

“Spirit Filled”

Psalm 104: Select Verses, Ezekiel 37:1-10, Acts 2:1-4 & 12

Pastor James York

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Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine you are eating your favorite food. How would you describe the taste? Now visualize the most beautiful art you have ever seen? How would you write about it? How would you describe the sensation of joy and the warmth of love? How would you define the beauty of a sunrise, the gracefulness of a robin, and the sound of a wonderfully-played musical instrument? All that is good is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

What happened on Pentecost blew away the expectations of all who were gathered there. It was an amazing experience of God. Luke tries to put it into words, **Acts 2:1-4 “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”** Luke is aware that his description of the work of the Holy Spirit fails to convey the majesty of all the Spirit does, so he prefaces his descriptions with “like” and “as of.” Luke is inviting us to savor joyful love and to dream of all the Holy Spirit will do in us and through us.

Our society’s zeal for measuring, analyzing, and explaining everything hinders our ability to enjoy the unknown. G.K. Chesterton, the witty British Roman Catholic writer said, “When tree branches and leaves are waving wildly in the wind, people think of it in two opposite ways. Most of humankind through the centuries has always believed that the wind moves the trees. But in recent times, a whole new breed of people has emerged. They assume that it is the movement of the trees that creates the wind.” He is joking, to make a point. The human consensus has always been that the invisible is what is behind the visible. But after observing how some modern people think, he reports with alarm that the broad consensus has fallen apart and some people naively assume that what they see and hear and touch is the all of reality. What can be tested and verified by the senses is all there is. If you ever find yourself falling into this mindset, then spend some time around children. Observe their joy as they experience something unknown to them.

Let’s set the context of Pentecost, so we can more fully imagine what happened. Pentecost, meaning fifty, falls fifty days after Passover. Pentecost was the Jewish harvest festival in which the first fruits were gathered and offered to God. There is a connection between our call to offer our first fruits, the very best we have and earn to God, the first fruits of revelation to the early church and the Jewish festival Pentecost where people offered their first fruits to God. The disciples were all together in one place revealing the unity and community of the early church. They were surrounded by crowds of people who journeyed from far and wide to attend the Pentecost festival. Luke uses two metaphors to explain the visible signs of the Holy Spirit, wind and fire. The language is metaphoric and the emphasis is on the supernatural. For Jewish people wind and fire were the expected visible signs of God. The wind of creation, the call of the burning bush, the wind that parted the Red Sea, the guiding pillar of fire, the wind and fire at the revelation of the Ten Commandments and God’s appearance to Elijah and on and on. An echo in the New Testament is Jesus’ Transfiguration.

The first miracle of Pentecost was a multitude of people of different backgrounds, statuses, languages, and cultures were all searching for God. The second miracle of Pentecost was instant translation. Over sixteen distinct groups of people were able to understand one another. At Pentecost the

translating work of the Holy Spirit was instant and a free gift of God. The content of their talks was likely the recitation of the mighty works of God. Starting with creation, the liberation of the Exodus, the revelation of the law, the survival through the wilderness, the arrival and life in the promise land, Jesus' life and teachings, Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and resurrection appearances would have formed the core of God's mighty deeds of power and love. Everyone was able to talk to one another and hear in their own language; but, the work of the Holy Spirit was not done, for our scripture says, **Acts 2:12** "**All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'**" The first and second miracles enabled the crowd to perceive God but not to discern what all this meant. They wondered. What does knowing God have to do with their life that day and for their future?

The third miracle of Pentecost was the inspiring of Peter and the disciples to interpret God's activity for others. There are volumes of books that try to explain God. However, many people are searching for someone to explain their personal experiences of God. We come to church, sharing our stories to interpret them for each other. Exploring what God is doing in each situation. What is God inviting us to do or be? Together we praise God for food, art, joy, love, sunrises, robins, music, and all this is good. Filled with the Spirit, inspired by each other, we scatter into the world to listen to those around us, to interpret God's activity in their lives with Spirit filled questions. A miracle of Pentecost is; if you listen to another and listen to the Spirit, then the Spirit will give you the right words to unite them with you and God in joyful love, the Spirit will reveal what God is doing in every person's life.

Peter and the disciples listened, then the Spirit filled them to translate God's joyful love into a language that each person understood resulting in over 3,000 people being baptized. A deep sense of awe came over them. They performed many miracles, signs, and wonders. They understood each other. They marveled in how God was doing something unique in each of their lives. They shared. They joyfully worshiped. They extravagantly loved. Each day seekers came, experienced God, the disciples listened to them, helped them understand what God was doing in their life then they became interpreters for others.

