

Pentecost: The Ultimate Surprise Party

June 9, 2019

Scripture: Acts 2: 1-12

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.'



As we have seen over the course of this sermon series, God is in the business of doing the surprising and the unexpected. It is God's specialty. Sometimes this

comes in the form of how God does something. Sometimes it comes in the form of whom God chooses to do the action. And sometimes the unexpected comes in the recipient of God's saving work. Today we will see God moving in a very unexpected way and affecting some very surprised people. Let us pray...

As we begin today, I invite you to turn in your Bibles to John 14. Here we find the story that comes before story. This passage in John 14 comes in the midst of what we now know as Holy Week. The triumphal entry has occurred, and Jesus knows that His death is imminent. In John 14 we find Jesus beginning to prepare His disciples for His departure. In Verse 6 Jesus tells His disciples that He is "*the way, the truth, and the life*" and that "*no one comes to the Father except through me*". Then, in the second half of chapter 14, Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit. In today's passage from Acts, the promise is fulfilled. I wanted to begin today by looking at the promise as it is given. This adds a little depth and background to our scripture for today.

In John 14, starting in verse 18, Jesus tells His disciples:

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

These words of comfort and encouragement must have filled the disciples with a sense of hope. They will not be orphaned. When the world no longer sees Jesus, the disciples will still see Him. When the resurrected Jesus returns and walks among them – when Jesus reveals Himself over a period of 40 days - the disciples will know that Jesus is in the Father just as He is in them and as they are in Him. He goes on, beginning in verse 26, to connect with the time after He ascends back to the Father. Even then, Jesus will not leave the disciples as orphans. Turning to verses 26 and 27, we read why:

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid".

The followers of Jesus will receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will teach them and remind them of the things Jesus said and did. It will dwell in them and bring them a peace. Jesus encourages them to not be troubled, to not be afraid. In Spirit, Jesus will remain with them. What a promise, what a gift!

Last Sunday I spoke of a story of reversals, of people finding freedom and imprisonment and of the journey between these two places. In the book of Acts and in this sermon series, this idea of reversals has been present as well. We have witnessed God doing the unexpected and the surprising, bringing many people freedom through faith in Christ. We have observed how God has reshaped thinking and has moved the church beyond its limited understandings to see the whole world as their parish, as their mission field. We have spent time these pasts five weeks in Acts 5, 9, 11, and 16. Today, we jump back to Acts 2, back to the beginning of the story. When we look at the larger scope of the Bible, we also find that it is full of reversals and stories of redemption.

As a young man, George's life was filled with debt and despair, with loss and infirmity. A cerebral hemorrhage left him paralyzed on one side. For four years he could not walk, much less write. Then, at age sixty, after several failed attempts to write music, he fell deep into depression and into deep debt and into hopelessness. He assumed his life was over. At his deepest point, a friend challenged him to write a sacred work dedicated to God. For twenty-four days he sequestered himself, read scripture, and poured his every effort into his work. He barely had time to eat. This was a far more ambitious, grandiose production than he had ever undertaken before. Every word came straight from the Bible. It was at his lowest point in life that he took his greatest risk. What emerged many consider the greatest oratorio ever written. Perhaps even you have sung, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" followed by a few "Hallelujahs". George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* is a song that could have been sung straight from heaven. George's story is a real-life tale of how God can use the most unlikely person to do an unexpected yet amazing work of faith.

If we reach back into the scriptures of the Bible, we find that an experience like Handel's was not a one-time occurrence. Nor is it happenstance. In Genesis we find the story of Abram and Sarai. They were promised a child and to have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. The years pass and, now known as Abraham and Sarah, they have given up hope of ever having a child. But well into old age, as Abraham approaches the century mark, God surprises them with a child of their own. And then there is the story of Peter the fisherman. He has fished all night and this upstart rabbi appears on the shore and, after teaching the crowd, asks him to put out into deeper waters, to let the net down for a catch. Surprise! The net is so full of fish that they have trouble getting it to shore. In an unexpected turn of events, Peter becomes a fisher of men. And then the wonderful and unexpected event that lead to life for all. Remember how they laid the body in the tomb, thinking they were done with this Jesus. That story did not quite end how anyone expected, did it? Again, our God is the God of the surprising and the unexpected, the miraculous.

