

Tell Me About the Holy Spirit

Pastor Jeff Wood

May 20, 2018

When we look at the size of the world from its population to its problems, it can be hard to know how to engage it – engage it in appreciation, some, but engage it in helping it be better, for certain. Trade wars. Gaza casualties. Sex trafficking. Foreign meddling in elections. Chemical warfare in Syria. What to do? What can anyone do? What can you and I do?

I am surprised sometimes by the fact that there are some very simple answers that if, everyone ... and that's a significant if, ... if everyone got on board with them, 90% of the world's problems would diminish considerably if not disappear completely. For example, carefully caring for the Ten Commandments. For example, putting into practice the Sermon on the Mount. Think about it. They're simple but would, if done, make a marked difference in how the world is.

I've cited the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount but we come to another passage today that gives us building blocks for a better world. It is the account of an event fifty days after the resurrection of Christ. It's called Pentecost where the "pente" has to do with the fifty. It's also called the Feast of Ingathering and it has important information for how the world can be gathered together in a good way.

Jerusalem is swollen with pilgrims once again for this feast. The mood is not unlike our Thanksgiving Day weekend. In it, followers of Jesus are doing what he told them to do. They are praying. He, having risen from the

grave, ascends to heaven. But as he had taught them, when he goes up, his Spirit comes down. The disciples are in waiting, praying, and it happens. And it happens with three unusual, miraculous phenomena. Look for them as I read.

What are the three unusual, miraculous phenomena? The mighty wind. The tongues of fire. The home-language communication so that everyone hears. A violent wind shakes the prayer place. Each believer is lit up. All sorts of languages get spoken and understood simultaneously. In these three there are important lessons for us and a better world empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We in Florida know something about **mighty winds**, don't we? Because of them we, thanks to a gift from the late Don Maclean who knew fierce winds on ships in the Great Lakes, put up storm shutters.

I personally love the wind. I love the breeze on my face; it's cooling. I've known wind from the mountain tops of Wales where we pushed blankets against the doors of a little cottage to keep it from coming underneath them to typhoons in the Pacific. When I was six or seven years old we lived on the island of Guam. The typical procedure was for Coast Guard pilots to fly their aircrafts out of the way of the storm. And leave, we, their families, behind. Hmm, my airplane or my family? One of those typhoons, named Karen, was recorded at 230 mph when it took down the shack that was recording wind speeds. The island was denuded, vegetation stripped. I remember yacht-sized boats dropped hundreds of feet inland from the harbor. I can understand the cleansing nature of wind but this was ... well, somewhere between thorough and devastating.

The wind we read of here is not the kind that destroyed the building in which they were praying, but it was devastating and yet good and right and necessary in another way.

The mighty wind we read of here was supernatural. We don't read that the wind speeds gradually increased. We don't read that it whipped around the house. We read that it was sudden, that it sounded like a freight train, that it filled the inside of the house, and that it came from heaven. It was not normal. It was different. It was not, and this is important, psychological, something they imagined. It was objective and from the outside in.

Much of the time, especially in our culture, we think the problems we have are outside of ourselves and the task is to marshal our inner resources to meet, manage, and conquer them. It's the politicians' fault, just rearrange your votes. It's your family's fault, just get mind and heart tuned in another direction. It's the marketers' fault, just put your will power into it.

But in this incident, we get more of what the Bible has already said, that our problems are not outside us primarily but inside us, that we don't have the resources to meet them, and that what we need is help from the outside ... big, noisy help *from heaven*.

We and this world are given this vital information and help in this passage ... that we cannot save ourselves because our selves is the problem; but there is help that has come and is available from heaven; God's Spirit. Let the righting of the world begin with you and with me wanting, *personally* accepting, the *personal* wind of

heaven. Pray right now, “Holy Spirit, help me, enter me; help us, enter us.”

With the wind come flames about the Christians’ heads. **Fire**, a second miraculous phenomenon. They, the followers, being Jews, would remember when Moses met God with the burning bush, when the Hebrews met God on Mt. Sinai covered with smoke.

