

**A “PANHANDLE” PASSAGE**  
**Acts 2:1-13**

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Someone has said the search for energy is the modern history of mankind. I certainly understand that perception. In fact, some would even argue that the current geopolitical climate around the world is greatly influenced by a battle over sources of energy.

We search for new sources of energy. Biomass. Geothermal. Nuclear. Hydroelectric. Solar. Some even set forth the methane gas produced by cow manure. But that really might be a moot point after all, because there is no efficient method of passing gas from cows to our homes and automobiles. At least, not yet.

But wind has no limits as an energy source. Especially in the Panhandle. In fact, according to weather.com, Amarillo ranks #1 in the windiest city in America contest. (Poor Lubbock only placed at #3.) So if anyone would appreciate a sermon on wind, surely it is you.

Well, long before we began looking to wind to turn on our lights or fire up our furnace, the early church was dependent upon the wind as its sole source of power.

The Greek word used for “Spirit” is the same word for “wind” or “breath.” This baptism for which the disciples are waiting in the Acts of the Apostles is the very breath of God blowing upon them, the wind of God. Blow wind, blow.

Remember, moreover, what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3? “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going; so it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

The wind is a terribly powerful thing. The wind, said the prophet Ezekiel, was the Spirit of God. The prophet Ezekiel called to the wind to blow upon the dead bodies in the valley of his vision. It was the breath of God that breathed upon them and filled the dry bones with new life. Listen to the words of Ezekiel in 37:9. “Then God said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Come from the four winds, O breath, and breath on these slain that they may come to life.’” So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ... And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it,’ declares the Lord.””

Ezekiel saw the valley full of dry bones. And the Lord commanded Ezekiel to call upon the breath of God, the wind of God, the presence of God’s Spirit. And the bones were born to new life.

That's what happens here in Acts. The Spirit of God is audible in the sound of the wind.

Our passage today is also about new life, about the birth of the church. It's the dawn of the Day of Pentecost and the followers are gathered to wait and pray. In Acts 1:4-5, Jesus gathered them together and "He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

In 1:8, He tells them, "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses...."

Things are about to come loose, to break open. It's the same wind which on the very first morning of all mornings swept across the dark waters – the wind of creation (Genesis 1).

The wind again, as in Genesis and in Ezekiel, is giving life to something. But this time, it is giving life to the very church of God.

### **I. Without this mighty rushing wind, there would be no birth of the church.**

Verse 1: It's the Day of Pentecost. They were all together in one place.

**For a first-century Jew, Pentecost was the fiftieth day after Passover. It was an agricultural festival. It was the day when farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop, and offered it to God, partly as a sign of gratitude and partly as a prayer that all the rest of the crop, too, would be safely gathered in. But for the Jew, neither Passover nor Pentecost were simply agricultural festivals. These festivals awakened echoes of the great story which dominated the long memories of the Jewish people, the story of the Exodus from Egypt, when God fulfilled his promises to Abraham by rescuing his people. Passover was the time when the lambs were sacrificed, and the Israelites were saved from the avenging angel who slew the firstborn of the Egyptians. Off went the Israelites that very night, and passed through the Red Sea into the Sinai desert. Then, 50 days after Passover, they came to Mount Sinai, where Moses received the law. Pentecost, the fiftieth day, isn't (in other words) just about the "first fruits," the sheaf which says the harvest has begun. It's about God giving to his redeemed people the way of life by which they must now carry out his purposes. (N.T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, Pt. 1, p. 21)**

Verse 2. "And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting."

Jesus had just gone up into heaven (1:11; 2:2), and, now, the sound comes from heaven – an obvious correspondence.

Joel, the prophet, had said this was going to happen. "And it will come about after this, that I will pour forth My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men

will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.” (Joel 2:28ff.).

Joel was saying God is going to open the windows of heaven and pour forth His presence, His Spirit, upon God’s people. We can expect it to happen because Joel said it was going to happen.

But John spoke of it too. In Luke’s first volume, in chapter 3, John the Baptist says, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (3:16).

John said it, and Jesus said it as well. “You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:48-49). And He told them, “You are going to be clothed with the very power of God.”