Despite ample evidence that this is just who God is, we are still surprised when God shows up and reverses the circumstances that are apparently stacked against Him or against His people. Why is this? Why are we surprised? Being surprised again and again by God's interventions is like that person whose friends throw them a surprise birthday party again for their next milestone birthday, again throwing them off guard, again being in true shock when they open the door to shouts of "Surprise"! And now, I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Acts 2, to look at one more surprising and unexpected act of God.

Fifty days after Easter, Jesus' followers were gathered together, to observe Pentecost and to worship God. In verse 2 we read, "*suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting*". This violent wind attracted a crowd. Jerusalem happened to be filled with Jews from all over the world who had come to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost.

Continuing on, in verses 3 and 4, we read, "*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*". The Jesus followers who had gathered to worship their Lord experience the unexpected. These good old Galileans begin to speak in different languages. Some speak in the language of the Medes and others in the language of Mesopotamia. Others speak in Egyptian and others in Arabic. The believers were first filled with the Holy Spirit and then they were blessed with a gift from the Holy Spirit – the ability to speak in tongues. The implication is that for all of those people – people from all over the known world – for all of them – they heard someone speaking in their native languages. Not just some of these visitors to Jerusalem heard their own language – all the people heard the Word of God being spoken, telling them all about "*God's deeds of power*". We read that all that were there were amazed and perplexed. There was no explanation for what God was doing in and through these followers of Jesus Christ.

There are, of course, some doubters. There always were and there will always be doubters, scoffers, those who do not want to believe. Peter rises and addresses the crowd, helping them to understand what has happened. Peter connects back to what these Jews would understand, to the prophet Joel, from

the Old Testament. In Joel 2, which is quoted in verses 17 through 21 in our passage today, he prophesies that God will pour out the Spirit and that some will prophesy, that others will dream dreams, and that others will see visions. Joel prophesied that the Spirit will even be poured out upon slaves. Joel concludes with this word: "*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*". This, of course, ties into God's plan for this Pentecost day. Reading on in Acts 2, we find in verse 41 that 3,000 were added to their number that day. 3,000 in one day!

As amazing and unexpected as this is, the real surprise that day was the change in Jesus' followers. Yes, they could speak the Word of God to people in ways that they never could before – in their native tongues. That was amazing. But once they received the Holy Spirit, they were different. They were bolder; they were more able to minister with power from above. They were less afraid of human persecution and the powers of this world. They were definitely more unified, and they were certain of their purpose in life: to spread the gospel. This group of believers would become the church, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, they would move out from the first Pentecost to change the world forever.

As I draw to a conclusion today, I once again remind you of the fact that God can and will use anyone. In this sermon series, we saw how God used both Paul and Peter and several visions to build the early church. We saw God use some pretty unlikely people – a Roman centurion, a Jewish woman who dealt in purple cloth, a jailer – drawing them and their whole households to faith in Jesus Christ. We have their stories of conversion. We can only dream of how God used them to go out into their worlds to share this same good news with those they met. Who knows how far the kingdom of God spread as these secondary characters

shared their stories of faith. And then there was the chief persecutor of the earliest church, Saul. In a quick minute, he met Jesus and became Paul, the greatest missionary of the early church. As I said before, if God can use a guy like Paul... As we have considered these unexpected and surprising acts of God found in the book of Acts, I hope you have considered how God might use your faith story and your relationship with Jesus Christ to continue to build the kingdom here in this time and place. If you have not, I hope and pray that you will do so in the next few days. God wants to use all of us. Yes, He does!

Today as we gather, we too celebrate Pentecost - the church's birthday. On this day I invite you to remember and to celebrate how God took a pretty rag tag bunch of people and changed them into something pretty powerful, all through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. No offense church, you look pretty rag tag. May the Lord our God take ahold of this beautiful church, of this body of Christ, filling us all with the power of the Holy Spirit, leading us all out into the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, continuing to build the kingdom of God here on earth. May it be so for each of us this week. Amen and amen.

GPS – Go, Pray, Serve

- 1) Go. Your faith story is unique to you. To whom can you go this week to share the story of what God has done for you?
- 2) Pray. This week pray for God to reveal how the Holy Spirit is working in your life and for guidance on how to use this work of the Spirit.
- 3) Serve. Handel's story was extraordinary. God most often uses the ordinary. What simple act of love can you offer to another this week?