

Sermon

Are You Pentecostal Enough? (Acts 2:1-47)Pastor Jerry Truex; June 12, 2011

Today, seven weeks after Easter, we celebrate Pentecost. Pentecost marks the day when the Spirit came upon the followers of the Messiah Jesus and, in the power of the Spirit, they invited people from every nation to follow Jesus. The response was astonishing and about 3,000 people joined the messianic community.

Today, I want to ask you: Are you Pentecostal enough?

According Acts One, after Jesus was resurrected, he appeared among his followers for seven weeks. But the time came when Jesus announced his departure. It was at this very point that the disciples ask Jesus a decisive question.

Acts 1:6. ... They asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (NRSV)

That question is the backdrop for understanding the events of Acts Two, which narrates the miraculous events of Pentecost.

We are going to walk through Acts Two. It is a familiar text to many of you, but I'm going to try to draw out some features that are often overlooked, features that I think Acts Two emphasizes. Then I will return to the question: Are you Pentecostal enough?

A. The coming of the Spirit

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. (NRSV)

Acts chapter one ends with Jesus being taken up into heaven. Then, Acts Two, jumps abruptly to the day of Pentecost.¹

¹ Pentecost comes from the Greek *pentēkostos* meaning "fifty" (2 Macc. 12:31-32).

1. Wind and fire

Suddenly, there is a “sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house” (2:2). It is the entrance of the Spirit “from heaven.” It is Jesus returning “in the same way” he left them (1:11).

The experience of the Spirit is expressed with highly symbolic language. It is “like wind” (ὡσπερ ... πνοῆς). It is “like fire” (ὡσεὶ πυρὸς). Wind and fire are connected to God’s power in the Hebrew Bible.

In Hebrew, the word, *ruach*, means both “wind” and “spirit”. In Genesis one, the *ruach* of God, the spirit of God, moves over the waters and creates the universe out of chaos (Gen 1:2). The same power—the *ruach* of God—now moves through the disciples.

Fire is also an image for the power and presence of God. Remember how God came to Moses in “a flame of fire out of a bush” (Exod. 3:2). Remember how God descended on Mt. Sinai “in fire” to give the Law on Sinai (19:18).

So, the coming of the Spirit—as *wind and fire*—means this events being narrated are as significant as the creation of the world ... as significant as the giving of the Law on Sinai.

2. “Rested on” (*kathidzō*) each of them

We are told that the disciples—about 120 of them (1:15)—were sitting in an upper room of a house when tongues “rested on each of them.”

The word for “rested on” is *kathidzō* (καθίζω). It can be translated “to settle down, live with, or dwell with.” The Spirit comes as permanent gift. In the Spirit, the Risen Jesus continues to dwell permanently among and within his followers.

3. “Tongues” (*glōssa*) and “languages” (*glōssa*)

We are also told that the Jesus’ disciples experience the coming of the Spirit like “tongues” (γλῶσσαι) of fire resting on each of them and, as a result, they were able to speak in “other languages” or “other tongues” (ἑτέραις γλώσσαις).

This experience in Acts Two is often confused with “speaking in tongues” reported in the letters of Paul. It’s not the same thing. Paul is talking about unintelligible speech.

1 Corinthians 14:2 For those who speak in a tongue [ὁ γὰρ λαλῶν γλώσση] do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. (NRSV)

Paul is talking about prayer language addressed to God. What happens in Acts Two is the opposite. It is language addressed to people, not to God.

The miracle of Acts Two is that people from all over the world, who spoke different languages, are able to understand the disciples.

This is a primary function of the Spirit. The Spirit works to create understanding and unity among diverse people groups.

B. People from every nation

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."

1. A gathering from every nation

Next, we are told that devout Jews *from every nation* are in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.² We are given a list of fifteen different nationalities (2:10-11). The list of nations is representative. It represents the world. The world has come to Jerusalem.

The Prophets predicted this. They predicted that the nations would stream to Jerusalem and God would be Lord of all nations; there would be one God and one people (Micah 4:1-4; Zech. 14:9).

The picture of all the nations steaming to Jerusalem demonstrates that *God's love has no borders*. God does not favor one nation or one ethnic group over another.

² As many as 180,000 people would gather in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost with as many as 120,000 pilgrims from other lands. Chalmer E. Faw, *Acts, Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1993) 41.

2. A reversal of Babel

Notice that the gathering of people from every nation reverses the catastrophe of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Recall the story of Babel. People conspired against God by building Tower so high that it would intrude into heaven itself. The Tower builders were arrogant. They blasphemed God. As punishment, God confused their languages and scattered them throughout the world.

Now, we see the reverse of Babel.

- At Babel, God *scatters* people all over the world.
- At Pentecost, God *gathers* people from all over the world.
- At Babel, people travel into confusion and conflict.
- At Pentecost, people understand the most profound mystery of all.

3. Disciples accused of drunkennes

But notice ... some in the crowd do not understand. They accuse the disciples of being drunk. There was something about the disciples' behavior that was similar to being drunk.

We can guess they were overflowing with excitement and energy. They were ecstatic. But they were not drunk, but filled with the Spirit.

C. Peter's explanation / sermon

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!'" ...

Peter responds to the scoffers with an interpretation of the baffling events.

1. Outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-32)

Peter tells the crowds they are witnessing the fulfillment of prophesy. It is the outpouring of the Spirit prophesied by Joel long ago (Joel 2:28-32). Joel said the Spirit would be poured out *on all flesh* in the last days, when God bursts into human history. That's what is happening.

