

Sermon: ALL IN!
Text: Acts 2:1-21 NLT
God's Word: 1 John 5:9-13 NLT
Date: Sunday, May 19, 2024
Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens

Acts 2:1-21

2 On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. 5 At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. 7 They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, 8 and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! 9 Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" 12 They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. 13 But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!"

14 Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. 15 These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that. 16 No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

*17 'In the last days,' God says,
'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.*

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

*Your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.*

*18 In those days I will pour out my Spirit
even on my servants—men and women alike—
and they will prophesy.*

*19 And I will cause wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below—
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.*

20 The sun will become dark,

*and the moon will turn blood red
before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.
21 But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD
will be saved.'*

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Pentecost is one of the most important days in the history of Christianity. It is, quite literally, the birthday of Jesus' Church. In importance, it is right up there with Christmas and Easter. That being said, a lot of people know very little about it. Why do you suppose that is?

It's a very spectacular event, filled with lots of drama and even special effects. But, there is no Pentecost Bunny or Pentecost Santa leaving plastic eggs in baskets for the children or gifts under a tree. Grocery stores and pharmacies aren't filled with Pentecost candy for months before-hand. Hallmark doesn't have rows upon rows of "Happy Pentecost" cards. The radio doesn't play Pentecost music from April through June. People don't spend months and months--not to mention--tons of money Pentecost shopping.

And when the church service is over, if we did go to church that morning, that's usually it. We don't tend to go home to our Pentecost celebrations. I wonder why that is.

Before Pentecost there was no church, just a group of about 120 frightened and confused people who had watched Jesus be Crucified, Resurrected and then Ascend back to heaven 10 days earlier. Jesus had instructed them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for "the gift" God promised. This gift, Jesus said was that, "in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

They really had no idea what Jesus was talking about. It was just such a radically different concept—they couldn't get their minds wrapped around it—it had never happened before, it was something brand new! It was something that had to be experienced in order to be understood.

Remember back, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist? What happened as soon as Jesus was baptized? We are told "At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" This was the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We are told that Jesus was led by the Spirit and filled with the Spirit.

A similar thing happens to the 120 Jesus followers on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit comes down from heaven and rests on each of them. And they are able to speak in

the languages of all the pilgrims who had entered Jerusalem from a bunch of different countries in order to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Weeks. It was a wild scene, and it drew a big crowd.

It's like what happens to a person when they have a radical born-again experience. Suddenly, the lights come on in their heart and mind, they understand the Gospel in ways they never understood it before, and they are filled with the Holy Spirit and along with that comes a new confidence, a new courage, a new outlook and a new life. Nothing is ever the same again.

This happened to each one of the 120 first followers of Christ on that day approximately 2,000 years ago. And it happened to them all at once. And suddenly they were on fire!

And who should stand up and give the first Christian sermon in the history of the Church? Probably the last person on earth whom we might expect. The Apostle Peter, the same man who on the night Jesus was arrested, was so afraid that he wouldn't even admit to a servant girl in the high priest's courtyard that he even knew Jesus. But sure enough, this once frightened man, stands up and speaks boldly, and passionately and loudly to some of the very folks who put Jesus to death.

Wow! What a change. What a day. We are told that 3,000 people joined the brand-new Church that day, and the numbers kept growing and growing and growing.

And the Book of Acts is the story of the early Church and how it evolved from there. It's an amazingly exciting adventure. And in it we get a very intriguing picture of a group of people—folks just like you and me—who are continually being changed and formed and transformed in their understanding of God.

And one of the things that stands out most is that even though the Church is born on Pentecost, the Church is not finished on Pentecost. It is a work of God, always under construction—all the way to today.

Even though the first disciples may have been able to preach truth about Jesus with boldness and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that didn't mean that they understood everything there is to know about the God Who created this infinite universe. They knew some basics. If they had been able to comprehend everything at once—it would have been just too much. How could they?

What does the Apostle Paul say in 1st Corinthians 13: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child...Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

For those of you who have been Christians for a long time, how many of you have the exact same understanding of God that you did say, 10, 20, 30 years ago? It's always changing, isn't it. It's growing, it's moving, it's fluid. And it's not that God changes, it's just that our understanding of God and God's ways change the more and longer we live in Him.

And that's because the gift of salvation—the Gift of God's Holy Spirit is an ongoing gift, it's not just a one-time event, and the Church is constantly changing according to the Spirit's leading.

Even on the very first day of the Church something amazing happens. There is a radical social equality for those who receive God's Spirit. Everyone is on the same footing—the old, the young, women, men, slaves and free people, the rich and the poor—they all receive the power of God to prophesy, see visions and dream dreams.

And all these different characters come together to form one Church where, as we are told in Acts 2:44-46: They were all “together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave anyone as he [or she] had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God...” And, of course, as the story continues, they were eventually persecuted and scattered. But all this did was to make them grow faster.

