

BEGINNING AGAIN
Acts 2:1-21

Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
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I was glad when they said unto me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

Today is Pentecost Sunday, which, on the church calendar, celebrates the birth of the church, the beginning of the community of Christ. Today churches all over the world celebrate what happened at Pentecost – when the Spirit of God blew in, like a mighty, rushing wind, with blazing fire.

Pentecost has at its root the number 50, meaning the 50th day after Passover. As a harvest celebration, Pentecost was the gathering of the first harvest fruits and giving them to God.

Following the events of Acts 2, it also came to symbolize the harvest of the church, as we experience the long-awaited arrival of the Holy Spirit and the very birth of the people of God, the called out ones, the church. Three thousand repent on Pentecost and call Him the Christ.

Luke wrote both the Gospel and Acts, they were two volumes of one book. Following the crucifixion of the Christ, the downcast disciples are gathered together at the end of Luke’s Gospel. But suddenly, Jesus stands in their midst. “Why do you doubt? Why are your hearts unsure? Come, feel my hands, my feet. It is I myself. Touch me. I’m not a spirit; I have flesh and bones.”

While they marveled at the resurrected Messiah, He said to them, “Can’t you get me something to eat?” Jesus eats broiled fish. Following the banquet of fish, Jesus begins opening up the Old Testament to them, showing how it predicts both His death and His resurrection. “It is written that the Christ should suffer and rise from the dead the third day,” He assures them. And then He spoke of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name for all the nations. Finally, the last words of advice from the once dead, but now living Lord, “Go and stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Then He ascends. And they return to the temple, continually praising God.

Like any good sequel or series, Acts rewinds the action just a bit as it begins. Turn to Acts 1. Jesus teaches his student, his disciples, for forty days (between His resurrection and His ascension) about the kingdom of God. Gathering them together (1:4), He tells them, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for what the Father promised...for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” This gathered group of 120 disciples is made up of the twelve, the women who follow Jesus (1:14), and Jesus’ family – Mary, his mother, and his brothers – and other disciples.

And in our text today in chapter 2, we celebrate the arrival of the Spirit and the birth of the community in which the Spirit dwells, the church.

I. Together (v. 1)

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all **together in one place.**”

The church of Jesus Christ had its very beginning – its birthday – as the gathered people of God. They were “all together in one place.”

Now, I know it’s best for many of you to worship from home for a few more weeks or even months. I realize we have many more people watching by television and livestream than we do here in the room today. But, eventually, and ultimately, always and everywhere, the church is a gathered people of God. When the day of Pentecost came, they were “all together in one place.”

Today we are together once again – in one place. Precautions in place, but we’re together.

I recently read a work that explored the history of Amarillo. I discovered that even as the architects were designing this very sanctuary, there was a delay in the drawings because, and I quote, “A smallpox epidemic swept through Amarillo in the early months of 1927.” The church minutes of First Baptist Church of Amarillo at that time note, “There were no public gatherings of any public nature in the city, therefore no church services or conferences were held [in January and February.]”

The planning of this very room was put on pause because the church could not gather together for eight weeks. This time, it has been ten weeks, but pauses for pandemics put forth no new problems for the pioneers, the people called First Baptist Church of Amarillo.

On that day of Pentecost, they were all together in one place. Today, Pentecost again, and we begin anew – gathered in one place.

I wonder, back in 1927 when they were permitted to worship together again, did it feel like today? Were they glad to be gathered, like the early disciples, all together in one place? Were their hearts heaving with gratitude and their eyes moist with tears of joy?

When God’s people gather, mighty things happen.

II. Tongues (vs. 2-4)

“And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”

On that day, to all peoples in every language, the church was empowered to speak God’s message of the Messiah. Jesus is the risen One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is Israel’s

rightful Lord (2:36). And all who respond in repentance and receive the Holy Spirit become part of the community of God, the church (2:41-47).

There was no culture that could not to hear the message, the gospel, the word of God. Every tribe heard the church preaching in their own tongue.

There may be many languages, but there is only one message.

Acts 2 is a reversal of the Babel story of the Old Testament. At Babel, God scattered them, multiplied their languages – tangled their tongues – as they tried to steal His glory. But here God brings them together with one language – everyone hearing and understanding the good news of the Christ.

III. Translated (vs. 5-8)

“Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?’”

Look at that list beginning in verse 9. The Medes. The Elamites. Skip on down – those from Cappadocia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Cyrene. Some from Rome. Others, Cretans and Arabs. Each and every one heard the message of the Messiah as if the apostles were preaching in their own language. A miracle of utterance or translation – speaking or hearing?

It is the intent of God – always has been, always will be – that all men and women from every nation, every tribe, and every tongue, will hear the good news of the Christ, confess their sins, repent, receive the Holy Spirit, and be ready for that day when Christ returns.

