

## *“Come, Holy Spirit”*

*Genesis 1:1-9; Acts 2:1-13*

June 5, 2022 – *Pentecost Sunday*

I gotta tell you, one of the blessings of being a pastor at any church is getting to spend time with the kids. A few years back, at a previous church, the kids and I worked together to make the communion bread. We had such a good time mixing the ingredients and kneading the dough. I remember it got a little messy with kids and dough all over the place. IT was such a good time. Finally, when the bread came out of the oven, I took one of the loaves, cut it up into slices and wrapped each piece up in plastic wrap. I gave each child two pieces of the bread. I told them to try one piece and then, when they got home, to give the other piece to one of their parents and simply tell them about God’s love for us all. I initially considered instructing the kids to give the other piece to anyone they wanted. Then my mind got to spinning. What if that person didn’t want it? Well, that might not be so good. So, I played it safe and told them to give it to their parents. No sooner had I given the bread to them all then one of the kids walked straight up to me and asked me a question. “Can I give my piece of bread to somebody *other* than my parents?” Curious about why, I asked, “Why wouldn’t you want to give it to your mommy or daddy?” The child replied – “Because other people need to know about God’s love too.” Hearing this, all the kids began thinking of someone who really needed to hear about God’s love instead of their parents. It was neat to see that even children could identify people in need of God’s love. It really drew a contrast between what the children were willing to do and what I was willing to do. WOW! I thought - they got it. They really get the spirit of Pentecost. Better than I do sometimes.

While I was thinking about people turning down that piece of bread, they were thinking about sharing God’s love with everyone. Further, and this is key, *they were undeterred by the prospect of rejection*. While I was in some small way, rationalizing away our Christian calling to share the Gospel with outsiders, the kids were willing to share that piece of bread, that little reminder of God’s love, with anyone they could. And then it really struck me - here was one of our kids willing to do something few of us would consider – walk up to an outsider and tell them that God loves them. *But our whole religion is built upon those little acts of evangelism*. If it weren’t for those early disciples walking out to the very ends of the Earth and sharing the Gospel, then Christianity, at least as we know it today, wouldn’t exist.

Our Pentecost reading from Acts reminds us that we’re not left alone in our task to evangelize in the name of Jesus Christ. God sends the Spirit to be with us in our witnessing to the world. As we evangelize in the name of the Lord, the Spirit is with us! I mean imagine where they were. Jesus had left them. They were again, apparently all alone to face a world that was hostile enough to Jesus to kill Him. Further, they were His followers. As I’ve shared before, prior to Jesus, there were several men who proclaimed themselves Messiah. They weren’t of course but, after their shenanigans, all of their followers were executed as well. This was no time to stand up or to stand out. To be sure, to be vocal now was to put oneself in danger of the highest order.

But the Spirit won’t let us remain silent. We see this so clearly in the Apostle Peter from Acts. In that crowd, filled with doubt and detractors, skepticism and scorn, Peter stands up and does the unthinkable by today’s standards! He evangelizes. He speaks of Christ even in an environment hostile to the idea. Filled with the Spirit he preaches the Word to an audience that was less than receptive. Remember, they thought he was drunk! Further remember, this was still the same world in which Jesus was killed for being subversive to the Roman empire and Jewish hierarchy. Jesus had been killed and while the disciples knew of His resurrection, not everyone else did.

And what Peter did isn’t like what I’m doing here this morning. Not really. You see, each week I get to stand up here in front of you wonderful Christians and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. But I get to come in here and, well, I get to preach to the choir, both literally and figuratively. When I come into this pulpit, I’m talking to a Christian audience. It isn’t likely that someone will backtalk me.

But there, at Pentecost, jeers could’ve easily broken into Peter’s sermon. No preaching to the choir there. In fact, some of the folks gathered there would’ve thought Peter a complete nut-job. Some of them would have

rejected his message outright. But he evangelizes nonetheless. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter evangelizes in the name of the Risen Lord.

Although this is the first one in the Book of Acts, there are many evangelistic sermons just like this one. One of those sermons comes from Stephen, the first deacon. He shares testimony about Jesus just before the crowd stones Him to death. The point being, the Spirit comes into the lives of those early disciples and the next thing you know they're sharing the Gospel message with everyone they meet and it doesn't matter the rejection or the potential for danger, they speak nevertheless. And these aren't trained ministers. They're not that educated in the Bible nor do they hold seminary degrees. They're fishermen and tax collectors. They're former prostitutes and they're the previously unclean. And yet the Spirit rushes in and makes the whole motley group of them evangelists.

Does that happen to you sometimes? Do you think about sharing about Jesus only to have doubts come in and flood the good idea away in a torrent of worry? Look, the Holy Spirit does a great many things, too numerous to mention in a thousand sermons, but it seems to me the primary purpose of the Spirit's arrival is revealed here to us in Acts 2. When we read through Jesus' last words to His disciples, when we read the Great Commission, when we read this second chapter of Acts, we can't help but acknowledge that the primary purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit is *evangelism*. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit, *and then to be witnesses*. The language of the Gospel of John verifies this. The Spirit is sent to be alongside us as we testify, giving witness to Christ.