The burning bush reminds me of when I was in Kenya many years ago. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa was celebrating an anniversary and they had banners all over which read, “Burning but not consumed.” I thought of how many of our churches might have the banner reading oppositely, “Consumed but not burning.” And I reflect today how many of our own lives might be said to be consumed but not burning. Consumed with greed, dismay, lust, apathy.

However, here in Acts 2, God shows his desire to light lives, to come to us like candles actually meant by design to hold and have a flame, to have us know light and life and warmth and glory through connection with God. To behold and hold. We need the wind of God and life from outside us and we need the flame of God and life inside us.

In that upper room were the apostles and everyone else. These flames didn’t come to just apostles Peter, James, and John. These flames didn’t come to just the apostles twelve minus Judas. These flames came on every single believer and *that* is what the world needs to know – that every individual is important to God, every individual is made to be and can be lit by God, that every individual can be a burning but not consumed bush, that

every individual can be Mt. Sinai, and that means every member of the congregation, not just elders, men and women, educated and uneducated, monied and poor, black and white, young and old.¹ And when we all know that, and when we all have God in us through the Holy Spirit, that God is for every single person, the world will be a different place.

Tongues of fire about the heads but a miracle of linguistic tongues happens as well. In other places in the Bible the gift of speaking a language you haven't known occurs and with the one speaking, there is one who interprets. I had a friend, Peter Hennessey, who, when we prayed, would pray in tongues. He didn't understand the words and no one interpreted. He didn't seem to mind. I didn't either really. But in the Bible, when this happens in a group, there should be an interpreter. Well, in this Acts 2 case there is a bunch of speaking and a bunch of hearing and a bunch of understanding and it's all about God and his greatness and goodness and it is all understood.

All of us have been in situations where someone is speaking a foreign language to us, or to someone else, like Korean or Hungarian, and we are in the dark. But not here in Acts 2.² Everyone can understand everyone. (Repeat this phrase, what a wonder that was and will be, everyone understanding everyone. Really understanding.)

God wants to be known clearly and intimately in the mother tongue of every person. The language learned

¹ This is an application of the Protestant "priesthood of believers."

² They're not in the dark literally because of the tongues of fire. Ha. But neither are they mentally because of understanding the message in their mother "tongue."

in the crib, in the putting on of shoes, in the doing of chores.

I love the ministry of Wycliffe Bible Translators. They have a wonderful headquarters and museum over in Orlando. Through the original Wycliffe we have the Bible in our language. Gone the days when if you didn't know Latin, all the Bible and church stuff was confusing. God continues his desire through their ministry bringing the Bible into hundreds of languages around the world.

We're studying Hebrews on Wednesday mornings. That letter begins with, my paraphrase, "God isn't an uncommunicative, inarticulate hermit or a strong silent type who grunted a monosyllable once. No, he has tried to connect with us repeatedly and in many, many ways including supremely through his in every way exceedingly superlative son." And now, in Acts 2, through many languages speaking of God's loving work through that son.

The "us" that God wants to connect to, is every one of every language ... and languages represent cultures. Every culture and society is loved by God. No one has a higher place in his redeeming love than another. There is a great, beloved diversity as far as God is concerned.

This is not always the case. In Islam, the Koran is only the Koran really when it is in Arabic. I don't say this to categorize Muslims in some bad way. But that faith's approach is different. Not one language for the Bible. It is really the Bible when it is heard so you can understand, whatever language that may be.

So God is helping from the outside in and we want to be humble and take it. That will make the world a better place. God is willing to come to every individual and

that means we prize each one. Us doing that will make the world a better place. And God, he is for every language, culture, ethnic group on the face of the planet. And that news, understood and lived out, will make the world a better place. The Holy Spirit is about making us and the world better.

I don't know anyone who doesn't want the world to be a better place ... nor the building block of the world being a better place, our hearts being a better place. The Holy Spirit, will you open your heart to him today? For he is all about God coming to make everything and everyone better. Come Holy Spirit, come heavenly dove, come right here with us, and fill us ALL, ALL the way, with your love.

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

pastorieffwood@gmail.com.

Also see welovefirst.org

or [facebook.com/welovefirstseastian](https://www.facebook.com/welovefirstseastian)