

There's a few big days in the church year, like Christmas and Easter. And Pentecost is also one of those big days, just as important as any other. But it's a day that may not be quite as clear to us. We understand Christmas. We understand Easter. But Pentecost? Pentecost might leave us asking like those who were there that day, "What does this mean?" What is the purpose of Pentecost? What happened on that day? And perhaps more importantly, what does that mean for us today?

The first thing we might say about Pentecost is that the thing that happened was the coming of the Spirit, right? The Spirit came down from heaven like a mighty, rushing wind, blowing through the room where it was. The Wind of God blowing where it wills. And tongues of fire descending upon each person who was there, so that they began to speak in other tongues, to speak in other languages, a sign that the Spirit was among them. And they were telling the mighty works of God, because the Spirit had been poured out upon all of those who were gathered together on that day. That, we might say, is what happened at Pentecost.

And while it's all true, Christians, in reality Pentecost is not all that different, if that's the case, from any other day. Because this is not the first time that we see the Spirit in the Bible. Nor is it the first time that we see the Spirit doing things like these. All the way back in the time of Moses, for example, we meet him in the camp as he is resting upon two of the people there. As Numbers, chapter 11, tells us: "Now, two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them." Joshua tried to stop them. He tried to say this wasn't right. You should tell them to stop doing this, Moses! And Moses replied: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them." So the Spirit at that time rested on these two men, and he caused them to prophesy, to speak for God. And all of this was just the same as what happened at Pentecost nearly fourteen hundred years later.

We also meet the Spirit in the time of the judges, a judge like Samson, for example. Where we read in Judges, chapter 13: "The spirit of the Lord began to stir Samson in Mahaneh-Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol." So the Spirit rested on the judges too, pushing them along to do great things for God, to do mighty works in his name, just as he would do more than a thousand years later at Pentecost.

Or we also meet him with the kings and the prophets, like King Saul, for example, where we here in 1 Samuel 10: "When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met Saul. And the Spirit of God rushed him, and he prophesied among them." So the Spirit was rushing like a great mighty wind upon the kings and the prophets, causing them to do these things, just like he would do hundreds of years later at Pentecost.

So if we focus, then, on these things, Christians, Pentecost isn't all that different. Pentecost isn't all that special, because the Spirit came like this many times throughout the Old Testament. But we know that Pentecost is something special. We know that it is something unique, something different. So what happened on that day has to be something else. What is that? That's what we're trying to figure out.

We can see a little bit more of what happened at Pentecost if we think about who received the Spirit on that day. Because in the Old Testament, you'll notice that the Spirit was always given to specific people at specific times. Moses and Medad and Eldad, for example, all had the Spirit, but they were the only ones in the entire camp of Israel who did. The judges like Samson had the Spirit, but they were the only ones in all the land. And the kings and the prophets also had the Spirit, but no one else in Israel did. In the Old Testament, the Spirit was given to specific people at specific times for specific reasons and not to everyone. But at Pentecost, all receive the Spirit. As Acts chapter 2, verse 4, tells us: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." All of them began to speak in tongues. All of them were telling the mighty works of God. All of them, not just a few of them. The Spirit was given to all, not just some, as in the time of the Old Testament. And Christians, when we believe in Jesus Christ, we also have the Spirit. The Spirit has been given to each and every one of us. The Spirit is not given to just some Christians and not others. The Spirit belongs to us all, because we believe in Jesus Christ.

Now we can start to see a little bit clearer what makes Pentecost different, but we're not quite there yet. Because if that was all that made it different, well, what makes it different from today? Because we all have the Spirit, just like they did at Pentecost, but we don't see the same miracles. It's not like when one of us believes, we hear the wind rushing and fire coming down upon our heads. We don't have a mini-Pentecost every time someone comes to faith. So something else is happening at Pentecost. Something else makes it unique, makes it different from every other day.

And we see what that is, Christians, when we look at our reading, especially the great list of names in the middle. And I know that the Parthians and the Medes and the Elamites and Mesopotamia don't mean anything to us today. These words are talking about places long ago that have since passed away. But this picture that we have here is of the entire world. Because if you were standing in Jerusalem with Peter, this list begins in the far east, in what is now modern Iran. And it moves in a counterclockwise motion going around all the world, coming back towards Jerusalem. So we have here a picture of the entire world of that day, and men coming from every part of the world to Jerusalem to worship God. And all who were there heard what Peter said. All of them who were there saw the signs and the miracles that were performed. And as Acts chapter 2, verse 41, tells us: "Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." So those three thousand people, then, came to believe in Jesus, people from all over the known world.

So what exactly happened, then, at Pentecost? These men from all over the world were joined into one body, the Church. Because the Spirit was poured out upon them on that day to make them into something new. The fire of Pentecost was welding them together, like lots of different pieces of metal welded into one, or like a stack of hot metal which is hammered into one single, solid piece. The Spirit was making them one, so that the many became one body in Jesus Christ. No longer with the Spirit be given only to a few people. No longer would the Spirit be given only to Israel and the occasional outsider. From now on, the Spirit would be given to all, to every nation in the world, so that all would come to believe in Jesus Christ. As Peter says in verse 21 of our reading: "It shall come to pass that everyone," not just a few people, but everyone "who calls upon the name of the Lord" would be saved. It didn't matter if you were a Jew or a Greek. It didn't matter if you were a slave or a free man. It didn't matter if you were male or female. All

who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. One united Church called out of every nation by the pouring out of the Spirit.

And yes, Christians, it's true that our human differences would still remain. Differences like race, ethnicity, language, all of these things. Because those differences are good. That's part of how God has made us to be. And those differences will continue even into eternity. But out of all of these different races and languages, they would be united into one body, so that in every tongue and language, everyone would come to say the same thing: that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. That, Christians, that is what happened at Pentecost. That is what makes it different. That is why it is such a great day.

And this unity is not limited to just that day, either. Because that unity which was forged at Pentecost comes also to us today, so that when we believe in Jesus Christ, we are joined together into that unity. That's why we don't have mini-Pentecosts or have it repeated over and over again, because there's no need. We have already been united as one in Jesus Christ.

And this unity goes back also to those who came before Pentecost, all the way back to the beginning of creation. Because as Hebrews 11 tells us: "All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." So without us, then, the saints of the Old Testament are incomplete. Without us, they could not be perfect. But with us, they are completed. With us, they are perfect. Because now all are united in one single body in Jesus Christ. So that we are not united just with those who are alive today, Christians. We are united with all Christians of every time, of every place, of every race, of every language, of every nation, from the very beginning of creation all the way to the end of the world. All are one in Jesus Christ, because the Spirit has united us together through what he did at Pentecost.

So united in the Spirit, then, Christians, let us also be united to one another. Let us stand together as one against the assaults of the world. Let us be at peace with one another. Let us not fight with one another. Let us care for one another. And let us not turn away from a fellow believer, but let us turn towards them in love, because we are all united as one body in Jesus Christ through the working of the mighty Holy Spirit. That is what Pentecost means for us today.

Let us pray. Come, Holy Spirit, mighty Fire of Pentecost, who has united us into one body, the Church. Point us always towards Jesus in all things, so that we may live as one body in him, his holy Church; for you live and reign with the Father and the Son, one God, now and forever. Amen.