



Youth Sunday, May 15, 2016  
Ryan Palmer, Director of Student Ministries  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *The Story: New Beginnings* Acts 2

Have you ever had a gift that you didn't know what to do with? When my son was two years old he received a power wheels jeep from his grandpa. I'm positive that as his father I was more excited about this gift for him than he was. The first time we showed him the jeep, ready to be driven, he used it to put rocks in the back... those rocks are still there today. The first time he drove the jeep he would press the accelerator and then stop (felt like a preview of the teenage years to come). I had to show him how to hold his foot down on the pedal. Once he got the accelerator down, I would have to jog beside him to help him steer. Here was this gift that I dreamed of having when I was a kid, that now my son gets to have, and when he got it he didn't know what to do with it or how to use it.

The last few weeks in The Story we have heard about the death and resurrection of Jesus. As powerful and spiritually moving the death and resurrection of Jesus are, it is not the end of the story. There are still promises to be fulfilled, and this is where we will pick up the story today.

This weekend we are celebrating Pentecost, and in the protestant church this is when the disciples received the promise of the Holy Spirit... which is why you may notice the abundance of red here today. Before we get to the reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, let's review what happened in Acts 1.

Luke, the author of Acts, records that Jesus appeared to them over a period of 40 days... teaching them and providing convincing proof of his resurrection. Finally, while Jesus was eating with them He gives them a command to wait, to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit baptizes them. Just before Jesus ascends into Heaven He says to them in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Everything in the book Acts, looking forward, revolves around this verse. The narrative we will see in Acts is this promise being fulfilled over and over and over again along with the Gospel multiplying and spreading to the point where you and I are in this room today. For the rest of chapter one, the disciples are working to replace the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot, and filling it with Matthias. The number of believers that were together was 120 plus the women. Let's open our Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 2:1

*"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." This is the word of the Lord.*

Before we move forward there are a couple things worth looking at here in these four verses. The first thing is Pentecost, known as the celebration of weeks, because it happened 7 weeks after the second day of Passover. Pentecost literally means 50—representing the 50 days after Passover. This would have been a huge agricultural celebration, and people would come from all over from different nations to celebrate.

The next thing is the description of the Holy Spirit. We see in these verses the Holy Spirit wasn't a violent wind, but rather was the sound of a violent wind; and secondly, they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire. These are two symbols—through sight and sound—that are both ambiguous. Both wind and fire can represent multiple things, which keeps the Holy Spirit from being confined.

The last thing worth pointing out is that "they were all filled"—meaning all 120 people and the women, not just the 12 disciples. Once they were filled, they began to speak in tongues that, in this context, is other languages, as we will see in verse 6.

*<sup>5</sup>Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup>When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. <sup>7</sup>Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup>Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Jump down to verse 12. "Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup>Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."*

So the Holy Spirit begins to work, and the response of some of the hearers is that they must be drunk. This accusation leads to Peter's sermon. By studying this sermon today, we will look at a few points on how the Holy Spirit can empower us. I am not saying that this event is the only way the Holy Spirit works, we don't have to wait for the sound of a violent wind or see a flame that looks like a tongues of fire. With that in mind let us continue. Peter's sermon begins like this:

*"Then 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. <sup>15</sup>These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!"*

First off, they were not drunk. Come on people, it is only 9:00am! Here's Peter, who 50 days ago was denying Jesus to the crowds and in hiding for fear of persecution. Now after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, he is boldly standing up in front of thousands of God-fearing Jews and is ready to preach about who Jesus is. This leads us to the first point I want us to hear today. **The Holy Spirit Empowers.** You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. For Peter and these followers it empowered them to speak in other languages as well as to stand up in front of thousands of people to share the truth of Jesus.

What is the Holy Spirit empowering you to do today? Or whom is the Holy Spirit calling you to share Jesus with? Maybe the Holy Spirit is calling you to make a disciple of someone in your life. Whatever it is, you don't have to be afraid; trust that the Holy Spirit will be present with you in this process. Don't be discouraged because of missed opportunities; we all have them. But we can learn from them and grow stronger because of them.

