

EMPOWERED: FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Acts 2: 1 – 13

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I know that as we begin this new year, which to me has given us a desire for a new year, not like the last one; there's a desire from a lot of people I know for change. Change in our world and an end to this pandemic; change in our country and the extremism which seems to be the way for some to go; change within our community and a sense of unity to break out among us; change within our church as we prepare for a new Head of Staff and shepherd to come and lead us; and a change of ourselves with a view towards transformation of who I am into who God calls me to be. We want to see "Habits of the Heart," as someone once called them, develop within us and call us to be more a people of prayer, students of the word, and caring covenant partners to one another. We want to be able to say with Paul what he said about God to the Ephesians, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*" But a lot of us are asking, "How do I get there from here, from here where I'm living my daily life? From here where I know myself to be and it's not there?"

Well, we can take hope from a couple of things Dave Kerr showed us last week, things Luke wants us to know as he is writing the Book of Acts - "Jesus is alive" and "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*" And today I want to look at the second chapter of Acts and see what it means for us to be filled with the Spirit. Remember Dave said the Book of Acts didn't end in chapter 28 but goes on as we see the Acts of the Holy Spirit continue in our lives today. So let's READ Acts 2:1-13

We're not told much about the house where they all were gathered or who they all are. John Chrysostom, the great 4th century expositor believed that it is the 120 people mentioned in verse 15 and not just the reconstituted 12 disciples. But we do know they are all together and sitting when what sounds like a mighty rushing wind fills the house where they are gathered. Then, visually something is added as what looks like tongues of fire come and rest on each one of them. Two things seem to

be happening here. This is a fulfillment of what John the Baptist had said would happen when the one who was to come after him came. John said that he himself baptized with water but this coming one would baptize with wind to separate the wheat from the chaff and fire to devour the chaff. Also there is a fullness of presence as the whole house is filled with the sound like wind and the tongues like fire rest on each one. Then they are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in these other tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance. These are languages not known to them but we will see in a minute they are languages and dialects known to others.

The scene moves from the house out into the streets as we are told that those who have come from all over for the Festival are drawn by the sound. The sound is not the wind but the sound of the disciples speaking in these languages about the mighty acts of God. The pilgrims are bewildered because the ones speaking and praising God are all from Galilee but are speaking in such a variety of languages and dialects they all recognize as being their own. Then we get a kind of roll call of these nations folks are from in 5 groupings. And these are Jews and those who have converted to Judaism who have made the pilgrimage for the Festival. They gather around the disciples and they are amazed because these are Galileans speaking (they are known by their accents) and they are thought to be pretty uncultured people (hicks from the sticks). So the pilgrims ask one another, "What does this mean?" and some provide a quick answer, "Oh, they're drunk." That's a charge Peter will address in the sermon he preaches following this account.

Both wind and fire are symbols for the movement and activity of the Spirit. Both Hebrew and Greek only have one word for breath, wind and Spirit, it's all the same word. In the Old Testament, when God made the dry bones come alive with wind he said, "*Behold, I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.*" And when Jesus meets with Nicodemus at night he tells him the Spirit is like the wind which moves mysteriously and effects new life in people. In the same way, fire is used in the Old Testament as a symbol for the presence of God. And when John speaks about baptism he says Jesus will baptize with fire, as judgment, and it will burn the chaff. So the Spirit's coming will be experienced as both life and judgment to different people.

So let's go back to the question the crowd raised that Pentecost morning, as they saw and heard the movement of the Spirit among them, "What does this mean?" What did it mean for them and what does it mean for us? What does it mean for

them to hear the mighty works of God, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, in their own language? How has this coming of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God changed things in that situation and what ongoing implications does it have today?

Well the overarching implication we can see is that Jesus keeps his promises. He had said he would send the Spirit and the Spirit came. He said the Spirit would come with power, so they could be Jesus' witness to others and that's just what happened. It's also a fulfillment of what Jesus promised through the prophets. In his Pentecost day sermon, Peter will say this is a fulfillment of what the prophet Joel had said about a new age coming years before. What else had Jesus said about this promise he has now kept? Well, he said that the Holy Spirit was a gift he was sending to them for ministry. That's been borne out so far. Notice how the text works to make it clear that it comes upon all of these believers gathered together. It doesn't just come upon the 12 disciples or upon the most spiritual of them. Dale Bruner points out that Luke makes a point of saying they are all sitting in the house. They are not kneeling in prayer or prostrating themselves on the floor before God, showing their piety and devotion. They are sitting around the house. I'll be doing it this very Sunday afternoon. The filling of the Holy Spirit is a gift, given for ministry, not a reward to the spiritually elite.

