

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 5, 2022**

**TIMES OF REFRESHING
Acts 2:14-24, 32-39; 3:19
Pentecost Sunday**

For the Call to Worship this morning, I read the account in Acts 2:1-11 of what happened in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Now I want to continue the story by reading portions of Peter's Pentecost sermon – the first sermon he ever preached! – beginning in Acts 2:14. I encourage you to follow along as I read. Let's give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God's holy Word.

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The Day of Pentecost is not a national holiday like Memorial Day or the Fourth of July. But it is a high holy day in the calendar of the Christian year. After Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, Pentecost is the singular most momentous day of the year in the life of the church. Many Christians consider Pentecost to be the birthday of the church, the official beginning of the church.

Without a doubt, Pentecost is a day of historic and spiritual significance in the life and witness of the church.

The word "Pentecost" means *fiftieth* (50th). It refers specifically to the 50th day after Passover. Pentecost was one of the three pilgrim festivals that every adult male in Israel was expected to attend, along with Passover and Sukkoth (the Feast of Tabernacles). Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks, was held seven weeks after Passover. Hence the name Pentecost, since it was 50 days after Passover. In Old Testament times, the Feast of Weeks was a thanksgiving festival acknowledging God as the source and provider of the grain harvest. By the 1st century AD, though, it had also become a time to celebrate God's giving of the Law to Moses – which, like the harvest of grain, was something to celebrate.

But that is not why we celebrate Pentecost. The primary significance of Pentecost for the church is what took place on the Day of Pentecost as described in Acts 2, when God the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of the promise made by God the Son, came in power and fullness upon the followers of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem exactly 50 days (counting Easter as day one) after the resurrection of Jesus.

The coming of the Holy Spirit had been promised by Jesus in Acts 1:4-8, which I read as part of our Call to Worship this morning. Earlier, in John 14-16, Jesus had spoken to His disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit and the ministry the Spirit would have in their lives.

On the Day of Pentecost, with Jewish pilgrims flooding Jerusalem from throughout the Roman world, the promise was fulfilled. In dramatic fashion. With the sound of a rushing,

gale force wind. With what looked like flames of fire settling on the heads of Jesus' followers. And with languages being spoken by people who had never spoken those languages before, announcing the wonders and grace of God in the languages of all the pilgrims.

The meaning of what happened that day was not intuitively obvious to everyone who observed it. It required some explanation. But it sure got people's attention. So Peter, prompted by the Holy Spirit, stood up and started to speak. One of the things that strikes me in Peter's message is the way he shows that what was happening had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier by the Old Testament prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32). Peter explained that the believers were not drunk, as some of the onlookers suggested cynically (Acts 2:13). After all, it was only nine o'clock in the morning (2:15). Instead, this was a momentous act of God in fulfillment of a promise from God to the people of God.

Instead of being drunk with wine, the believers in Jerusalem were filled with the Holy Spirit, which was (and is) God's intention not just for those first Christians but for all of Jesus' followers in all times and places. Including you. Including us. Right here. Today.

It is true that wind and fire and the gift of languages are not God's usual *modus operandi*. Not always, but most of the time, God works more quietly. Sometimes the Holy Spirit does work in dramatic ways. More often the Spirit works in ways that are imperceptible in the moment. In whatever way(s) the Holy Spirit chooses to work or to make His presence known, the thing to understand is that since the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost 2,000 years ago, the Holy Spirit is the birthright of every Christian. The gift of the Holy Spirit is given to every true follower of Jesus.

When you put your trust in Jesus Christ and receive Him as Savior and Lord of your life, you also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is, the Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in your life. Receiving the Holy Spirit is not a separate, subsequent, second experience of grace, as some Christians believe. It is true that being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) is not a one-time event. It is meant to be an ongoing experience, to be repeated whenever our souls begin to run dry – which happens because we tend to leak spiritually. So, we need a frequent, fresh infusion of the Holy Spirit to live our lives at full capacity.

I'll say it again: The Holy Spirit is your birthright as a follower of Jesus. You receive the Holy Spirit – another way to say it is that you are baptized with the Holy Spirit – when you come to faith in the Lord Jesus.

Not only is God the Holy Spirit *with* us as Christian believers, the Holy Spirit lives *in* us. *But*. Here is the *but*: Yes, the Holy Spirit has come to live in us. *But* the Bible says that you can quench the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:19, ESV). You can put out the Spirit's fire (NIV). You can neglect the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. You can ignore the wisdom and promptings of the Spirit. You can let the power of the Spirit go unused. You can go through life without letting the Holy Spirit shape your life for God's purposes. You can refuse to let the Holy Spirit unleash His power through you for witness, service, and ministry. You do so at great spiritual risk.