Joel. John. Jesus. They’re all saying the same thing. The church is going to be born, the Spirit will be poured out, and you will be sent on a mission.

They are gathered together – probably the 120 who are mentioned in Acts 1:15. And they wait on the Holy Spirit.

**Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead. (John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 60)**

## **II. With this rushing wind, Babel is undone.**

Verse 3. Accompanied by this rushing wind, there is the appearance of “tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.”

Fire represents the presence of God. A bush that burns before Moses. “Take off your shoes; you are on holy ground” (Exodus 3:2). Fire is God.

Or God is the pillar of fire that led the children of Israel at night. God is the consuming fire on Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 4:24). Hebrews 12:29 declares “Our God is a consuming fire.”

And John said that while he baptized with water, there was one coming who baptized with the Holy Spirit and in fire (Luke 3:16).

Fire joins wind as the emblem of the Spirit’s power. God, Himself, is in the representation of the fiery tongue was on them, in them, and upon them. And they were submersed in God.

Verse 4. And thus, “filled with the Holy Spirit they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”

Now this is not some unknown, holy ghost language. I think that exists – for example, in the city of Corinth as represented by 1 Corinthians. But that’s not what’s happening here. Jews have come from every nation on the earth, from far-flung lands of the Dispersion. And they were astonished as they heard the loud praises of God uttered by the disciples in inspired language. For just this moment, the disciples seemed to share the mastery of most of the tongues spoken throughout the known world. *Xenolalia* is the miraculous speaking of a language unknown to the speaker.

We have the eruption of the Holy Spirit in the wind and in the fire. It leads to proclamation by the disciples in languages that are not their own, which leads to bewilderment by the bystanders. (William H. Willimon, *Acts*, p. 30)

They are amazed (v. 7). They are bewildered. “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?” Notice all the nations represented. “What does this mean?” they asked (v. 12). Some seem to think they’re drunk.

**The gift of Pentecost is the gift of something to say, a Word to speak in the brokenness and tragedy of the world that is unlike any other word. Did you notice what happened to the church when the Spirit was given? It stood up and it spoke. It moved from silence to language. It talked, and the whole world heard the good news in its own languages. As the prophet Joel said, “In the latter days, I will pour out my Spirit on all of humanity. And your sons and your daughters will prophesy.” Your sons and your daughters will have a Word to speak, that life is stronger than death, that hope is deeper than despair, that every tear will be dried, and that in the power of Christ’s resurrection, death and pain will be no more. That Word is our gift to speak. (Tom Long, “What’s the Gift?” [http://day1.org/3822-whats\\_the\\_gift](http://day1.org/3822-whats_the_gift))**

**The whole question of Acts 1, you remember, was of how God would fulfill the promise to extend his kingdom, his saving, sovereign rule, not only in Israel but through Israel, to reach the rest of the world. In other words, the question had to do with the challenge to see how God was going to fulfill what he had said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: “In you, and in your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed.” And this promise to Abraham comes directly after the dramatic and comic chapter in which the people of Babel are building a tower, thinking arrogantly to make a name for themselves. God’s response, as always, to human pride and arrogance is to overturn the project and ridicule the people, which he accomplishes by confusing their languages so that they cannot understand one another and cannot, therefore, work together on creating a human society which would have no need of the creator God.**

**Now Luke is implying, with the day of Pentecost this curse is itself overturned; in other words, God is dramatically signaling that his promises to Abraham are being fulfilled, and the whole human race is going to be addressed with the good news of what has happened in and through Jesus. (N. T. Wright, p. 28-29)**

### **III. You can't organize or box in a wild wind.**

The Spirit of God is that immeasurable, uncontrollable force of God that causes people to do His will and His way. I can preach the gospel until I'm blue in the face, but unless the Spirit of God is blowing in the midst of the hearts of men, there is no response.

As Will Willimon says, as we read this text we are listening to an account of something strange, something beyond the bounds of the imagination. Miraculous. Inscrutable. An origin which, as far as Luke is concerned, was the only way one could explain the existence of the church.

The Spirit made the difference.

