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90 Day Challenge II: The Acts of the Holy Spirit
By the Spirit We Are Filled
Acts 2:1-41

We are two weeks into our new 90 Day Challenge, reading one chapter of Acts each week. In our first 90 Day Challenge, we read a gospel chapter every day, but this time we are going deeper as we read and reflect and pray and memorize and talk about what the Holy Spirit is teaching us. I realize this approach is different; it requires more effort and focus. And if it's too much for you, you are welcome to start just by reading the passage... maybe several times out loud in different versions. But my hope is that as we stew together in the same text for several days, we will experience it in a deeper way. So how many of you have done some part of the 90 Day Challenge this week?

We are journeying through the book of Acts—the Acts of the Holy Spirit, we are calling it—because here we are introduced vividly to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Remember, the Spirit is a person, not a thing... a He, not an It. We find the Spirit at work in the earliest moments of creation and periodically throughout the Old Testament. But today, we come to the second most important moment in the history of the Christian Church. The first was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The second... well let me tell you an exciting story from Acts 2.

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. ¹⁷'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

³⁶"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." ³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." ⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Pentecost was one of the three great Jewish festivals. It occurred 50 days after Passover, and during that time Jerusalem swelled with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. It was a time to be among the crowds, joining in the festivities, worshipping, but the 120 followers of Jesus, both men and women, were not among the crowds in the streets. They were gathered in an "upper room" praying and waiting for what?

You heard "what" last week from Pastor Megan. The risen Jesus gave two seemingly contradictory commands to his disciples. First, he told them to go to the ends of the earth and make disciples. Well that sounded like a long trip and a lot of work, so they ought to get started, right? Well... no, because his other command was wait. "I want you to wait for the gift the Father has promised you."

For once the disciples did as they were told—they waited. They waited ten days, praying continuously. And then, on the Day of Pentecost, God kept his promise. Boy, did he keep his promise! Luke struggles to find the words to describe this experience: "A sound like the blowing of a violent wind..." "...what seemed to be tongues of fire." We overuse the word "awesome" to the point of meaninglessness,

but if ever there was an awesome experience in the Bible, surely this was one. Awesome!

But the most important description is about what happened to the disciples themselves. Luke tells us they were “filled” with the Holy Spirit. Take note of that phrase. This is the first of seven times we find it in the book of Acts—filled with the Holy Spirit... filled with Holy Spirit... filled with the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, this was the gift Jesus had promised. This was why they were told to wait instead of go... so that they could be filled with the Holy Spirit. But I have a question for you: Didn't they already have the Holy Spirit? Remember in John 20, when the resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples on Easter night? They were locked behind closed doors for fear of the Jews when suddenly, Jesus appeared. He greeted them: “Shalom!” Then we read this phrase: “...he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

So did they already have the Holy Spirit, or were they filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Yes, both! The Upper Room was an hors d'oeuvres—a taste of what was to come. It was an appetizer to tide them over until the real meal had been laid before them. But it was only at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came upon them—was poured out upon them, filled them to the point of overflowing. Not this... ‘Little breathing’ but this ‘BIG breathing’!

We need to understand this. When we give our lives to Jesus—when we ask him to save us and take away our sins—it is the Holy Spirit who does that. You are not a Christian if you don't have the Holy Spirit in you. Think of it this way. [*Blow up balloon partially.*] Is the Holy Spirit in here? Yes, but there is something more that God wants to do. He wants to fill us with his Holy Spirit... fill us to bursting. [*Blow up balloon fully.*]

Some denominations speak of this as a “Second Blessing” or a “Second baptism”—I reject this. The Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Ephesians, said, “Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit.” The actual Greek means, “Be continually filled with the Spirit” or “Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.” In other words, as Christians, we ought to continuously invite God the Holy Spirit to fill us up. Second blessing... and third and fourth and fifth and one thousandth blessing!

Why do we need this filling? Because there are things in our life that restrict the freedom of the Holy Spirit to use us. Sin, unbelief, distraction, busy-ness—all these things make it harder for the Holy Spirit to do what He wants to do. It's like blowing up this balloon with my fingers tight around the neck. It works, but it is constricted. As believers we must continually confess and release those things that restrict the movement of the Spirit in our lives so that we can be more readily re-filled by Him.

There's another reason we need to be continually filled by the Holy Spirit. [*Let air out of balloon*] We leak! We leak the Spirit. We get anxious, we get angry, we get lustful, we get greedy, we fall back into our sinful ways and we leak! We suddenly realize we are not walking in the Spirit, not producing the fruit of the Spirit—we lack power, we lack courage, we lack conviction—and we realize we need a refill! Once again, we pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit to fill us, fill us... fill us again to overflowing.