But I think the truth of the matter is sometimes we aren't so willing to do the witnessing part. Sometimes we neglect our calling to trust the Spirit and evangelize. One of the real dangers that comes when we get to thinking about the Spirit is that we'll focus too much on what the Spirit does for us without considering *why* those things are done for us. It's easy for us to think that the only reason the Holy Spirit came is for our benefit, for our Christian growth and for our comfort. *We forget that the Spirit came to empower us to reach out to the world, telling everyone about the love of Jesus Christ.* The Spirit is here so that we'll talk about Christ and the salvation He brings. The Spirit is here so that we, like the children of that church, might walk up to a stranger, give them a little piece of bread and say, "God loves you."

UGH! – Evangelism we might think. In fact, I'll bet some of you have already uttered in your mind the standard – "that's not my gift" or "Not ME!" Or maybe you think – good thing there are Baptists or Pentecostals in the world. They can do it, not us. But, listen folks, those aren't effective cop-outs according to the Scriptures or to our Reformed outlook. Jesus and Peter and Augustine and Calvin and Barth were all evangelistic in their outlook. You see, our reliance on God's grace shouldn't mute our evangelism. If anything, our Presbyterian beliefs should have us out there, telling the world about Christ!

Look, maybe you have apprehensions about evangelism. I get it. I really do. When I get hesitant about it, I'm generally thinking about those people that show up at our doors on Saturday morning fumbling through scripts and laden with pamphlets. But this week, I got to wondering about WHY I feel so uncomfortable when they come to my door. When it gets right down to it, it isn't that I dislike their theology or the disruption to my day or their presupposition that I'm NOT Christian.

Just yesterday morning all my pretense was pushed aside and *I realized that any annoyance I feel ultimately comes from the fact that too often, I'm not willing to be them. I'm not willing to face that much rejection.* And I think really what makes me feel so agitated when they knock on my door is a form of remorse. Remorse coming from the awareness that Christians are blessed with the Holy Spirit for doing just such things.

Please hear me – It doesn't have to be knocking on people's doors BUT WE ARE TO BE SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE WITH CHRIST TO PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF OUR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES. That's WHY the Spirit came on Pentecost and remains with us. To help us live out the Grand Commission. The Spirit gives us that power, that ability. Every one of us. Quoting Scripture, Peter says *"that in these last days between Christ's resurrection and the completion of all things in Him, that God will pour out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."*

Do you see? The Spirit has been poured out on US. Young and old, men and women, none of us are left out. No gender excuses or age limits. Everyone's included! The Spirit can take all of our doubts, all of our anger, all of our brokenness and fill us to the brim with trust and love for God. Looking back on the danger, peril or sadness behind us, the Spirit fills us with DEEP JOY in knowing that God's been with us all along. And it's a purpose-directed joy. It's a joy that we're to take and spread to the world around us through our evangelism.

The celebration of Pentecost is our reminder that the Spirit came, filling us with power so that *we could complete the mission God has entrusted us with – to make disciples of all the nations, teaching them all that we were commanded.* And our opportunities to evangelize are all around us. Several years ago, I was up early in the morning, Benji had woken me and I couldn't get back to sleep. As I was surfing the internet, I ran across a coupon for a free pizza through a nationwide chain. Within six hours, I had emailed, called or spoken directly to a dozen people. And that was just for a free pizza.

As I reflect on Pentecost, I think I may have missed an opportunity. I wasn't always a pastor and I have many friends who don't believe. I imagine in light of Pentecost how much better it would've been if while I was telling my non-believing friends about free pizza, I'd ALSO taken the time to mention God's love, freely given in Jesus Christ. Maybe it would've been a little hokey, I don't know. But I'm convinced that if we put aside our pretense and our pride and just go out there trusting the Spirit and seeking ways to proclaim Christ in our everyday lives then we'll experience the Spirit's power in amazing ways. Just like Peter did on Pentecost morning.

Now I'm not telling you to start knocking on doors, although I don't think it's a bad idea. I am asking you that as you approach this communion table, you reflect on your life. Think about the ways that you've absolutely known God was with you. Those precious moments when you feel the Spirit stirring deep within you. Maybe it came when you suffered with an illness or survived a great loss. Maybe it came as you watched a sun rise or you saw your children smile at you for the first time. As you step forward to receive the bread and grape juice, remember those occasions when God the Spirit did for you what you could not do for yourself.

*As you leave the table today feeling the love God has for you, make a promise to yourself before the taste of the bread and juice departs from your mouth. Promise yourself that the next chance you get, you'll share those wonderful experiences you've had with God with someone new. That's evangelism folks, just as much as knocking on doors. That's why the Spirit came on Pentecost. That's why the Spirit remains with us until the end of the age!*

Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took her boy to a great piano master's concert. After they were seated, the mother spotted a friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity to explore the wonders of the concert hall, the little boy rose and eventually explored his way through a door marked "NO ADMITTANCE." When the house lights dimmed and the concert was about to begin, the mother returned to her seat and discovered that the child was missing. Suddenly, the curtains parted and spotlights focused on the impressive Steinway on stage. In horror, the mother saw her little boy sitting at the keyboard, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." At that moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing." Then Leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child and he added a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience. The audience was mesmerized."

You may feel like a novice, but do like those little children. Go out and talk to someone about Jesus. You'll sure to feel a bit uncomfortable at first but then, the Spirit of the Master will sit down beside you and the next thing you know, you'll be making beautiful music together.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.