After they scatter, one of the early Apostles, Phillip, meets an Ethiopian eunuch. And the Holy Spirit tells Philip to go and speak to the Eunuch. The Eunuch becomes a believer and asks Philip, “Why shouldn't I be baptized?” And they stop his chariot and go down into the water and Philip baptizes him.

After they scatter, Peter stays at the home of a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. During his stay, Peter preaches the Gospel of Christ to a large gathering of non-Jewish people. And Peter proclaims, “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.” This was brand new stuff that Peter and the early Church were learning little by little, bit by bit. This was radical.

It went against everything they had ever been taught about God and how they were to relate to other people—people who looked differently from them, acted differently, ate differently, thought differently, believed differently, behaved differently. Their understanding of God was evolving bit by bit, day by day, little by little. And it took a long time for the church to embrace these changes.

And many of us are still wrestling with some of the same issues to this very day. The Church is always a work in progress. It is always under construction, changing, growing,

moving. What new things is the Holy Spirit teaching you about God and how you are to relate to others, to those who are different?

Peter received a lot of criticism from the other apostles and believers throughout Judea when they heard what he had done. It was scandalous. So scandalous that Peter had to go to Jerusalem, the home base of the early Church and explain himself to those who were saying: “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them”????!!

Friends, I’m going to be honest with you. Change is difficult. It is just plain hard. It’s not easy to rid ourselves of old prejudices and ways of thinking—especially if these ways of thinking have been ingrained into us since we were young.

However, in order for us to be the church, we have to lay aside our differences. John Wesley would say, “If your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand.” Basically, we can think differently, but love alike. You see, we serve a great big wonderful God. A God that can handle all of our differences. A God who can handle all of our quirks and even our meanness and still calls us His Beloved.

Sometimes, I make God too small. I try and create God in my image rather than the other way around. I want God to see the world the way I see the world, versus me needing to see through God’s lenses. I want God to walk in my shoes and do life my way. I don’t want to have to adapt to God’s way. That requires too much change. I’ve made God too small! How about you? When we try and make God into what we want Him to be instead of living into His image...friends, we are treading on thin ice and headed down a slippery slope. When we lay on God our small-minded thinking, our small worldviews, our own idiosyncrasies, we pass those ideas on to others.

Friends, we are called to be ALL IN! There were no limitations on who could receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Those first 120 followers were all in. They had gathered and prayed and were now waiting in Jerusalem as they had been instructed. Those are the ones who had put their trust in God. Those are the ones who were blindly following. They didn’t know what life was going to look like, but they followed anyway. They were ALL IN! And what a difference! Because they were all in, there were 3,000 converts that day and then thousands more, and then thousands more. THEY were ALL IN!

Do you believe what is on the front of the bulletin? That everyone—regardless of who they are, where they come from, the color of the skin, their economic status, their sexuality, or any other excuse we can come up with to kick people out—EVERYONE is welcome in this place. Nowhere in the text today does it say that the power of the Holy Spirit only came for you or me. It came to all who were open to receive it.

And in Acts, we are able to see a group of believers, people just like us, who make mistakes in their understanding of God and who eventually change their thinking. Some,

though, do not change their thinking. And they are the ones who tend to get in the way of the progress of God's Church and God's plans. They are the ones to whom the Apostle Paul kept admonishing and trying to persuade through his many letters which are recorded in the New Testament.

"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" I'm still trying to figure out exactly what that means, how about you?

A friend of mine recently said, "You know what makes Christianity different from all the other religions? Christianity is about loving God by loving other people. That's it. When we are actively loving and serving other human beings we are actively loving and serving God. "Whatever you have done for the least of these, you have done it to me..."

On the day of Pentecost they were staying in Jerusalem, people from every nation under heaven. When the Holy Spirit filled Jesus' first followers, they began to speak in other tongues which means languages as the Spirit enabled them. "A crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs."

Pentecost was the inbreaking of God's purposes for all of us; bringing people together despite our differences, and it still is... Whenever and wherever the Church is open to the rush of the Holy Spirit; God is making changes in the way we see ourselves, one another and ultimately—God! So are you ALL IN or are you out? You get to decide.

Bucyrus United Methodist Church has been, is and always will be a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. It is a place where healing takes place. It is a place of comfort. It is a place where we pass on the faith to our younger generations. It is a people who love fiercely and who work tirelessly for the sake of the Gospel. It is a church that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the pulpit and with our very lives. That has not changed nor will it change. Are you ALL IN? Friends, this train is taking off! God is doing a new thing. The power of the Holy Spirit is among us. Will you receive it? Get on board, or get off the tracks.

Are you ALL IN?

May it be so. Amen.