I want you to notice two things that happen when Peter and the rest of the apostles allow themselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit. First, they are empowered. When you hear Peter preach this sermon you can hardly believe it's the same guy. Remember, this is the braggart who promised to lay down his life for Jesus and yet three times denied he even knew the man. When we see Peter at the end of John's gospel, fishing with friends, you get the sense he is pretty beaten down. Yes, Jesus is alive... great. But Peter is ashamed and broken and disgusted with himself.

Then comes Pentecost—the rush of a mighty wind and tongues that seem like fire dancing on the head of every person—and suddenly, Peter is a new man! The man who once denied he knew Jesus now stands up, raises his voice and preaches to thousands. And not only does he acknowledge Jesus... he goes for the jugular! Listen: ²³This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. And again, ³⁶"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

He's not pulling any punches, is he? "You were responsible for the execution of your own Messiah! God allowed it; God used it, but you were responsible." How can you account for this courageous new man... this transformation from a denier of Jesus to a defender of Jesus? By only one thing—he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit empowered; He also interpreted. The most mysterious part about Pentecost was that these apostles were suddenly enabled to speak in tongues they never learned, and the foreigners understood every word they were saying. You hear the long list of visitors: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, and so forth... 15 different people groups are mentioned by name. They were "astounded" and "perplexed" and "utterly amazed" at what they were experiencing, especially since these men were Galileans. Did you hear them make that comment? What's the big deal? Well, Galileans were considered hicks—they were the equivalent of "hillbillies" or "rednecks" for us. Their accent gave them away; they were thought of us uneducated doofuses! The fact that Galileans spoke in 15 different languages blew their minds!

Later on in Acts, we learn that one of the mysterious gifts of the Holy Spirit is the ability to pray in an unknown language that no one understands unless someone else has a gift of interpretation. But that is not what is going on here. At Pentecost, they did not receive tongues that hid meaning; they received tongues that revealed

meaning. They did not receive tongues that needed interpretation; they received tongues that were interpretation. The whole point of this Pentecost gift was to allow uneducated men to proclaim miraculously the wonders of God to thousands of people gathered in that place.

So what happened when a Holy spirit-filled apostle proclaimed the power of the resurrected Christ? Did you see how the people received this anointed preaching? "They were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What shall we do?'" Listen to Peter's response: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and for your children... and for all who are far off!" And what happened? 3,000 people were baptized that day... and that was just a beginning!

Is there anyone here who does not need these same gifts from the Holy Spirit? We want to be brave; we want to witness to our faith with courage... but we are timid, frightened, embarrassed. How is it that deniers of Jesus become defenders of Jesus? When we are empowered by His Holy Spirit! Or is there anyone who feels like they don't know how to communicate their faith with others? You may have the courage to speak, but you stumble over words. You don't know how to share the gospel of Jesus with someone steeped in a culture that denies God and embraces immorality as our culture does. We feel like we are speaking a foreign language. How is it that tongue-tied Gig Harborites become eloquent proclaimers of the gospel? When we are filled with the Holy Spirit who translates our words into the language of those we love.

Presbyterians are typically suspicious of the Holy Spirit—too emotional, too weird—and that's too bad! When you have Presbyterians who take the Holy Spirit seriously, who receive his gifts and power and wisdom... when you have a group of believers like this room that says, "Yes, Holy Spirit, I want you to fill me now and tomorrow and every day of my life. Fill me. Anoint me. Empower me that I might have the courage and the wisdom to do all you call me to do." When you have such willing vessels, the Holy Spirit does amazing things. What would happen if this group of Presbyterians spent one month, every day, inviting the Holy Spirit to fill us? How do you think Gig Harbor would be shaken by such an experience? Come Holy Spirit!

In a moment, we are going to confirm our high school students. We will baptize 8 of them. We will anoint all of them with oil—oil represents the Holy Spirit in the Bible—and in that anointing, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill, to indwell, to empower these young disciples to be all that God dreams for them to be.

[After ceremony]

Did you notice Peter said, "This promise is for you and for your children?" We Presbyterians take this passage seriously. It is one of the reasons we baptize infants... because we believe the promise of the Holy Spirit is for us and for our

children. Years ago, we had a ministry called Prayer Guardians. You read about it in the bulletin. Every single baby we baptized was assigned a Prayer Guardian who committed to pray daily for them. It was an awesome ministry, but when both Diane Johnson and Kathy Pandiani, who started it, went to be with the Lord, the program kind of fizzled away.

Well, we think it is time to revive this ministry. Peter warned his listeners to “save themselves from a corrupt generation.” Is today’s generation any less corrupt? Do our children need the gift of the Holy Spirit less today than they did 2,000 years ago? Are there any here who would be willing to be a Prayer Guardian for one child? If so, when you walk out on the way to our Youth Celebration, would you stop in the back and sign up to be a Prayer Guardian? You can get more information at that time.

May we be a church full of Presbyterians who take the Holy Spirit seriously, who invite the Spirit to fill us—and fill us and fill us again—until the power and love of Christ pours out of us.