



Acts 2:1-13  
Acts: The Church On Mission  
Fuel for the Mission

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This morning's passage gives us a great look at a part of what the early Christian Community was like, and how they were fueled up for the mission that Jesus had given them, which we looked at last week in the opening verses of the book of Acts. And that mission was simply to be his witnesses.

Jesus also told his followers that the Spirit would come to them, and that the Spirit would give them power for accomplishing this mission. And here in Acts 2 we have a description of what happened when the Spirit came to them. So the background here is that: **Some of the Christians were gathered in Jerusalem during the Jewish Festival of Weeks.** This basically means that lots of Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the known world to celebrate this festival, which was about thanking God for his provision and celebrating when God gave their ancestors the Ten Commandments – rules for living in relationship with God and with each other.

Pentecost is the Greek word given to that Festival – it means 50<sup>th</sup>, which is an apt name because it occurred 50 days after the Passover. We celebrate it in Christianity because it's when God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to His believers, since as this passage tells us, it happened during the time of the Pentecost festival.

The setting is Jerusalem, according to verse 5. As for where exactly they are in Jerusalem, that's up in the air. Verse 1 of today's text tells us, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." That's not very helpful. And in verse 2, it mentions that they were gathered together and sitting in a house. That's only slightly more helpful, but it's all we get.

As for *who* was there...that is also a little hard to know, but earlier in Acts 1:15, we're told that about 120 were gathered together in Jerusalem. Maybe it was all 120 who were together here in Acts 2 as well. It's hard to say for sure, because it sounds like at least a little time had passed between the events of Acts 1 and Acts 2. If today's passage *is* about all 120 people mentioned in Acts 1, then that's a mighty big house they're gathered in.

Regardless of the number gathered or where they were, a group of Christians were gathered together in some kind of meeting, perhaps even gathered for a time of worship, or prayer, or teaching. And: **As they're gathered together, the Spirit descends upon them.** We're told that there came a “sound like a rush of violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:2-4).

So, this is the giving of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus said His Heavenly Father would do. Now, you may recall that in the Gospel of John, Jesus invites his disciples to receive the Holy Spirit, and then breathes out over them, as though giving the Spirit then and there. This leads to some confusion on exactly when the Spirit came. So let me just make a few comments in regards to this that might help us to understand this, though more could certainly be said.

First, we need to remember that: **The Holy Spirit did not originate with either of these events.** We talked about that last week some as well, but it never hurts to be reminded of it again. The Spirit is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, and the Spirit is present and active in the Gospels, long before here in Acts. But beginning here, the Spirit is continually active in believers' lives, rather than coming actively into their lives only at certain times. So the Spirit didn't originate with Jesus breathing over them or with this event in Acts.

As for understanding how the two accounts fit together, there are several ways to interpret this. Let me give you a couple. First, **The event in John 20 could be more of a symbolic act rather than the actual giving of the Spirit.** This makes some sense because after Jesus breathes on them in John 20, the disciples don't live with any sense of power or conviction in their faith. They're timid and scared, and they huddle up in a home (20:19, 26). Quite frankly, they don't act as if they have the Spirit. Additionally, Jesus repeatedly tells His disciples that the Spirit will come *after* he returns to his Heavenly Father, not while he's still with them. So perhaps the Holy Spirit was not actually given to them in John in that moment, and what happened

there was more of a symbolic action and a foreshadowing of what would happen later in Acts 2.

**Another way of seeing how John 20 and Acts 2 fit together is to see the Spirit being given to them in two stages.** First, when Jesus breathed on them, and then fully and completely in Acts. Perhaps the breathing on them in John is reminiscent of God breathing life into humanity when he breathed into the nostrils of Adam, and much like the disciples who lived very timidly when Jesus did that, Adam was also very timid. So this stage of being spirit filled is marked with that similarity. Then the second stage of receiving the Spirit happens here in Acts 2, and they live with much greater boldness and power. So, those are a couple ways that John 20 and Acts 2 have been seen to work together...but either way, the point is that the Holy Spirit is given to Christ-followers, to lead them and empower them in the mission Jesus gives them.

Now: **The Greek word for Spirit is “pneuma.”** (Holy = hagios.) Greek is the language that the New Testament was written in, and was one of three languages that were commonly spoken in this region at that time (Hebrew and Aramaic). We’re somewhat familiar with this word, pneuma. We see it in words such as “pneumatic shocks” – as in automobile shocks that use air as the way to cushion the ride of your car – or “pneumatic pump,” which is what you use to inflate tires and basketballs, and so forth, with air.

So, we all know that: **Without air in things that require it for them to work, they don’t work right.** For instance, car tires require air. I was reminded about that this past week. Last Sunday after church, I got out of town to Vashon Island with three of my kids - Gwen was away for the weekend with Blakely on a school band trip that he was participating in. So I had three of the kids...and shortly after we arrived, I realized that my car’s front left tire was flat; there was a little air in it, but not a whole lot. Being Memorial Day weekend, I knew I wasn’t going to be able to address it until Tuesday. So I put on the spare. I hadn’t had to put on a spare tire since learning how to do that for my driver’s license, at age 16, about 15 years ago. ☺ The next morning, I realized that my right rear tire was also going flat, though it was leaking slow enough I was confident it would make it home

later that afternoon. When Gwen and Blakely got home Monday night, she and I took it to the shop and left it there for them to take care of the next day.

