

## **What Does This Mean? What Shall We Do?**

### **Acts 2:1-12, 36-41**

READ Acts 2:1-12, 36-41

This story of Pentecost has at least three spectacular things happening in it: the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire, people from all over the world hearing the Gospel proclaimed in their own language, and preaching that saw the group of believers grow from 120 to more than 3000 in one day. All those things are powerful witness to what God can do when we are open to Him. We celebrate Pentecost as one of the great days in the church calendar.

The believers are gathered at the beginning of this passage from Acts not because they were anticipating the promised manifestation of the Holy Spirit on this particular day, but to observe the day of Pentecost as Jews. Pentecost had its roots in the Jewish observance of the delivery of the law at Mount Sinai, traditionally held to have happened 50 days after the Passover and their flight from Egypt. But Jesus had promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to sustain them, and had told them at the Ascension to hang together and wait. They did not have to wait long.

We could spend a lot of time on the details of the event of Pentecost or on Peter's sermon, but I'd like to focus on the two questions that the people who were there immediately asked. These two questions should cause us to pause in our observance of Pentecost – to stop us from reading it as a historical event and lead us to deeper consideration of its meaning for us as individuals and as a church. What does this mean? (v. 12) and What shall we do? (v. 37)

The complete answers to these questions are way beyond my ability to explain them. But there are some relatively simple pieces of the answers that I hope will add something to our appreciation of Pentecost.

Part of the answer to the question “What does this mean?” is that we are better able to understand the completeness of the Trinity. One of the important meanings of this Pentecost manifestation of the Holy Spirit is that for the early church, it completed their direct personal experience of all Three Persons of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We see these elements in Peter's sermon to the crowd

gathered at this Pentecost. He covered the history of God's relationship with the people of Israel, connected it all to and through Jesus as the Messiah, and tied it all together in the on-going presence of God through the Holy Spirit. I think we are getting close to grasping the Trinity when every time we think "God", that means to us "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit", and every time we think "Jesus", that means to us "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit", and every time we think "Holy Spirit", that means to us "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit".

I will only suggest one answer today to the question "What shall we do?" There are untold numbers of other answers in Scripture and in the history of the church. The answer I suggest for us today is this. What shall we do? We shall claim the power of the Holy Spirit to be the church. That's what Peter and the others did. Right then and there, they began to fulfill the Great Commission and the Church was born.

We start claiming the power of the Holy Spirit in part by opening ourselves up to the experience of the presence of God in worship. We begin by expecting the presence of God in our worship, and we then intentionally and purposefully open our hearts and minds and eyes and ears to that Presence. Last Sunday, we celebrated the sacrament of Holy Communion. That is one of the sacred moments we have in the life of the community of faith where the sacrifice of Jesus for us and for our sins becomes something we touch and taste. Something mystical happens in Holy Communion that connects us to Jesus and connects us to the entire fellowship of believers for 2000 years. Not mystical in the sense of magic spells or enchantments, but mystical in the sense of being something we can experience but not quite explain. Faith allows us to have such experiences and to know them as the presence of God without us having to be able to explain them.

We also claim the power of the Holy Spirit by directly calling upon the Holy Spirit in prayer. We routinely go to God in prayer, and we have no reservations about praying in the name of Jesus, but how often do we pray to the Holy Spirit? No reason not to, because the Holy Spirit is one in the Trinity with God the Father and Jesus the Son.

Prayers to the Holy Spirit have been part of the Christian tradition from the beginning. We've printed one in the bulletin, and I want to focus on it.

This is a prayer to the Holy Spirit from the fourth century. It was originally in the form of a call-and-response, and then later in a Latin hymn. I don't know who all uses it today, but I found references in my research to use by Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Episcopalians. That's a pretty broad spectrum of Christianity.

Say this prayer with me.

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and kindle in us the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, Who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy Your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen*

Hear answers to the questions What does this mean? and What shall we do? in the words of this prayer.

*Come, Holy Spirit,*

We are addressing our prayer to the third person of the Godhead, the Trinity: God, the Father; Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and the Holy Spirit. We are inviting Him to come, and act within our hearts.

Jesus promised us, the believers, that when He left the earth, God would remain in us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would dwell within our hearts forever. The Holy Spirit would teach us all things. The Holy Spirit would bring to our remembrance all that Jesus ever said. We find these promises in John 14, when Jesus was speaking His last instructions to His disciples, and to us.

*fill the hearts of Your faithful.*

We are claiming the title of "Your faithful" for ourselves here, whether we deserve it or not. We know what it means to have faith in God. That is how we received our salvation, by believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "By grace are we saved through faith...." Our salvation is a gift, coming to us through faith in Jesus. But have we ever stopped to think what it means to be faithful to the Holy Spirit?

In Romans 8:16, Paul writes, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." In Romans 8:26, Paul writes that when we do not know what to

pray, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us. Do we acknowledge the Holy Spirit for who He is? Do we ask Him to do for us what Jesus promised He would do?

We know that the Holy Spirit is in our hearts filling us with the knowledge that we are God's children. We need to be filled with that truth. We must never forget it, or even fail to think about it. What a difference it would make if, before anything else, our first thought would be that we belong to God. What a difference it would make if we relied on the power of the Holy Spirit in all things.

*and kindle in us the fire of your love*

We know that when God manifested the promised Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, He revealed Himself in the form of "tongues of fire". We are asking that same Holy Spirit to kindle or light in our hearts that very same fire. It is that fire that burns in us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. It is that fire that moves but does not consume us or burn us when we get close, and it draws us closer like moths to a flame. It is that fire that will not let us rest while one is unsaved or one is lost or one is hungry or one is afraid.

*Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be created.*

This refers to the creative spirit, breath of God that hovered over the waters at Creation. It is the Spirit that God breathed into Adam as the breath of life, that God breathed into the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision, that the risen Christ breathed on the disciples and said "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). It is the Spirit by which God makes Himself real to us, all the time.

We shall be created and re-created with every breath of the Holy Spirit. The faithful, who take that breath in, will be transformed into true children of God.

*And you shall renew the face of the earth.*

That's it; that is God's plan. Jesus, when He left this earth, had a handful of faithful disciples. These disciples were kindled with the fire of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and they created more faithful disciples and renewed the face of the earth. Our world today has many problems for sure. We see them on television, in the newspapers, on the internet, everywhere we turn, but compare the number of Christians today to

twelve or 120 or even 3000. The face of the earth has been renewed and is continually being renewed by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. The face of the earth has been renewed and is continually being renewed by the church universal claiming the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission, one person at a time.

The prayer continues:

*O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful.*

It is the light of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus was called the Light, that instructs our hearts and illuminates our path. Jesus said that the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) would teach us the meaning of everything. We pray that God will teach us all that we need to know to be faithful disciples and share the fire of His love with others. We just have to listen. He will tell us the truth.

*Grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations.*

It is the Holy Spirit that brings us to the full realization of God's kingdom. True wisdom is found in the truth of God, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

And, we ask that we may always remember the Holy Spirit is with us forever. So, we are asking to enjoy forever all the ways God comforts, consoles, blesses, and delights us. That is the abundant life that Jesus promised us now. It is the complete joy of being a child of God, the Father. And, how is this going to be completed in us?

*Through Christ our Lord, Amen.*

What does this mean? It means that God offers to make Himself real to us all the time through the presence of the Holy Spirit?

What shall we do? We shall claim the power of the Holy Spirit to be the people of God, as individuals and as a church.

Hear in this prayer to the Holy Spirit the reality of God's presence and the promise of His power. It is the power that saved 3000 people on the day of Pentecost. It is the power that can save one more right now.

**Amen.**