That's the warning that comes with the incredibly good news of Pentecost, which is that God has given Himself to us in the person of the Holy Spirit to enable us to make it through life in this broken world without losing our faith, our hope, or our way. The Holy Spirit sent from the Father and the Son on Pentecost 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus is God *with* us, God *in* us, and God *for* us. He gives us the power we need (but do not have apart from Him) to live the Christian life and to faithfully serve God's purposes in this world.

So, thank God for Pentecost. Celebrate the coming – the gift – of the Holy Spirit to the church on the 50th day after Easter. Live your life in the light and fullness of Pentecost by opening your heart fully to the presence, power, and guidance of the Holy Spirit in your life.

You cannot live your life as a fully devoted follower of Jesus apart from the Holy Spirit. One of the questions we ask new church members is: “Do you now resolve, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?” The key to this question is the part that says: *In humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit*. Why? Because otherwise, the Christian life is impossible. You can't do it without the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is a supernatural life. It requires supernatural strength, a supernatural power. You can't do it on your own. It is only possible through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in your life. So, open your life – the whole of your life, not just the “spiritual” part of your life, but the entirety of your life – to the guidance and work of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's Pentecost message, as I've already noted, was rooted in the Scriptures. Peter looked to the Old Testament Book of Joel to explain what was happening. Another thing that strikes me about Peter's message is its Christ-centeredness. Jesus is the main subject. It is all about the person and work of Jesus. Peter talks about Jesus and presents the case for His Messiahship in verses 22-36. Make sure you don't miss the significance of what he says there.

A MESSAGE THAT DEMANDS A RESPONSE

Peter's message that day made an impact, as you can see in verse 37, where we are told that “when the people heard this [message], they were cut to the heart.” Conscience-stricken. Seized with an overwhelming sense of their guilt before God. The Holy Spirit was at work in them. Conviction of sin is part of the Holy Spirit's work, as Jesus says in John 16:8. So, they said to Peter and the other apostles: “What should we do?” (Acts 2:37)

Peter answers in verse 38: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The message of the gospel requires a response. A *personal* response. The act of repentance involves changing your mind and changing your direction. It involves changing what you believe, the way you think, and how you live. One way to think about repentance is to picture it as making a U-turn. If you make a wrong turn and end up going in the wrong direction in your car, your GPS is likely to tell you to make a U-turn to resume heading in the right direction. I've had to repent this way many times in my life!

To repent, in a moral and spiritual sense, is to change your mind and heart about the direction of your life. And it is central to the gospel. John the Baptist, setting the stage for Jesus, called people to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2). When Jesus burst on the scene, He likewise urged people to “repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15; cf. Matthew 4:17). In this sense, it means to turn away from sin and unbelief, and turn to God in faith and obedience. It involves a) the recognition that I have been wrong in what I believe and what I have done, b) a sincere sense of sorrow for my sins, and c) a desire for a fresh start, which God graciously offers in the gospel.

Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 is not the only place where he highlights the necessity of repentance. In Acts 3, following his dramatic healing of a crippled beggar in the Temple courts, Peter implores his audience to “repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out [and] that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (3:19). In *The Message* paraphrase it says: “It’s time to change your ways! Turn to face God so He can wipe away your sins [and] pour out showers of blessing to refresh you” (3:19, MSG).

The first act of repentance is to admit that you’re going the wrong way in life. That the attitude of your heart toward God is not right. That the way you’re living is not pleasing to God.

The second act of repentance is to turn and go in a different direction. A God-pleasing direction. To turn from the way you have chosen for yourself and to begin (or begin again) to go God’s way.

What I want to ask you this morning is this:
 Is the Holy Spirit calling you to repent today?
 Are you going God’s way?
 Are you living your life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ?
 Or are you resisting His way?
 Rebelling against His rule?
 Living in disobedience in some area of your life?
 Who is calling the shots in your life?
 Is it God or you?

Do you need to take the step of repentance today?

Before I say more about repentance, notice that the second word of counsel Peter gave to his Pentecost congregation was to be baptized (2:38). Keep in mind that his audience was made up of Jewish pilgrims who had never been baptized either as children or as professing believers in Christ.

Peter encouraged them to receive baptism as a sign of their repentance, of their faith in Jesus and their trust in Him alone for salvation. If you were baptized as a child or as a professing believer, you don’t need to be baptized again. You don’t need to be baptized more than once. Baptism is one way to give evidence of your faith in Christ. But not the only way. You can bear witness to the sincerity of your repentance and your faith in Christ by developing a

Christ-like character and by exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in your life. The essential point is that true repentance and authentic Christian faith result in a changed life. To the glory of God.