When I was in college, I went out for a little Caesars \$5 pizza. When I got there I felt the Holy Spirit saying, "buy two." So I did, and I said to myself, "Okay, if I see a homeless person from here to my apartment, I will pull over and give the extra pizza to them." I only lived three blocks away, so I was thinking I was in the clear and would have extra pizza for later. Wouldn't you know, in one block I saw a homeless man walking down the sidewalk, and I knew I was supposed to pull over and give the extra pizza to him. Instead of obeying the Holy Spirit, I kept on driving until I got home with my "guilt" pizza. To this day, remembering that moment makes me feel uneasy. This has left me with a choice: I can choose to use that experience as an encouragement to be obedient when the Holy Spirit speaks, or I can dwell on the missed opportunity and feel bad. Just because we fail doesn't mean we can't learn and grow from those experiences.

Peter continues his sermon and begins to preach from the Old Testament book of Joel. This is what he has to say to the crowd about what he read:

*"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup>This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup>But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."*

I don't know about you, but when I'm telling people about Jesus I usually don't start with "you killed Jesus." Peter knows that most of these people are from other nations and were not present during the time of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Why is Peter accusing them of killing Jesus? Let's continue reading to find out; Peter continues in verse 36.

*“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

Peter says it again. “Hey, in case you missed it the first time, let me say it again. You are responsible for killing Jesus. Instead of becoming defensive, when the people heard this truth, they were cut to the heart.

This leads us to the next point: **The Holy Spirit meets people right where they are.** It wasn’t a coincidence that the Holy Spirit filled them during Pentecost, when thousands of people who didn’t know Jesus were coming to Jerusalem to party.

The truth Peter shares is what everyone needs to hear, that we are all responsible for the death of Jesus, even himself, because we have all sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. That is something every person from then until now can relate to—“missing the mark” because we live in a fallen world. Had the Holy Spirit waited until I was more obedient or until I was more mature in my faith or understood more about the Bible, then I would still be waiting on Him. Instead the Holy Spirit met me right where I was—a goofy, disobedient 16 year old, and He changed my life. Let’s see how He changed theirs. Peter continues in verse 38:

*“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.<sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call.”<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”<sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”*

Yes, we all fall short, but we are also justified—freely by his grace—through the redemption that came through Jesus. Maybe some of us here today have been struggling with how to live empowered by the Holy Spirit, because we haven’t truly accepted the fact that we have been justified freely by His Grace, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. I get it. I have struggled at times, feeling unworthy of his grace, and that’s exactly where the enemy wants us to live. Because when we take our focus off of the Holy Spirit, we miss opportunities to be empowered by Him. Think about what this world would look like today if the Church lived in the power of the Holy Spirit daily!

What a beautiful message for this group of people who committed their lives to being obedient to a law they could never fully live up to. Dependent on priests to offer sacrifices to a God they had failed. Imagine the relief they experienced—like a weight lifted from their lives when they realized it’s no longer about what they can do, but rather what Jesus has already done for them. They are forgiven, and all they have to do is accept His forgiveness and, in turn, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We read three thousand people came to know Jesus as their Lord that day and were filled with the Holy Spirit. This brings me to my last point. **The Holy Spirit is not done working.**

We see this in the rest of the chapter 28 of The Story: the Holy Spirit empowering believers to live for Jesus boldly. We see it when Stephen preaches truth to the Sanhedrin and it cost him his life. We see it with one of the greatest persecutors of the Christian church, a man named Saul, who encounters Jesus, receives the Holy Spirit and becomes one of the most influential missionaries of the Christian church. We see it when Peter is no longer hiding from a persecution, rather embracing it, to continue to spread the truth of Jesus. We see it today in men and women who are committed to fellowship, teaching, breaking bread together, and inviting others into that experience and continuing to fulfill our call as witnesses.

We have an opportunity to recognize the Gift that has been given to us: the Holy Spirit, the third part of the Trinity, God, the creator present with us in our daily lives. There no magic words or special ceremony to live with the power of the Holy Spirit. All it takes is for us to recognize daily that God, through His Holy Spirit, is present within us. When we have committed our lives to Jesus, we don't have to wait anymore; he is already there.

It has been a year since my son received his gift from his grandpa. With guidance from me, his father, he is able to drive his jeep all on his own. He can now use his gift to its fullest potential. I actually have to ride my longboard just to keep up with him. If we here today can do the same thing as my son, and recognize the gift we have been given then we too can use it to its full potential.

That gets me excited, because if we as a church live daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will see revival. We will see disciples making disciple making disciples. We will see the Holy Spirit continue the work he promised to do until the day Jesus returns.

Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you His perfect peace both now and forever more. And whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.