God is always working. Sometimes people are more open to receiving the Spirit and being interpreters for God than other times. The disciples' reception of the Holy Spirit resulted in the rapid growth of the church. The reformers reception of the Holy Spirit educated Europe and the United States so everyone could experience God through the Bible. In the 1700's Jonathan Edwards reception of the Holy Spirit spread powerful logical preaching that sparked the great awakening. Spirit receptive Presbyterians like William Tennent formed many seminaries and colleges.

Many people today feel that we are about to experience another great spiritual revival. They point out that the first miracle has already happened. Many people have a great spiritual hunger today. People are searching for God through media and experimenting with spiritual practices. Many are in desperate need of you to interpret; sharing what God is doing in your life and suggesting what God might be doing in their life.

Some people are alarmed by the latest Pew Research that resulted in headlines such as, "Christians decline sharply as a share of the United States population." If you study the numbers, the biggest shift is from affiliation with a church to "nothing in particular." Many in this group have not found a church where they experience the grace of God; yet, they are searching for God. Perhaps the Pew Research is indicating that we are on the verge of a great Pentecost season. The first miracle has already happened again. People of different backgrounds, experiences, and languages are searching for God. The Holy Spirit is working everywhere. Perhaps God is calling us to listen to them, not to try to change them to be like us, not to give them a list of rules, rituals, and church verbiage, rather for us to explore with them what God is doing in their lives and setting them free to enjoy God. Perhaps God is calling us to be the interpreters that make the third miracle of Pentecost a reality again, a great spiritual

revival. We are all called, like Moses at the burning bush. We are all commissioned by Jesus, to make disciples, to show Christ to the world. We all have the wind of the Holy Spirit filling us.

There is the calm wind of the Holy Spirit that leads us and equips us, giving us serenity and peace. "Peace be with you," said Jesus when he appeared to the disciples after his resurrection. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit," giving them the power to be gracious and love extravagantly making disciples. We are each given peace, ministries, and a sense of direction by the Spirit. The calm wind of God sustains us when life gets tough, nasty, and tragedy befalls us. Whatever the nature of the external assailing us, the calm wind of the Spirit keeps us on mission, on point, and on message. We have inner peace, joy, and overflowing love.

At other times, the Holy Spirit comes as a "strong breeze" with creativity, surprising transformations, and new directions in our lives. Scripture tells the life experiences of numerous people anointed by the Spirit which empowered them for specific tasks and missions. When we encounter situations with new directions, fresh opportunities, and unlimited possibilities, we are motivated and empowered by the "strong breeze of the Holy Spirit to carry out the will of God.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit blows into our life as a "gale" a force that breaks unhealthy patterns and shakes up the status quo. In a world that so often responds to violence with even more violence, we are given the power we need to go in a different direction. Jeffrey Burton Russell said, "Evil is not effectively resisted with hatred and with guns. The only response to evil that has ever worked is the response of Jesus ... and that is to lead a life of love. That means what it has always meant: visiting the sick, giving to the poor, helping those who need help. This is a powerful wind, one that can knock us off balance and push us out of our comfort zones. We need to ask ourselves: Are we receptive to be blown in this direction?"

Next we have the "Holy Storm." This is what hit Jerusalem on Pentecost, turning the lives of the apostles completely upside down. They were reoriented from looking inward at themselves to looking outward toward a world in desperate need of the gospel. They were changed from fearful disciples into fearless evangelists, and they headed off into the mission field with a powerful sense of purpose. A Holy Storm produces a spiritual revival in which the Spirit-winds with great force blow across the landscape of our souls, redeeming and transforming individuals, uniting believers in community inspiring everyone to share, to work together and care for one another in harmony all joined together in a joyful unbreakable bound of love. The Holy Storm has great energy, power, and can change the entire world.

Our scripture reminds us of the great wind of Pentecost, a day when suddenly the Holy Spirit united people with different languages and from different cultures, every barrier was blow over and crossed. The Holy Spirit gave each disciple a motivating fire that empowered them, burned away their guilt, fear and insecurity and set them ablaze with passion to courageously share the wonderful news of salvation through Jesus with the world.

C.S. Lewis said, "God works on us in all sorts of ways. But above all, God works on us through each other. People are mirrors, or carriers of Christ to other people. Usually it is those who know God that bring God to others. That is why the church, the whole body of Christians showing God to one another, is so important."

The Holy Spirit is able to give each of us exactly what we truly need. Open yourself to the Holy Spirit and be receptive to its wind and fire. Many people are hungry for the perfect peace, joy, love, and hope that only God can give. How do you model your faith revealing extravagant, joyful, love? How is God calling you to be a Holy Spirit filled interpreter? Amen