**A man wanted to ballroom dance with his wife. So he went out and bought a book to surprise her. A "how-to" book. He took it home, and he read, and he studied. He imagined himself dancing. When the instructions said sway, he swayed. When they said lean, he leaned. When they said spin, he would spin. He even cut out footprints and arranged them as the book asked him to, so he would know exactly where to step.**

**Finally, he thinks he's got it. He calls his wife in to surprise her. "Honey, watch." With book in hand and reading aloud (so she'd be impressed that he was doing his homework), he followed the instructions, step by step. One step here. One step there. To the side. To the fore. He keeps this up, reading and moving, reading and dancing, through the whole thing. He collapses, exhausted, on the sofa and says to his wife, "What do you think? I did it exactly right. I didn't miss a single step."**

**His wife responded, "You executed it, all right. You killed it."**

**"But I followed the rules. I laid out the pattern. I did everything the book said."**

**"But you forgot the most important part," she said. "Where's the music?"**

**With that, she put on a CD. "Try it again," she said. "Quit worrying about the steps. Put the book away." She held out her hand. He gets up and takes it, and the music starts. The next thing you know, the guy's dancing – he's really dancing, moving to the music without the book.**

**Sometimes we try to do church without the Spirit. We can memorize all the books of the Bible, order ourselves into an army of do-gooders. But if we miss the music, if we're without the Spirit, it's wooden, mechanical and flat.**

**Jesus knew that. So He introduces His disciples to the song maker of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. (Rubel Shelly, *Great Themes of the Bible: Spirit's Indwelling, Faith Matters*, faith matters. faithsite.com)**

#### **IV. We are all Pentecostal!**

So many times, as Baptist people we have confused the Holy Spirit with the American Pentecostal movement. If we're not careful, we can neglect the Spirit of God for fear that's not "our brand of faith." We are all pentecostal if we are His.

**Perhaps you've heard about the young couple from the hills of Arkansas who got involved in a church where there was a lot of shouting and clapping and running for Jesus. They were trying to convince Grandma she should attend.**

**"You should have seen it," the young man said to Grandma. "The Holy Spirit was really there!" Grandma kept rocking and didn't say a word.**

**"And Grandma," said the young woman, "you should have seen the preacher. He really got with it. He was screaming at the top of his voice, and the people were popping up like popcorn to praise the Lord. It was unbelievable, Grandma!" And again, Grandma kept on rocking away.**

**Finally, the young man said, "Grandma, don't you like our new church? Aren't you listening to what I'm saying?"**

**Grandma finally spoke. "Honey, let me just put it this way. I don't care how loud they shout, I don't care how high they jump. It's what they do when they come back down that counts." (Adapted from Hal Brady, Dallas, Texas, [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com))**

The Holy Spirit of God is not to be confused with emotional, flamboyant forms of worship. One worship style doesn't lend itself anymore to the presence of the Holy Spirit than another. Whatever a community's style – reserved or eccentric – all styles are empowered by the Spirit of the Living Lord, and only by the Spirit of the Living Lord.

When you're empowered by the Holy Spirit, you're no longer willing to accept the mundane or the mediocre. Life led in the Spirit refuses to go back to the predictable, controllable spirituality of the flesh. When we are driven by the Spirit of God, individually as a congregation, it ought to be scary to some people. It's dangerous. We're dangerous people.

When the church begins to live for the kingdom of God rather than earthly kingdoms, we are a frightening people to those to the left and to the right. For we, indeed, march – or should I say today – dance to the beat of a different drum.

Peter stands up in the midst of this blowing, violent wind and these flaming tongues of fire and these many languages and this confused situation where some think they're drunk. What does it all mean?

It means the church is being empowered. Go back to Acts 1:8. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

The Spirit comes that we might go and tell the world – whatever their language – the story of Jesus.

Is your own life arranged in such a way that telling the story of Jesus by the empowerment of the Spirit is top priority for you? Is the life of this church so ordered, this community called First Baptist Church so ordered that, empowered by the Spirit, to tell the story of Jesus is what we're about? Are we ready, are we willing to leave the Upper Room to be empowered by the Spirit and to make the proclamation of the story into which we are called?

Right in the middle of the madness of the blowing wind of the Spirit, Peter stands up and quiets the crowd (v. 14). Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "What does it all mean?" (v. 12). Peter is going to tell us next week.