The Spirit—once the exotic possession of the prophets—is now offered to everyone.

- Both males and females—"your sons and daughters will prophesy" (προφητεύουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες ὑμῶν; 2:17).
- Both young and old will be given visions and dreams.
- Both male and female bondslaves will receive the Spirit.
- With the Holy Spirit, there are no social, gender, racial, or class distinctions.

2. Peter's core message

Peter's core message is this: With the Risen Jesus there is divine power loose in the world which is able *to restore all people to God* and *to unite all people* in the New Community of Jesus' People.

D. The Results

1. Repent and receive

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit..."

After Peter's speech, the crowd was "cut to the heart." Peter's message—Word and Spirit—was so powerful that the crowd was convicted on the spot. So they ask, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter's response is straightforward: repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus (4:38).

2. Signs of the Spirit Community

Now we come to the climax of the Spirit's work.

⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All

who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

If we limit the “gift of the Spirit” to ecstatic experiences or particular emotional manifestations, we misunderstand the work of the Spirit.

The work of the Spirit—which includes enthusiasm and emotional highs—is more substantial and more profound than temporary altered states of consciousness. The work of the Spirit represents an *epochal shift in human history*.

There are four signs or marks of the outpouring of the Spirit.

a. Devotion to the apostles’ teaching

First, the power of the Spirit is found among people who devote themselves to the apostles teaching (2:42). The word for “devoted” (προσκαρτερέω) means “to attach oneself to, persist in, spend much time with.”

The apostles’ teaching is primarily reflected in the NT and OT. Therefore, a mark or sign of the Spirit is daily reading, studying, and meditating on the Bible. The Word and Spirit are inseparable. If you want the Spirit, read more of the Word.

b. Prayers

Second, the Spirit produces prayers (2:42). It is likely that the earliest Jewish Christians prayed two times a day as did all devout Jews.

In fact, these Jewish believers continued to go to the Jewish Temple to worship and pray. Being part of the New Messianic Community does not mean that Jews (or anyone else) gives up their ethnic identity and practices.

c. Breaking bread

Third, the presence and the power of the Spirit is a tangible and visible when the Messianic Community of Jesus breaks bread” (2:42).

- Sharing food together creates a fellowship of equals at Christ’s table.
- Eating together is a mark of unity, solidarity, and friendship.
- Eating together breaks down barriers.

- Eating together pictures the future Messianic Banquet where people will come together from every tribe and nation (Luke 13:29).

d. Fellowship / *koinōnia*

Fourth, the Spirit produces *koinōnia* or fellowship (2:42). This is a miracle of Pentecost—people “from every nation” are unified as one body (2:5). Fellowship is more than warm-hearted get-togethers; more than picnics, potlucks, and parties.

Look at verse 43. Fellowship includes “wonders and signs” (2:43). What do the “wonders and signs” refer to? Look at verse 44. The “wonders and signs” refer to believers having “all things in common or *koinos* (κοινός)” (2:44). We are told they sold their possession and redistributed the wealth so no one had any need. That was a miracle!

When we read about this communal sharing, we are tempted to dismiss it as impractical or naïve or antiquated.

But, if we keep reading the Book of Acts, we hear the same thing two chapters later; the disciples shared their possession, redistributed wealth, and no one has any material needs (4:32-37). We hear about the same thing in Paul’s letters. This kind of *koinōnia*, this type of sharing-fellowship, is put forward in Acts Two as proof of the miraculous work of the Spirit.

This text is a very disturbing. The Spirit disturbs us. Just as the Spirit disturbed the Jewish disciples of Jesus to include people from every nation in the messianic community of Jesus, so this text disturbs us. We are materialistic people. We define ourselves by our possessions and this text encouraged us to redistribute our possession within the community so there is no material need in the church.

It disturbs us, because we must become nonattached to one of the things in our culture that we in are most attached to. That is how the Spirit works. The Spirit wants everything. Our whole being. All of our possessions. Everything must be available for God’s use.

E. Conclusions

The question is: ***Are you Pentecostal enough?***

Being Pentecostal often means speaking in tongues, engaging in certain forms of ecstatic worship, and participating in the signs and wonders of God. All of that is true. But that is not where Acts Two puts the emphasis.

1. Acts Two shows the power of God's Spirit in ushering in the Kingdom. The Spirit brings communication, understanding, and unity among very different people groups from around the world.

Are you Pentecostal enough?

If we claim to have the Pentecostal Spirit of Jesus, then, like the earliest disciples of Jesus, we cross ethnic and cultural boundaries. We take efforts to communicate and understand people different from ourselves. We try hard to include people from every nation in Messianic Community.

2. Acts Two also answers the disciples' question: Is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6) The answer is "yes!" Acts Two shows the beginning of the restoration of the remnant of Israel, the God's people, Messianic Community of Jesus. The Spirit draws people to Jesus and moves them to repentance, to being filled by the Spirit, and to join the community of Jesus.

Are you Pentecostal enough?

If we claim to have the Pentecostal Spirit, we follow Jesus and seek forgiveness. We are open to being filled by the Spirit. We devote ourselves to the Word, prayer, breaking bread, and fellowship defined as economic sharing. We also invite others to do the same, to follow Jesus, join the messianic community, submit to the Spirit, and live nonattached lives in devotion to God.

God wants everything. God wants each of us. All of our being. All of our time. All of our possessions. Everything at God's disposal—"That God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).