

“Prepare and Pray”

Acts 2:1-21

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Today is Pentecost on the Christian calendar, known in these parts as the only day Kentucky fans wear red. On the other hand, there are those among us who feel all the red in the sanctuary this morning just proves God is a Cardinal or Hilltopper fan.

Actually, all this talk about the color red has nothing to do with sports, but the difference God can make in our lives through the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit. Red was chosen by the early believers to symbolize Pentecost because “they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” while they were attending the Festival of Weeks in Jerusalem.

Pentecost was the second of three annual festivals which occurred every year in Jerusalem. The first, Passover, came in early spring and commemorated the release of the ancient Jews from bondage in Egypt. The third, the Festival of Booths, was in the fall and recalled the years the Israelites spent in the wilderness on their journey to the land of promise.

Pentecost, so named because it occurred fifty days after Passover, celebrated Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mt. Sinai. Later, Pentecost became the forerunner of our Thanksgiving when it became a celebration of the earliest wheat harvest. Listen to the instructions the ancient Jews were given concerning this special day.

“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the

seventh Sabbath and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord." (Leviticus 23:15-16)

Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem with grateful hearts to worship the Lord during Pentecost. In all likelihood, more attended this festival than Passover or the Festival of Booths because the weather was better for traveling.

Large numbers of Jesus' disciples were in Jerusalem this particular year to celebrate Pentecost. They were there not only because it was their sacred duty, but also because Jesus instructed them just prior to his ascension ten days earlier to remain in Jerusalem until they were "clothed with power from above." (Luke 24:49)

While gathered in a room somewhere near the temple on that busy day, something remarkable occurred to the disciples. Luke describes it this way.

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

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, they came together in bewilderment because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked, 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?' " (Acts 2:1-8)

Luke goes on to record that Peter, the one who had lost his voice around a charcoal fire the night Jesus was arrested, suddenly found it again. He boldly and powerfully shared the story of Jesus to all who would listen and concluded by saying, "Therefore let all of Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36)

Upon hearing this, the people asked the disciples, "What shall we do?" Peter 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. This

promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord will call." (Acts 2:37b-39)

Of course, not everyone embraced Peter or his message, but Luke records a great number did. He writes that 3,000 responded to Peter's invitation by being baptized. I can only imagine the joy Peter and all the disciples felt.

Like you, I have read and studied this passage many times. Each time, it speaks to me in new and different ways. This was certainly true last week.

What captured my attention was what Jesus said to the disciples moments before he ascended to heaven. Once again, he challenged them to continue the work they had begun, but he emphatically told them to wait in Jerusalem until they had a transforming experience with God and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high," Jesus said. (Luke 24:49)

This intrigues me. **What was lacking in their lives before they received the gift of the Spirit?**

After all, they spent two to three years with Jesus observing his every move. They noticed how he often stopped to listen to people's stories and struggles and responded with grace and compassion. They heard him teach the masses and had countless private tutoring sessions. They listened to him pray and followed his example. They watched to see how he handled adversity, disappointment, temptations, difficult people and his enemies. They had numerous encounters with Jesus after his crucifixion and resurrection, which brought their own faith back to life after they witnessed the crucifixion.

What more did they need to know? What did they not have in order to continue the work he began and embark on their own public ministries?

They needed the empowering gift of the Spirit. The challenges and opportunities they would face would overwhelm them if they relied solely upon their strength. Quite frankly, they would fall flat on their face and abandon their mission.

"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Why was Jesus insistent the disciples wait in Jerusalem to receive 'power from on high'? The Spirit they would receive would actually be a

continuation of his presence with them, and every day Jesus would provide three things his followers needed in order to continue his work of transforming the world through the power of redemptive love: the **ability** to do things they had never done, the **confidence** to believe they could do them and the **courage** to overcome their fears and take risks.

What did Luke want his readers to understand? Why did he pass this story down to his generation of believers?

He wanted them to know the same Jesus who empowered his disciples would also empower them. He, too, would give them the **ability** to do things they had never done, the **confidence** to believe they could do them and the **courage** to overcome their fears and take risks.

Luke also wanted his readers to know that no one was exempt from this promise. Men and women, old and young, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, master and slave, exceptional or ordinary--all could be 'clothed with power from on high'. Just as Jesus invited people from all walks of life to follow him, so he would live in every heart that invited him.

This includes us, all of us, and this is good news!

I don't know what problem you are wrestling with, opportunity has come your way, challenge you are facing or unfamiliar road you are traveling down, but I know this. You will make better decisions and do far more than you think if you let Jesus walk alongside you and help you.

As he did for his disciples and Luke's readers, Jesus will give you the **ability** to do things you have never done, the **confidence** you need to believe you can and the **courage** to overcome your fears and take risks. **Why would you even think about refusing such a wonderful gift?**

It is my prayer today you will receive the gift of Jesus' presence in your life through the Holy Spirit. Humbly and gratefully ask him to walk with you this week as you face your challenges and opportunities. I assure you God will take every step with you.