Peter says that if you turn from sin in your life and turn in faith to the Lord Jesus, you will receive two priceless gifts. Two gifts all the money in the world can't buy. You will receive, first of all, the gift of forgiveness. The forgiveness of your sins. All of them. You will receive cleansing from the stain of sin in your life and deliverance from the burden of guilt you carry around.

The second gift you will receive is the Holy Spirit Himself. Not simply to be with you or to be on call in case of an emergency, but to live in you and to fill you with His power for life and witness in all the ups-and-downs and ins-and-outs of your life.

These gifts, says Peter, are for you and me. For us and for our children. For people who are close to God and people who are far from God, for all whom the Lord will call to Himself in grace (2:39).

Repentance, Peter tells us, leads to "times of refreshing from the Lord" (3:19). It leads to "showers of blessing" (*MSG*) from heaven. In a word, it leads to revival. Personal revival for those of us who have drifted or turned away from God and His ways, for those whose faith does not burn as brightly as it once did. And corporate revival in the church and even in our culture – our nation – as hearts are turned to the Lord.

As much as we want to see a great spiritual revival in America, the place where true revival begins is with each of us. Listen to the words of Charles Spurgeon, taken from his classic devotional, *Morning & Evening*. Reflecting on Song of Solomon 2:15, which says: "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vines," Spurgeon says:

A little thorn may cause much suffering. [As can a pebble in your shoe or dust in your eye.] A little cloud can hide the sun. Little foxes spoil the vines, and "little sins" harm tender hearts. These little sins burrow into the soul, making it so full of what Jesus hates that He will not hold comfortable fellowship with us. A great sin cannot destroy a Christian, but a little sin can make (us) miserable.

Jesus will not walk with His people unless we drive out every known sin. He says: 'When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in His love' (John 15:10, NLT). Some Christians rarely enjoy the Savior's presence. How can that be? Certainly, it must be painful for a child to be separated from his or her father. Are you a child of God, yet satisfied to go through life without seeing your Father's face? Are you the spouse of Christ, and content without His company? [If this is true,] you have fallen into a sad state – for when He has left her, the pure spouse of Christ mourns like a dove without its mate.

So then, ask yourself the question: What has driven Christ away? He hides His face behind the wall of your sins. That wall may be constructed of little pebbles as easily as large stones. The sea is made up of many drops [of water]; rocks are composed of many particles. The sea

that divides you from Christ may be filled with the drops of your little sins; the rock that has nearly wrecked your boat may have come about by the daily work of the coral polyps of your little sins.

If you would live with Christ, walk with Christ, see Christ, and have fellowship with Christ, watch out for *the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines*. Jesus invites you to go with Him and catch them.... Go with Him on the hunt.

(Charles Spurgeon, *Morning & Evening*, May 30 Morning)

Is Spurgeon talking to you? About you? Are there some little foxes, some “little sins,” some secret or not-so-secret sins causing trouble in your relationship with God, compromising your spiritual health and vitality and witness? Do not tolerate them for a moment longer. Repent of every known sin in your life. Repent every time you fall into the same sin. Repent and turn to God. Proverbs 28:13 contains this promise:

Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper [spiritually],
but the one who confesses and renounces them
finds mercy.

If you long for “Times of refreshing” in your own spiritual life, in the church, in our nation or the world at large, the place to begin is with honest, earnest personal repentance. Whatever your sins may be. “Repent and turn to God, that your sins may be wiped out [and] that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (3:19). God knows, we need it! God knows, we need Him!

GIVE GOD A CHANCE

Remember John Lennon’s famous anti-war song with the refrain: “All we are saying is give peace a chance”? What I want to say to you today is “Give *God* a chance.”

Give God a chance to do immeasurably more in you than you could ever ask or imagine, through the power of His Spirit at work in you (Ephesians 3:19).

Give God a chance to root out “The little foxes” in your life that threaten to “ruin the vines” of your spiritual life.

Give God a chance to refresh you, to revive you spiritually, by confessing and repenting of your sins, whether big or small, and receiving His forgiveness.

Give God a chance to bring revival not just to you personally but on a larger scale to the church, to our nation and beyond, by devoting yourself fully to Him.

If you’re running away from God, if you have never come to Him in repentance and faith, it’s time to come home to Him. Today.

Give God a chance to make you a new person on the inside, to give you the gifts of forgiveness and peace and the Holy Spirit Himself to give you a new direction and power in life.

All I am saying is: Give God a chance. You will be amazed at what He can do.

Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.