

# Pentecost – For The Church Today

**We can read what happened, but we simply cannot experience what Jesus' disciples felt after Jesus was resurrected.** They had already seen more miracles than most people would ever believe. They had heard the message for three years and still did not understand it, and yet they continued to follow Jesus.

His boldness, His confidence, His sense of destiny made Him strangely attractive.

**But the crucifixion was a devastating blow. All their hopes were smashed. Their excitement turned to fear, they locked the doors and made plans to go home, back to the jobs they used to have. They probably felt shell-shocked, psychologically numbed.**

Then Jesus showed up, and by many convincing proofs He showed Himself to be alive. What a stunning turn of events! How could anyone cope with such a bewildering experience?

**Dead people don't live. They don't talk, don't eat, don't appear behind locked doors.**

What the disciples had seen and heard and touched defied all their previous understanding of reality. It was incomprehensible, disorienting, mystifying, electrifying, energising, all at the same time.

**And then a cloud lifted Jesus into the sky, and the disciples stared into the sky, probably speechless.**

*Acts 1:11 [NIV] "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

**Two angels told them that Jesus would come back.**

*Acts:1:15-26 [NIV] "In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus, he was one of our number and shared in this ministry." (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "'May another take his place of leadership.' Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles."*

So the disciples went back and, with spiritual conviction and a sense of purpose, they prayerfully sought a new apostle. **They knew they had work to do and a mission to fulfil, and they knew they needed help in getting it done.**

**That was an understatement. What they needed was the Holy Spirit, but did not yet realise this need.**

**For a God-sized job, they needed God.**

**For future decades of dedication, they needed more than adrenaline.**

They would have to face persecution from friends and strangers.

They would have to look at old Scriptures in a new way.

They would need divine authority, divine wisdom and divine direction.

They needed power, a power that would give them new life for the long haul, power that would regenerate them, renew them, transform them.

**They needed the Holy Spirit.**

## **Pentecost, a Christian festival**

**Acts 2:1-4** [NRSV] *“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”*

**Leviticus 23:17** [NIV] *“From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD.”*

In the Torah, Pentecost was described as a harvest festival, coming near the end of the grain harvest. **Pentecost was unique among the festivals in that leaven was used in the offering.**

**In Jewish tradition, Pentecost was also associated with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.**

**Nothing in Torah or tradition would have prepared the disciples for the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit on this particular day.**

Nothing in the symbolism of leaven, for example, would have made the disciples expect the Holy Spirit to cause them to speak in other languages.

**God was doing something new.** This was not an attempt to upgrade or update the festival, or to change the symbols or to assign a new method of keeping the old festival. No, this was something completely new.

**People heard them speaking in the languages of Parthia, Libya, Crete and other areas. And many began to ask, What was the meaning of this amazing miracle?**

**Peter was inspired to explain the meaning, and his explanation had nothing to do with the old covenant festival. Rather, it fulfilled a prophecy of Joel about the last days.**

**Joel 2:27-29** [NIV] *“Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. ‘And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.’”*

We are living in the last days, Peter told his audience, and the significance of that is even more amazing than the miracle of tongues.

**In Jewish thinking, “the last days” were associated with numerous Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and the kingdom of God. Peter was saying, in effect, that a new age had dawned.**

Other New Testament writings fill in the details about this change in ages: the old covenant became obsolete, and the era of faith, truth, Spirit and grace replaced the era of the law of Moses.

**Galatians 3:23** [NIV] *“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.”*

**John 1:17** [NIV] *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*

**Although faith, truth, grace and Spirit existed in the old era, the old was dominated by and characterised by law, in contrast to the new era, which is characterised by faith in Jesus Christ.**

We need to ask, as the disciples did in the first century, *“What does this mean?”* (**Acts 2:12**).

We need to listen to Peter for the inspired meaning: We live in the last days, in the end times, in a new and different age.

No longer do we look to a physical harvest, at agricultural life in a tiny part of earth. No longer do we look to the law of Moses, or to the leavened loaves of the Temple rituals.

**Acts 2:17-18** [NIV] *“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”*

**Now, we look to the Spirit, whom God is pouring out on all flesh, on men and women, on slaves and free.**

**God is calling all nations to faith and eternal life in His Son.**

**Acts 2:21** [NIV] *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

**In this new age, what do we do?**

**We preach Christ, just as Peter did.**

The dramatic manifestations of the Spirit were not Peter’s focus, **Peter spent most of his sermon on the identity of Jesus Christ.**

He could have repeated the words of Jesus.

**Mark 1:15** *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

**We live in an age of good news, an invitation to enter the Kingdom of God through faith, through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.**

**How should we respond to the message?**

**Peter answered the question in this way:**

**Acts 2:38** [NIV] *“Repent [turn toward God] and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

**Then we respond further by devoting ourselves as did the early disciples. Acts 2:42** *“to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

## Points from Pentecost

The Christian church continues to commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

In most traditions, Pentecost (also called Whitsunday) comes 50 days after Easter.

The Christian festival looks back to the beginnings of the Christian church. Based on the events of Acts 2, we see numerous valuable lessons in the festival:

- **The necessity of the Holy Spirit.**

**We cannot preach the gospel without the Holy Spirit living in us, empowering us for the work of God.** Jesus told his disciples to preach to all nations, but first they had to wait in Jerusalem until they were “*clothed with power from on high*” (Luke 24:49).

**The church needs power, we need enthusiasm (literally, God in us) for the work set before us.**

“This day [Pentecost] is about the church as the community of the Spirit, not merely about the work of the Spirit in the hearts of individuals. Babel results in disconnectedness, in a confused individualism. The church implies reconnectedness, such as that set forth in Paul’s metaphor of the church as a body having many parts, each different but in need of the others.” (Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church* (Abingdon, 1996), pp. 75-77).

- **The diversity of the church.** The gospel goes into all nations, is preached to all peoples. **God’s work is no longer focused on one ethnic group.** Since Jesus is the second Adam as well as the seed of Abraham, the promises are expanded into all humanity. The diverse languages of Pentecost are a miraculous picture of the worldwide scope of the work.
- **We live in a new age, a new era.** Peter called it the last days; we might also call it an age of grace and truth, or the church age, or the age of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant. **There is an important difference in the way God is now working in the world.**
- **The message now focuses on Jesus Christ,** crucified and risen, bringing salvation and forgiveness to those who believe. The sermons in Acts rehearse the basic truths again and again; **the letters of Paul give further explanation for the theological significance of Jesus Christ, for it is only through Him that we can enter the Kingdom of God, and we do it by faith, and we enter it even in this age. We share in the life of the age to come because the Holy Spirit lives within us.**
- **The Holy Spirit unites all believers into one body,** and the church grows through preaching about Jesus Christ. The church is to be characterised not only by the gospel mission, but also by discipleship, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. We are not saved by doing these things, rather, **the Spirit leads us into such expressions of our new life in Christ.**

**We live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit; it is God within us who brings the joy of salvation, perseverance in the face of persecution, and the love that transcends cultural differences within the church.**