

“Happy Birthday!”

Acts 2:1-47

Series: Book of Acts [#02]

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Theme: **Pentecost Introduced Christ’s Powerful Church.**

Introduction

“*Happy Birthday!*” Those are welcome, smile-producing words. Birthdays usually are happy and exciting times.

This morning we are thinking about a very important birthday, the birthday of *the church*. The events of Acts 2, which we read earlier, were exciting for those who were there and part of it. These events were exciting and more than that because they display God’s wisdom and love, His grace and power to create the church, to change people and bring them into the church, and to enable them to live, grow and serve in ways that please and honor Him.

So, we say “*Happy Birthday!*” to the church as we look at Luke’s record of *Pentecost Introducing Christ’s Powerful Church*. The church is powerful.

The Powerful Nature Of The Church.

The church is powerful in its very nature. The church’s powerful nature does not come from its organization or methods, but from the Holy Spirit within.

Look at the opening verses of this chapter, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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 as 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.”

(1-4)

Luke tells us this took place at *Pentecost*. Pentecost is one of the religious feasts and festivals of the Jews. It is also known as the festival of “Weeks,” and as “First Fruits.” It focused on giving thanks for the spring wheat harvest and also the giving of the Law. It takes place 50 days after Passover (and so the Pentecost in Acts 2 was also 50 days after Jesus’ crucifixion).

The book of Leviticus tells us this was one of the times all Jewish men were to come to Jerusalem. Now, after the captivity and the dispersion of the Jews to many different and distant areas, the distance, time of year and weather often made it difficult for some to travel to the festivals in Jerusalem. But at Pentecost the weather was usually good, and the

celebration was well attended. This year, 2008, the first day of Passover is April 20 and Pentecost (what the Jews call Shavuot) is June 9.

The first 13 verses of this chapter describe a *unique* event. First, in a very unique way, God gave a *sign for the ears*. Look at verse 2, again,

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

This was not an actual wind, but a noise or sound *like* a violent wind. It didn't start softly and build, but came *suddenly*. One moment there was normal conversation, the next everything was drowned out by this loud, violent sound.

Sounds get our attention. In 2006 the *Mosquito sonic deterrent device* made the news in Great Britain, when some stores used it to try to keep unwanted teens from hanging around. It was named the *Mosquito* because the sound resembles a buzzing insect. It works by emitting a tone that generally can only be heard by people aged 25 and under. Trials demonstrated that the longer someone is exposed to the sound, the more annoying it becomes. And so, at least the businesses hoped, the young people would leave.

It didn't take long for someone to come up with a use of this technology to *benefit* teens. You can download *Mosquito* Ringtones for your cell phone. One possible use is for school, where teens can hear their cell phone ring and, they hope, their teachers can't.

The sound on the day of Pentecost was one which all could hear and which got everyone's attention. God gave a very dramatic *sign for the ears*.

Then, God gave a *sign for the eyes*. Verse 3 tells us “And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them,” i.e., each of the 120 believers. Again, as with the sound like a wind, this was not real fire, but something which looked like fire.

These two signs had the purpose of getting everyone's attention and letting them know what was going here was not a natural phenomenon. They symbolized what God was doing internally: the Holy Spirit coming and taking up residence in each of those believers, giving birth to the church, and bringing God's *power* to Christ's church.

This power has a purpose. It's purpose is service. Jesus mapped out a mammoth task and journey. We are to be His witnesses to the remotest part of the earth (1:8). The Holy Spirit provides the guidance and *power* for this service.

When you take a holiday or other trip, you may do some planning including checking maps, fuel, clothes, food and money to make sure you are adequately prepared.

The Holy Spirit takes the limitless resources of God and makes them available to us for our service. Without this we will not, we cannot be adequately prepared for our task. The Holy Spirit resides with every believer. He also wants to fill or control and direct every believer.

When you received Christ, the Holy Spirit cleansed and sealed you for Christ, and took up permanent residence within you. The apostle Paul, in Romans 8:9, tells us that if the Holy Spirit is not within you, you are not a believer.

“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

When we turn to Ephesians 5, Paul gives a command in verse 18, “...be filled with the Spirit.” Continually, always be filled, controlled, directed by the Holy Spirit. This is a *choice* we make.