Then on Thursday morning, we went out to the car and the left rear tire was also completely flat! 3 out of 4 tires, in the span of 4 days. I know screws were in at least two of them. So either I happened to follow a truck that had a box of screws fall off it or I drove close by a poorly managed construction sight, or I've got some enemies that really want to slow me down, or God is simply trying to teach me a lesson. I don't know. And if God just wanted to give me a timely sermon illustration for this message on the Spirit, I can certainly think of a lot of other ways He could have done that which would not have inconvenienced me nearly as much. All I do know is that I can change a tire pretty fast now...and I know that without air, without "pneuma," those rubber tires are absolutely useless.

And it's the same thing with Jesus' disciples and the Holy Spirit. Jesus told his disciples just a few days prior to this, that the Spirit would come upon them and give them power. **It's the Spirit that fuels them, that powers the mission, that gives them what they need to move forward...to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.** They need...and we still need...the power of the Holy Spirit in what we do. It's what fuels us as Christians and gives us the power we need to live into God's mission for our lives and for our church.

And immediately, we begin to see the power of the Spirit active in *their* lives. **First, they start speaking in different languages.** Because this was in the middle of a major Jewish Festival, Jews were gathered there from all around the Middle East, Asia, various countries of North Africa, from Greece, Rome, and elsewhere. And some of them hear these people declaring the wonder of God in their own languages. It comes as quite a surprise, because the Jews who were speaking these languages were Jerusalem locals.

In fact, we're told that the crowd was "bewildered," "amazed," and "astonished" (Acts 2:6, 7). Why? Because they were not used to hearing their own languages spoken there in Jerusalem. They were gathered there for the Jewish Pentecost, expecting everything to be in Hebrew. **But here were a**

**group of people praising God and his mighty deeds in their own common, every day languages.**

When Gwen and I lived in South Korea for a few months, we took a trip one time to China. While in Shanghai, we were walking along a waterfront area, kind of an open, public square. And two girls, probably in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, came to us and they asked us if they could speak to us in English. They wanted to practice their English with us. We were happy to chat. Well, within a couple of minutes, we had a crowd of 20 or 30 people around us listening to a couple “of their own,” fluently speaking a foreign language. It was a similar experience to the onlookers here in Acts, only it’s inverted: The experience of the on-lookers in China was of their own people speaking a foreign language. In Acts, the on-lookers experienced foreign people speaking their own languages. The result, however, was the same: A crowd of people gathered around, astonished at what was going on. They speculated that the people were drunk... Which is kind of an interesting speculation to make, because last time I checked, drunk people usually don’t suddenly speak fluently in foreign languages that they had previously not known. But that's what happens.

So there was power in what the Spirit did through them, and people were drawn in to find out more about what was going on. It was like a magnetic force that pulled them in, that piqued their curiosity, and that caught their attention. That’s one of the ways that the power of the Spirit is demonstrated.

**The second show of the Spirit’s power was through Peter’s preaching and then drawing people to faith.** We see this in the following verses, which we did not read, but let me summarize for you. Peter, with the backing of the rest of the Jesus-followers there, dives right into explaining what it is that the people are witnessing. No, these people are not drunk, he says. It’s much too early to celebrate the festival – it’s only nine in the morning. Maybe if it was happy hour... oh, never mind. Then he neatly turns the conversation into explaining what they are in fact witnessing, and refers to Scripture to explain this event.

He quotes a passage from Joel, beginning in Joel 2:28, a passage that speaks

of God pouring out His Spirit on all people, that people will prophesy, dream dreams, the sun shall turn dark, and the moon will turn red. Remember what happened when Jesus died? **The Scriptures tell us that the sun was darkened and the earth turned dark, even though it was the middle of the day (Luke 23:44, 45).** Peter goes on to explain that what they are witnessing is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy: that God's Spirit would be poured out on all people, and that they are witnessing the manifestation of that Spirit in these early Christians.

So the Spirit gives Peter boldness and power in his words as he addresses this crowd of people that's gathered around. As a result of his preaching, Acts 2:37 tells us that they asked Peter, "What shall we do?" The onlookers have taken an interest in what he says, and in what God is doing through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and they want to respond. And Peter tells them to repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and they will also be filled with the Holy Spirit. And that's exactly what they do! So the Spirit moves in and through Peter to make this bold proclamation, and the people respond to that powerful word and come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

**And Acts 2:41 tells us that about 3,000 were added that day to the Christian faith.** 3,000 came to know Jesus Christ on that day alone. Right there in one day they had enough people commit their lives to Christ that if you took those 3,000 people and put them in a Presbyterian church today, they'd be one of the largest Presbyterian churches here in America...they'd be an instant mega-church. And that happened as the Spirit moved in powerful ways, giving them the fuel for their mission to be the witnesses that Jesus called them to be...to carry out the mission that He gave *them*, and has given *all of us* who cling to the name of Jesus.

**It's the Holy Spirit that gives us the fuel for the mission.** It's not on our own power that the power of God is demonstrated. We have power, for sure – God has given us talents, gifts, abilities, personalities, etc., that give us a power of our own. But that's not the power that fuels us for the mission. It's the Holy Spirit that gives us true power, power from God our creator, the same power that brought creation into being out of nothing, the same power

that brought order and purpose out of chaos, the same power that raised Jesus from the grave. Without it, we're like our minivan this past week, with three flat tires in four days: it has its own power – the engine worked, the gas was in the engine – but the pneuma, the air, was missing and the car was useless to its mission of getting us from A to B. When we are open to God's leading, when we trust Jesus and let His Spirit, his pneuma, lead us and prompt us and move in our lives, then our testimony about Jesus, and our witnessing to the grace and love of Jesus in our everyday lives, is filled with power. And not just any power, but with the power of God. And that's the power we need in order to live into the mission that He has called us to. Let's Pray...Amen.