

Under the Influence

Pastor Jeff Wood

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I was reflecting on the rhythm of God's seasons. There is Advent, a time of waiting, and then Christmas comes with its *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* punctuation mark! Then there is Lent, a time of examination, and then Easter comes with its *Hallelujah, He is Risen* punctuation mark! Then there is Eastertide, which we have just been in, a time of processing the resurrection and waiting (again), and then Pentecost comes with its *rushing wind and fiery tongues from heaven* punctuation mark! There's Advent and its culmination with the baby in a cradle, Lent and its culmination with the bloody cross and empty tomb, Eastertide and its culmination with the wind and fire and tongues. Just think...what Christmas is to Advent, Easter is to Lent, and Pentecost is to Eastertide!

In each there is the needful waiting, waiting for a promise, and then the fulfillment. Waiting, fulfillment. Waiting, fulfillment. Waiting, fulfillment. Today, dear ones, is a fulfillment day. Could you use a little fulfillment? Fullness? Filling? How about a lot of each?

Acts 2:1-8 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. [2] Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

[5] Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. [6] When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. [7] Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? [8] Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?

13-19 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

[14] Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. [15] These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! [16] No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*[17] " '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.*

*[18] Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

*[19] I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

Ephes. 5:17-21

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. [18] Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. [19] Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, [20] always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [21] Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In the introduction to his translation of the New Testament JB Philips wrote these words:

The great difference between present-day Christianity and that of which we read in these letters (the NT epistles), is that to us, it is primarily a performance; to them it was a real experience. We are apt to reduce the Christian religion to a code or, at best, a rule of heart and life. To these men it is quite plainly the invasion of their lives by a new quality of life altogether. They do not hesitate to describe this as Christ living in them.

One way of talking about what we talking about today on Pentecost is the experience of Christ coming to live in us. One way of talking about what we are talking about today on Pentecost is the experience of being invaded by Christ. One way of talking about what we are talking about today on Pentecost is the experience of coming under the influence of Christ, not merely as under the influence of his charismatic personality and physical presence or under the influence of his teachings, but under the influence of him, i.e., of him alive, not in front of us or beside us, but actually *in us!*

In Acts, the onlookers, some of them, believe that what has happened to Jesus' disciples is that they are drunk with wine. They are under the influence of

alcohol, they think. In Ephesians it says, “Be not drunk with wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit”. There is some way in which God, coming on and in, in which being filled with the Holy Spirit is akin to being filled with wine. (So he’s less like something we put on and more like something we take in.)

The onlookers that first Pentecost didn’t suspect Jesus’ disciples of being near bottles of wine. At a fancy restaurant you can be seated for dinner in a wine cellar, but that doesn’t make anyone passing by say, “They are drunk with wine; under the influence.”

The onlookers that first Pentecost didn’t suspect Jesus’ disciples of reading the labels of the bottles of wine. “These men have really read Jesus’ teaching!” No one said that. We are influenced by teaching. But that is not what was being said. That is not what they meant by under the influence.

The onlookers that first Pentecost suspected Jesus’ disciples of being filled with wine! In other words, they knew the disciples were under the influence. More than being in the presence of or knowing the teaching of. They thought it was under the influence of something ... the way someone is influenced by wine in them. The Bible tells us that they were under the influence of someone ... Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ *in them*.

People with alcohol issues will tell you that alcohol makes you move slow, dulls memories, depresses judgment, puts you with drinking buddies

who are supportive of drinking and carousing, and can, in some instances, lead to losing jobs, self-respect, and family. But the Holy Spirit is different in that he quickens, enhances, stimulates, aids self-respect, and brings you into relationships where people say, “Behold, how they love one another!”

In other words, the effects of the fruit of the vine in us is very different from the fruit of the divine in us. The fruit of the Spirit is love, patience, self-control, and the like.

A person under the influence of wine, drugs, greed, pride ... you name it ... is hindered. But a person under the influence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit is helped and helped and helped.

I know a guy named Mike who was a welder. He got his training from an old guy named Steve. Mike went off to be certified at the state capitol 400 miles away. When he was done welding, the state examiner looked at the weld and said, “Did you train with Steve?” Mike said, “Yes.” The examiner said, “I thought so. I’d recognize Steve’s work anywhere. He’s that good.” That’s being under the influence – Mike under Steve. Pentecost is all that and something more. It’s not just information and teaching in us as personally administered, as that may have been and as influential as that can be. It’s someone in us.

I’ve been in a canoe in whitewater and felt the influence of that rushing water on my little boat. I was reminded of that as I drove along the Cheet

River in WV on Thursday. The water force... “It’s taking me down those rapids!” And this Pentecost experience is more than being carried along by a force.

I’ve also been in a canoe in those rapids with Ken Kalish, my teacher, in a 17’ Grumman. On the Ontonagon River, I’ve felt the influence of the water on us ... and then I’ve seen how, for all my pulling of the paddle, Ken in his mastery steering us along safely and wonderfully. Pentecost is Jesus ... not just as our teacher, but as one in the canoe of our life with us. He doesn’t seek to take us over like a drug or a hypnosis. He wants to be in the canoe with us, relating to us. And so, via the Spirit, we can hear him steer us with quiet thoughts, “Don’t go to the right, but to the left.” Quiet thoughts of “Try this.” A friend told me he was having a hard time with his son and he heard inside him the thought, “Instead of trying to fix him, try loving him.” That’s Christ inside. A missionary sat on a hill behind his house in the Philippines and bemoaned his struggle to get people to be interested in Christ and he heard inside of him, “Why don’t you show interest in them?” That’s Christ inside.

You see here is the whole Christian story – there is the God above us who made us at creation, there is the God with us (incarnation), there is the God for us (crucifixion/resurrection), and there is the God in us (Pentecost and a different kind of mass incarnation).

Being a Christian has to do with your birthday, Jesus' birthday, Jesus' death day, Jesus' rising day, Jesus' Spirit day. Being a Christian has to do with creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and invasion!

Being a Christian isn't just thinking there is a God who made the world. It's more. It is finding that there is a God who came to be with you/us, who died and rose for us, who comes from out there and back, then to *in here* and *right now*. Have you had a Pentecost? Has Jesus come from *out there and back then for everyone* to *in here and right now* for you?

In Acts 2 the men and women prayed and he came to them. In Sebastian today you can pray and he will come to you.

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

pastorjeffwood@gmail.com www.welovefirst.org
www.facebook.com/welovefirstsebastian