The *baptism* of the Holy Spirit is described here in Acts 2 in verses 2-3—this is made clear in verse 33 and also later in 11:15-16. The *filling* of the Spirit is seen in verse 4. Since that day the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit takes place at the point of salvation when the Holy Spirit cleanses and seals us, takes up His residence within us. Then, we are *filled* with or by the Spirit when we yield control to Him.

The purpose is service. Verse 4 tells us the believers then began to minister for God. Specifically, to speak “with other tongues,” that is, as verse 6 clarifies, to speak to the crowds of pilgrims and residents of Jerusalem in their own languages.

This was a unique, one-time event in the N.T. It was not gibberish or some kind ecstatic speaking. Most of the people there would have understood Aramaic and Greek to some extent. But, verse 11 states, God enabled the believers to communicate “the mighty deeds of God,” to these people in their own, native, heart language.

Here we see the overall task of the church in miniature: the good news of Jesus Christ going to all people in their own language. God gave His church His power to carry out its mission. *Pentecost introduced Christ’s powerful church.* Let’s move on from the *powerful nature* to its powerful witness.

The Powerful Witness Of The Church.

In this chapter we have the first sermon of the church.

Like many sermons today, Peter had three points. First, he addressed the question, “What is happening?” (14-21). He began with what was on the people’s minds. With their question, “What is going on here?” He took them back to what they knew, back to the O.T. Drop down to verse 16. He said,

“...this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND...’”

Peter said this was God at work. God bringing in a new age in which He pours His Spirit upon *all* through Jesus Christ, not just Israel.

Now, Pentecost was not the complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. For example, the wonders in the sky and on the earth cited in verses 19-20, are still to come. They will be fulfilled at the end of this age.

Secondly, Peter addressed the question "Why?" (22-25). The people now knew *what* was happening. The next logical question was, "*Why* is this happening?" It is happening because, Peter said, in verse 22, Jesus is the Perfect One, God the Son. It is happening because Jesus died and was raised from the dead (vs. 23-24). And, because Jesus, with His work on earth being completed, is now exalted in heaven (v. 25).

The believers speaking of God's mighty deeds in the people's own languages were carrying on God's work. *That's why* this happened, to carry on God's work..

Peter's third point addressed the "How" question (25-36). "How do we know these things are true?" The Jewish people accepted God's Word. So, in verses 25-28 Peter took them to Psalm 16:8-11, and then pointed out that King David could not have written all those things about himself, but was speaking prophetically, looking ahead to the Messiah, to Jesus. In verses 34-35 Peter cites Psalm 110:1, which underscores the point that David was talking about the Messiah.

Peter's conclusion is in verse 36,

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

The power of the Holy Spirit through this message is seen as we go on to the results of the witness (37-42). God used this witness to *convict*. In verse 37 Luke writes,

"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart..."

God used this witness to convict these people of their sin; and also to *convince*. Continue on in verse 37,

"...and [they] said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" They were now convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel.

Peter gave them clear instructions. Look at verse 38,

"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.'" (38-39)

First, *repent*. Change your thinking, change your mind about Jesus Christ and about yourselves. Then, *receive* God's forgiveness of your sins and His eternal life by trusting, by putting your faith in Jesus Christ.

You most likely remember the people's response, verse 41.

“So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”

3,000 new believers were added to the small group of 120. Imagine if God added 3,000 new believers in one day here at Knox! Now, we know the numbers are in God's hands, and that Acts 2 was a special and unique circumstance. We also know that the people were added to *Christ's* body, *His* church, not to *Peter's* church. Nor were they added *by* Peter.

So we see the powerful Nature of the church, it's powerful witness, and now also the powerful life of the church.

The Powerful Life Of The Church.

There are four powerful qualities of the church in its infant days that should be present in all churches.

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

This verse gives us a good part of God's pattern for the church to develop or to grow as it should. Luke's language tells us this was real and ongoing devotion to spiritual growth in four specific things.

#1, Devotion to the study of God's Word.

These people did not have the completed Bible. The average person did not own any scrolls of what we know as the Old Testament. But that didn't stop them from meeting together in homes, public places, the courts of the temple and synagogues to go over the Scriptures and see the fulfillment in Christ and the church.

We have such a wealth of resources available that we can't keep up with them. The question is not of the availability of resources, but our *devotion* to read and study God's Word.

#2, We see their devotion to spiritual growth in their devotion to fellowship.

They shared their experiences and lives as they got to know each other and let down their barriers.

Fellowship is not just a synonym for coffee, tea or a meal together. It may or may not take place in those circumstances. It is sharing ourselves with each other.