Jesus also said it was better that he leave and then send the Spirit. Why? We always say, "If only I could hear Jesus himself speak, that would take care of all of my doubts and fears." Well, it didn't take care of the doubts and fears of his disciples who listened to him for three years. They still didn't get the whole package even as he was leaving. They were sitting around that house in obedience to what Jesus had said but also because they weren't sure what to do next. By sending the Spirit to them they were no longer disciples who traveled with Jesus, they were now "in Christ." Through the Spirit, Christ's Spirit was dwelling in them. Look at the change in them. They go from hiding in a house to moving out to the streets to proclaim the mighty works of God. Peter suddenly gets up and speaks with such clarity and conviction that causes three thousand people to say, "What must we do to be saved?"

I think for us, this morning, our question is "How does this 'being filled' work?" Dave Kerr, who used to sailboard a lot and then owned a sail boat could probably do a better job of explaining this than I could but here goes. Andrew Wilson writes in an article for *Christianity Today*:

“When you’re sailing, is ‘being filled with the wind’ an experience or a habit? Both. Catching the wind on a sailboat is clearly an experience. I vividly remember that first feeling of being seized and carried forward by a mighty power from elsewhere. But it is also a habit. If you don’t put the sails up, pull the mainsheet fast, or adjust the jib, you won’t go anywhere, even if the wind is blowing powerfully.

Sailing, in that sense, is the art of attentive responsiveness to an external power. You rely entirely on the external power to get you anywhere. Sailors never imagine themselves to be powering the boat by their own strength. But you also have to respond attentively to whatever the wind is doing, which comes through cultivating awareness, skill, and good habits.

Being filled with the Spirit involves the same both-and. We rely entirely on the Spirit’s immeasurable power, rather than our own strength, to get us anywhere. But we also develop habits. We respond attentively to what he is doing in and through us, a capacity that comes through awareness, skill, and practice.” So we realize the power source is outside of us but we also need to practice that which nurtures our relationship to the Spirit. That is being “in Christ.”

Lastly, this story tells us of our need to move out into the streets. It's fine for us to be together, here in this house this morning but we can't just stay here. We need to take the praise we have for God here and move it out to the streets. Inside we hear about the mighty acts of God but we need to take them outside, translate them as the Spirit shows us how, so that we can be Christ's witnesses in a way that people will understand. We want them to understand that this God we know, love and serve is a God for them. In Jesus Christ, God has made known his love for them and has opened the door to fellowship with him and by the Spirit we can help people understand how that impacts their lives. This story of Pentecost has always been about the people's need and the church's mission. By having the Spirit dwelling within us, the church is now equipped for its mission and ministry just as these 120 disciples were back then on the first day of Pentecost. The church is very distinct as an organization because it is the one organization which exists for its non-members. Church isn't about us. It's about the God who bought us at the price of his own Son's life and about the world he loves. We simply meet in order to be equipped and emboldened by the Spirit for the community which lies outside these walls. It's the mission of the church which matters, not the church itself. We are called to get into people's lives so that we can know their yearnings and be

trusted enough so that when we tell them about what God has done in Christ for them, they'll believe it.

What's on your heart today? You may be looking at the longings of your life and seeing if Jesus is the something more you've been searching for. If so, you have business to conduct with the Lord. Tell him about what you're feeling and about the realization that you can't make it on your own but want him to enter into your life to help you become who he calls you to be. Others of you might be thinking about where the Spirit is calling you to go. Someone once said that you need to look for where what goes deepest to your heart goes widest to the world. The intersection of those two things - your passion to serve God and the unique gifts and talents and passions he has given to you make for a great place to serve Christ. You too, like the disciples that first day of Pentecost are sitting on the edge of a miracle. We need only to invite him to equip and empower us for the service to which he calls each of us.