as of fire appeared among them and descended upon each of the disciples. One of these fiery tongues rested on each of the disciples, and the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak in other languages.

The language of Pentecost is meant to inspire awe and wonder. Pentecost is about heaven coming down and the glory of God spilling out into the world.

But, the story is also very practical.

There were people from all over the world in Jerusalem that day, and they needed to hear the gospel. The Spirit made that possible. The Spirit gave the disciples a universal language to use so that they could preach the gospel to the world.

This miracle of Pentecost was a miracle of communication.

Instead of being divided by language on this day God's people were united by language.

Some have said that this represents a kind of reversal of the Tower of Babel.

Just as language was confused due to the sinful pride of men and women long ago, so now the peoples of the world are given the ability to understand through a new "spiritual" language.

BEHIND LOCKED DOORS TODAY

Today the church is once again behind locked doors out of fear.
Today the church is losing influence at an alarming rate.
Many of my friends are always posting articles talking about this.

It's true.

The mainline church has become sidelined.
And actually things are not so much better for evangelical churches.

The fastest growing religion in our country is "none of the above."
We are becoming an increasingly secular society.

This is a very discouraging statistic.
And those of us who love the church wonder what have we done wrong.

There are lots of answers to that question.
Some will say that we've become too liberal.
Others will say that we've become too conservative.

Some will say that we have abandoned the Bible.
Others will say that we have taken the Bible too literally.

Some will say that we have abandoned the tried and true forms of worship and need to return to our roots.
Others will say that we need to embrace new forms of worship and express the faith in terms that modern people can understand.

There's probably some truth in all those answers.

But, the more important question is not how did it happen?

The more important question is how are we going to respond to this new reality?

How can we be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ in an increasingly secular world?

THE NEW WINE ARGUMENT

We need to remember that our situation is not unique.

When the disciples first preached the gospel in the power of the Spirit, not everyone was open to the message. In fact most were adamantly opposed to the message.

Half of those who witnessed that first expression of Pentecostal power were confused by it.

And the Scripture also tells us that the other half who heard the gospel actually mocked it. They said of those who preached the gospel that day,

“These guys are filled with new wine.”

In other words,

“Anyone who believes this crazy message has had one drink too many.”

That same criticism is leveled against the Christian church today.

This is not so much a reasoned argument but a rejection of faith through the use of satire.

Satire itself has almost become a religion in our society.

Think about all the hoopla over David Letterman’s last show. Almost everyone on TV said with great reverence that it was the “end of an era.”

I would say that Letterman’s edgy, cynical style reflected the mood of our society as a whole.

People may not believe much, but they are quite eager to mock those who do believe.

The “new wine” argument is alive and well, and is still used to great effect. How can we respond to this?

Let's be honest.

It's quite intimidating to stand up to those who mock us.

There is the temptation to either get angry or withdraw behind locked doors.

But, neither of those responses are very helpful or faithful.

Notice what a Spirit empowered Peter did.

He answered their satire with a reasoned argument from Scripture.

In fact Peter even used a little humor in his rebuttal.

He said,

“Hey, it's only nine o'clock in the morning.

The bars aren't open yet. These guys can't be drunk, at least not on wine.”

And then Peter gives his spin on what has just happened.

This was a fulfillment of prophecy.

This event is what the prophet Joel talked about.

In the last days the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out on all people, young and old.

And everything will change forever.

This is the beginning of a new creation.

This is that new day when everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

SALVATION

That's the key. Salvation.

“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Behind all the cynicism in our world is a deep longing for something that is real, something that lasts forever.

This is salvation.

And this is what all of us need.

We need what we cannot do for ourselves.
We need an answer that comes from above and beyond us.
We need an eternal Word planted in our mortal hearts.

We might not be able to express what salvation means, but we know it when we hear it.

It is like the sound of a violent wind.
It is like a tongue of fire.
It is the language of faith and hope.

The story of Pentecost reminds us that the church is given life by the power of God's Spirit.

The church is given voice by the power of God's Spirit. The church grows through the power of God's Spirit.

And through the power of the Spirit the church is given something to say that world desperately needs to hear.
In a broken and troubled world the Spirit enables us to speak a word of salvation.

As the prophet put it, all of us, young and old will speak a word that is stronger than death, and a hope that is deeper than despair.

That's Pentecostal power.
And it's still happening.

HOPE IN THE FACE OF DEATH

When Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross was writing her book on death and dying, she interviewed dying patients in the hospital. She was trying to find out what they were thinking and feeling as they faced death.

She began to notice a pattern.

Some of the patients were remarkably calm and at peace. And all of these patients had a common denominator. They had been visited by a certain hospital orderly.

One day Dr. Ross ran into this orderly in the hospital corridor and asked, "What are you doing with my patients?"

The orderly thought she was being reprimanded by the Dr. and replied, "I'm not doing anything with your patients."

Dr. Ross said, "No, what you're doing is a good thing. After you go into my patient's rooms they seem at peace. What are you doing or saying?"

The orderly replied,

"I just talk to them.
You know, I've had two babies of my own die on my lap.
But, God never abandoned me.

I tell them that.
I tell them that they aren't alone, that God is with them, and that they don't have to be afraid."

That's Pentecostal power.
That's a word of salvation that the world needs to hear.
That's a word of salvation that we need to hear.

God is with us and for us.
We don't have to be afraid.

Today we celebrate the fact that the Spirit gives us voice.

The Spirit gives us a word of power.
The Spirit gives us a word of peace.
The Spirit gives us a hope that is eternal.

Let us set the sail of faith and catch the mighty wind of the Spirit.

Amen.