Today is Pentecost. It’s the beginning of the church, and, today, for First Baptist Amarillo it is a beginning again.

The disciples gathered together – 120 followers (1:15) in one place. We don’t know if they start out in an upper room or at someone’s house. But eventually they make their way to the temple courts, where thousands of people could both hear and heed the gospel. Because it is Pentecost, pilgrims are there from all nations. God waited until this opportune time when in one place, gathered together, He would have peoples from all places hear the preaching of the kingdom. And 3,000 said yes to Jesus (2:41).

I love Luke’s expression in verse 1, “for the day having arrived.” My translation says, “Pentecost had come.” The waiting period was now complete. Look back again at 1:4. “He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised....”

The waiting was over.

Sometimes the waiting time is the hardest time of all. For many of you, not gathering in this room has been almost unbearable – not because God isn't everywhere, but because God is especially here among His gathered people. This is a sacred place for you. Within these walls, worshiping with these people – your brothers and sisters in Christ – has returned. “They were all together in one place.” Here we bless our babies. Here we celebrate the wedding of our children. Here we bury our brothers.

And then the wind rushes in as they gather. Wind and fire. Together they are signs that God is present, aren't they? Think about the fire on Mount Sinai when Moses receives the Law. Think about the pillar of fire that led Israel in the evening. Think about the prophet Isaiah, when he was in the presence of God and smoke was filling the house of worship. Or at Elijah's ascension in 2 Kings 2 – fire and wind work together. Perhaps a fitting allusion to recall Jesus' departure.

IV. Take Away (v. 12)

The crowd asked the question – the only question that matters – “What does this mean?”

What does it mean for the church to be gathered together in one place and receive the Spirit? For the fiery word of God to be proclaimed like a mighty, rushing wind?

The response was divided.

Paul experienced the same when he preached – the divided crowd. And every time the Messiah performed a miracle, some believed and some doubted. Everyone is not always ready for God to intervene.

Some cry out in repentance. But some said, “These men are drunk; they are mad with wine.” Peter stands in the midst of the confusion (v. 14), standing with the other eleven disciples, and declares, “These men are not drunk, as you suppose...” (v. 15). And then he gives the gospel.

In verse 17, he says, “It is the last days.” The prophets had spoken of “the day of the Lord” (Isaiah 13, Isaiah 58, Ezekiel 13; Ezekiel 30; Joel 1; Joel 2; Joel 3; Malachi 4). Early Christians spoke of “the day of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5; 2 Thessalonians 2; 2 Peter 3). Or “the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 1), “the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1), and “the day of the Son of Man” (Luke 17).

All of this means the day of the Messiah, the day of the Christ has come. On this day, God pours forth His Spirit upon all humankind. “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” On that Pentecost, with the birth of the church, they began to have visions and dreams. They saw signs and witnessed wonders from God.

First Baptist Family, we cannot go back to business as usual. You remember. Before the coronavirus, we came into this room taking for granted the opportunity to gather, to praise God. May this pandemic reignite our passion for our Christ and for His people, the church. Indeed, may the young men among us and the young women among us see visions. May our sons and our

daughters prophesy. And, yes, may the old men dream dreams – new dreams. New dreams for God. New dreams for First Baptist. New dreams for our own personal commitment to the Christ.

The message that Peter preaches in the verses that follow is clear. The age of fulfillment has come. The age of fulfillment has come through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The resurrected and exalted Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the sign of the church's power. And we wait for the complete consummation when Christ returns. Until then, all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be forgiven.

V. Transformation (vs. 21, 37-38, 41)

What must we do?

Look how the sermon concludes. “And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (v. 21).

After the 1918 influenza epidemic, an African American pastor by the name of Grimke stood in his pulpit upon reopening of the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. – the beginning again for his church. He said, “What is the meaning of it all if we come and go and are no wiser for it? Surely God had a purpose in it, and our duty is to find out what that purpose is and to try to learn from it.”

1. One thing we've certainly learned is that we are not in control. No matter the plans of mice and men, the kings, the queens, the presidents, and the prime ministers could not control the coronavirus. No matter how superior our science, no matter how advanced our modern medicine, an invisible enemy utterly changed our lives overnight. All of a sudden, we were powerless. We are creation, and He is Creator. We are dependent, and He, sovereign. We are feckless, and, yet, He faithfully forms our future.

2. We've learned the sacredness of sanctuary and the comfort of community – a joining like that very first day of the church, and all being together in one place. May we never, ever, take worship of God for granted.

3. Declare his deity and repent, being baptized.

And in the coming months and years ahead, may we dream new dreams and have a new vision. And as we begin again, may we, too, tell of the mighty acts of God (v. 11).

Pentecost all over again.

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of God.”