

Discipleship Moment

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost is a special time. It gives us an opportunity to look back at the works of the Holy Spirit in Scripture and reflect on our own time and lives.

This Scripture opens up with the setting: on the day of Pentecost the believers were together. This setting (the disciples gathered together in celebration of the festival of Pentecost) is interrupted by a sound and an image: the sound of wind (associated with God's presence and life force in the Old Testament), and what looks like fire resting on people's heads (fire is associated with God's presence in the Temple in the Old Testament). The disciples are *filled* with God's Spirit, and then *empowered* to speak languages that they didn't know or understand.

Filling and empowering are the two primary works that the Holy Spirit does in our lives. We are filled with God's very life. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit, God's very being and life. We are filled by God and therefore become part of God. We take part in God's life because it is his life that we are now living, by his Spirit. This draws believers together as one people because we are now all part of one life: God's life. And the Holy Spirit *empowers* us to live God's life. It empowers us to be holy. Martin Luther says this: "...the Holy Spirit causes our sanctification by the following: the communion of saints or the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. That means he leads us first into his holy congregation and places us in the bosom of the Church. Through the Church he preaches to us and brings us to Christ."

With this in mind, it makes sense that the first thing the disciples were empowered to do was proclaim the Gospel to the men and women from all over the world in Jerusalem. God immediately opened the doors of the congregation to include all sorts of races and languages. Because it is by this diverse community all living God's life through the Spirit that transcends all races, genders, philosophies, languages, and abilities.

This is challenging. Because you and I like to decide for ourselves who we associate with, and we like to decide for ourselves who is in and out of our group. But the Church isn't ours, it's God's, which means he gets to decide who is in and who is out, and he has decided that everyone who calls on his name and believes in the Gospel. God has decided that his work will be done in the world through a diverse community of people who all hang their faith on Jesus: Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, dumb and smart, even gay and straight.

When we treat our church like a country club where you pay your dues, meet with the same people who look and sound like you, have money like you do, and have the same hobbies as you do: we work against God's intention for his church. When we look weird that people who come to church in a beat-up t-shirt and jean shorts, we work against God's intention for his church. When we treat people, who have different skin color than we as outsiders, we work against God's intention for his church. You get it.

This doesn't mean that God doesn't transform our lives and the way we behave when we come to faith in Jesus and are filled with the Spirit. Because certainly Jesus has much to say about sex, marriage, money, work, etc. This doesn't mean that through the Holy Spirit, we are brought into holiness by dying to our own desires and listening to- and obeying God. But it does mean that the bar to get in, the bar to have faith, the bar to be filled with the Spirit is lower than we make it. We try to get people to act like us, talk like us, think like us, and then they can get in. God, rather, invites through the Gospel for people to trust in Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection. Mere faith is all that is needed.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. Have you ever had the experience of being somewhere and everyone knew each other but you didn't know anyone? How did that feel? What was that like?
2. Why do you think we have "country club" mentality: why do we gather with people who look and sound and act like us?
3. Why is it so hard to interact in meaningful ways with people who are so different from us?
4. Have you had the "country club" mentality? When and where? Why did you think that way?
5. Think about New Life (or the church you are a part of). Do we have a "country club" mentality? Do first time guests feel welcome? Are they greeted and fully integrated into our community?
6. What are things that you can do to make our church a more welcoming, diverse congregation?