#3, Devotion to “the breaking of bread.”

They remembered, they focused on Christ's sacrifice, His death for them. They did not observe Communion exactly as we did today. I'm sure there was variety both in the manner and frequency of observance even in those first days. The key

point is that they were devoted to remembering Christ's death for them in Communion.

#4, Devotion to prayer.

They were devoted to spending time in talking with God individually and collectively. The Holy Spirit may well have used this early example to direct Paul to write, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2).

In addition to being devoted to spiritual growth, they were devoted to worshipping God. Notice two phrases:

Verse 43 [a], "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe..."

Then, verse 47 [a], "[they were] praising God..."

Worship begins with "a sense of awe" about God. Seeing something of Him as He really is. Having reverence for Him. It continues then, and has its substance in an *active response* to God for who He is and what He does. Here it was in their "praising God." They were devoted to worship individually and collectively, in planned and spontaneous times.

God's power flows into and through a believer, a church that is devoted to worshipping Him.

The third powerful quality in the life of this church was that they were devoted to each other. Look again at verses 44-46,

"And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart."

Note the highlights of *community* as they knew it:

- they got together, they spent time together;
- they had all things in common;
- they shared with whoever among them had a need;
- they were united in their thinking and purposes;
- they were united in celebration and worship;
- they were united in sharing meals;
- they were united in gladness and sincerity.

Yes, their situation was unique. It was the very beginning of the church and there were so

many new believers. Many of them had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and by extending their stay, now were running out of resources. It *was* a unique situation, but it *is* a model for us.

The fourth powerful quality in their life was that they were devoted to a positive witness. Verse 47 tells us they had “favor with all the people.” Please don’t rush by this! Seven weeks earlier the throngs of Passover cried out “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

When these new believers now stated their faith in Christ who had been crucified and raised, it would often lead to them being put out of the Synagogue, and even being disowned by their family members who did not believe.

They *were* different, but they were not antagonistic toward those who did not receive Christ. They *were* separated to God, His truth and holiness, but they were not arrogant. And, yes, they were mocked, as they were back in verse 13 before Peter preached, but their witness was *positive*.

- It was *for* Christ.
- It was *for* the forgiveness of sins.
- It was *for* life everlasting through Christ.

Peter, and all the leaders, preached directly about sin and confronted sin and false teaching. But they also kept their witness *positive*.

Conclusion.

This second chapter of Acts describes *Pentecost Introducing Christ’s Powerful Church*. It is history, but more than that. We see God’s truth that the church in every place and time is to be powerful.

- Powerful in its very nature, because of God the Holy Spirit’s presence and ministry.
- Powerful in its witness through the Holy Spirit;
- Powerful in its life of devotion to grow spiritually, to worship, to its life of devotion to each other and to the mission of witness.

This truth is basic and vital. Sometimes we yawn at old and familiar things, and look for something new, even in the area of spiritual life, spiritual health or fitness.

Think about physical fitness. The basic principles for physical fitness are old and familiar. There are no short cuts. But there is a limitless supply of new ideas.

For example, Many people say they don’t have time to go to a gym, but they do shop. So one firm came up with *Trim Trolleys*—a shopping cart that is heavier, has a number of different resistance levels, and a screen that shows how many calories you’ve burned.

Then there is the *Game Runner*, a treadmill hooked up to a screen to play video games.

Another device for working out at home is a bicycle lawnmower. Take a bicycle, replace the front wheel with a push reel lawn mower, and you have it!

When it comes to spiritual fitness, we sometimes try the same approach. It's okay to change *the packaging*, but the basic principles of spiritual fitness and power do not change. There are no short cuts.

We also know that not everyone agrees on what it means to have true spiritual power or true spiritual fitness, and how to recognize it.

The key questions are:

- Do we realize God's design for us, for our church, which includes the Holy Spirit taking the limitless resources of God and making them available to us?
- Are we getting up off the *spiritual couch* and *getting into the game*?
- Are we living out the same patterns of devotion and faith those brand new believers in Acts chapter 2 were living?
- Do we really expect God to work powerfully in and through us?

As you spend a few moments with God, thank Him for the church, which you became a part of when you placed your faith in Christ. Thank Him for the Holy Spirit who lives within you and His wonderful, gracious, *powerful* ministry.

And then decide to make sure that each day you rise up to live in light of who you are in Christ and your calling, and to rely on the Holy Spirit to fill, control, direct you.

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