

Filled with the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-21

Happy birthday! This filling of the Holy Spirit changed what was original harvest celebration into the birthday into the birthday of the church of Jesus Christ. At the original birthday party there the 12 disciples (11 of the original and one chosen by lot), certain women, including the mother of Jesus, others that had followed Jesus through his ministry, and devote Jews from all over the Roman empire.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church is both the sign and the instrument of the launch of the church's mission. The disciples had been instructed by Jesus to wait to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5) and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be "my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). So they waited—until Pentecost, when the gathered disciples experienced in unmistakable ways the promised outpouring of the Spirit.

This rush of Spirit power initially enabled the disciples to proclaim their gospel message in the languages of the diverse peoples gathered in Jerusalem. In this text the Spirit also empowered Peter to offer the first sermon of the church era. This sermon linked that morning's outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the promise from Joel of just such an outpouring in the "last days" (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28-29).

This text from Acts gives us a beginning point: the Holy Spirit is poured out by God the Father to empower the church to advance Christ's mission to the very ends of the earth. The Holy Spirit enables the disciples to preach God's Word, and to be understood even in languages they do not know. The Spirit empowers numerous awe-inspiring "wonders and signs" (2:43; cf. 4:30-31), and miracles of healing,

economic sharing, and community (2:41-45). The Spirit gave the apostolic leaders courage in the face of threats and even the beginnings of martyrdom (4:8, 29; 7:55). The falling of the Spirit upon believing Gentiles confirmed for Peter and other early church leaders that the gospel was to be shared in the Gentile world (10:44-48). The Spirit provides guidance in major decisions, such as the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul to missionary travel (13:2) and the decisions of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

The apostle Paul further taught of the Holy Spirit, who "helps us in our weakness" (Rom. 8:26), sends spiritual gifts to equip the church for her ministry (1 Cor. 12), reshapes the character and temperament of cooperating believers (Gal. 5:22ff.), and empowers such mysterious worship and edification gifts as speaking in tongues and interpreting the meaning of such speech (1 Cor. 14:1-25), or receiving and speaking a divinely inspired word of prophecy or song (1 Cor. 14:26-32).

Where to go, what to do, how to worship, who should speak in worship, what should be said in worship, who should lead the community, how the community should be led, how to relate to outsiders, who should relate to outsiders, what to say when under threat—these and many other matters were handled through reliance on the empowerment and direction of the Holy Spirit. With Spirit-filled freedom came tremendous gains in shattering received religious and cultural patterns of all types, including crossing the Jew-Gentile barrier, making advances against sexism, and moving people toward radical economic sharing and away from selfishness. The church also relied heavily on a kind of trusting communal intuitionism, in which Spirit-empowered believers were given wide latitude to discern and communicate the Spirit's engagement with them just as they felt led to do so. (**David P. Gushee**)

In the extensive planning of this Pentecostal party, the spirit of *YHWH* weaves together the generations through a Spirit that brings life out of death, hope out of despair. We recognize the darkness and distress of our world. As we witness the growing gap between the rich and the poor, growing manifestations of poverty and unchecked disease, growing divisions between nations and within economies, and growing intolerance of any opinion or ideal other than our own, we celebrate our glimpses of the work of that Spirit, and we await again blowing of that fresh and life-giving Spirit and powerful "priesthood of all believers."

By the end, the disciples face the uncertain future of ministry in an unwelcoming world separated from one another and from the corporeal presence of Jesus. In the midst of the wilderness of these celebrations, these folks live the fear of transitions begun and changes realized.

Many of us know this fear. Some of us are transitioning from the challenges of childhood to a whole new set of challenges that accompanies raising families and planning for futures in a world full of unpredictable economies and unequal access. Others of us sit in church realizing that while our seat or pew does not change, our world does. We mourn the loss of the church, the community, the family, or the constant stability we once loved. Times of life transition come with promise and hope, with fear and mourning, and we experience them all.

Finally, after the preparations and the guest invitations, after the mourning and sense of loss, we celebrate that at this party folks take away some incredible party gifts. Some of those disciples have been training for this time for up to three years as they learn by their mistakes and Jesus' example, through the challenge of parables told and crosses to be borne. Now this birthday party has the feel of a graduation party. The promise of the Spirit was finally fulfilled, and they receive their authentic voices, with which they will enter an unwelcoming world preaching and living the love of Jesus.

This narrative challenges us to find the Spirit within ourselves and to locate, claim, and utilize their authentic voices, gifts, and skills with which to love and serve. However, we cheapen the Spirit and her gifts if we reduce them to dwelling exclusively within the individual. This Spirit that swept through the house gifted more than those disciples at Pentecost and the disciples with whom we minister today. That Spirit has been loosed into the world, and its creative and life-giving power is now the gift of families and communities, of churches, and of nations. The relevant question becomes not just "How will *I* respond to these party gifts of the Spirit?" but "How will *we* respond to these gifts?" (**David M. Bender**)

Peter reminded his listeners that "all flesh" includes us; people of all ages and sexes, all humanity: "my slaves, both men and women, ... shall prophesy" (v. 18). It is at "the Lord's great and glorious day" (v. 20), when "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 21). (**Stephen A. Cooper**)

Spiritual Power. Sometimes the power of the Holy Spirit known in worship services resembles the vision of poet-theologian Amos Wilder: "The world is molten and hearts are sifted. The altar is like a third rail that spatters sparks. The sanctuary is like the chamber next to an atomic oven. There are invisible rays and you leave your watch outside." Spiritual power can create thundering choirs, soaring rhetoric, over-the-top praise bands, and sermons that rock with joy. It can create congregations who sing with their hearts in their faces, pray without ceasing, and extend themselves for others. Acts 2 shows a big God with a big word at work expanding out into a big world. A Holy Spirit filled life is available to each of us and to this church. These are the kind of God and the kind of story that inspire listeners and create, not little people of the little word, but believers who are madly expressive. (**Jana Childers**)

Some of us have seen visions and dreamed dreams. Some of us have the gifts of healing, encouragement, leadership, hospitality, teaching, singing, but others

have discouraged us – some did not believe. But the Holy Spirit is waiting for us to be like those on the Day of Pentecost, to understand that we are equipped for ministry to expand the kingdom of God. My brothers and sisters, you are indeed filled with the Holy Spirit and equipped to be witnesses to the ends of the earth!

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to have an understanding of a promise;

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to experience a change;

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to participate in a surprise;

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to proclaim a sermon;

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to give a scriptural quote new meaning;

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to receive a promise;

And today that same filling of the Holy Spirit is available to each of us! Thank God!

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