

First Presbyterian Church
Acts 2:1-11, “Keep on Pouring It Out”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 5/23/2021

Well, friends, here we are on Pentecost Sunday, and our passage is the great text from Acts 2 which describes the arrival of the Spirit among Jesus’ disciples.

This is the fulfilment of God’s promise to
pour out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples.

Just imagine that this pitcher is the Spirit of God, the living water of God, being poured into the lives of God’s people...

[Pour a small amount of water into the container]

The story takes place on a Jewish holiday which celebrated brining in the harvest as well as the gift of the Ten Commandments.

The festival was called the Feast of Weeks but in Greek
it was known as “Pentecost,” because it was 50 days
after the Passover, and that’s the name the church
has used to refer to this event ever since.

This festival drew Jews from all around the world to worship and celebrate together.

Verse one says that the day of Pentecost had arrived, and the disciples were gathered together.

At this festival, those who had been scattered throughout the known world traveled back to Jerusalem to celebrate and worship.

v. 2 – says they heard a sound like rushing wind.

Not that they heard a rushing wind, but some sound *like* that which they, apparently, couldn’t really explain otherwise.

This loud noise, like a violent wind from heaven,
filled the house that they were in.

v. 3 – says that, inside the house, they saw what looked like
tongues of fire rest on each of their heads.

The red in our worship service represents this tongue of fire.

Following this visual sign, they each began to speak
in different kinds of tongues,
which is to say, they were clearly heard by the diverse crowd
before them in many different languages.

So the big picture is this: Jesus had promised the disciples
that they would receive the Holy Spirit if they waited in Jerusalem,
then he went up into heaven.

On this day of Pentecost the promise was fulfilled.

But that was a long time ago.

So I ask you, 21st Century Christian, can you feel the Spirit?

We've got red banners and...some of us have red clothes on –
can you feel the fire of God's Spirit?

We're singing songs about the Spirit –

do you know the power of God in your life today?

We're praying prayers about the Spirit –

have you been filled with a new awareness of God's life
that changes the world around you?

If you answered yes to even one those, then I'm very grateful for that!

Praise God for those who experience the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday.

But what if you didn't answer, "yes"?

What if you feel flat, dejected, hungry, bored, or just ... normal?

What if you wore a blue shirt on the red shirt day?

Can we be filled with the Spirit, live in light of Pentecost,
and yet not "feel" the uplifting energy of the Spirit?

Well I sure hope so, because this year, I ain't feeling it!

One year ago we were just two or three months into the coronavirus pandemic.
The country was reeling from the murder of George Floyd,
and our church was confused about what the year would hold.

We had not yet witnessed the summer of protests in Portland,
nor suffered the wildfires of September,
nor imagined the deep wound
of the Jan. 6th insurrection at the US Capitol.

We had not yet lost touch with so many of our friends.
We had not yet even dreamed of being vaccinated
or having to wonder about who wasn't getting vaccinated.

And so after that long year, a lot of us are just not "feeling" a whole lot.
Jesus promised that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.
Well as I wrote to one of our elders last week,
"If this yoke is easy, then I'm asking Jesus to give me a cleaner plow."

It has been a hard plowing year for most of us.

So when I come here to preach on Pentecost Sunday, I look to God and I cry out,
"You poured out your Spirit on the church so many years ago,
and we know you have given this congregation
everything it has needed for ministry for the past 169 years
(170 in July!).
Keep on pouring out your Spirit on us today,
whether we feel it or not,
so we can keep in step with your in these days."

Speaking of pouring out – did anyone notice the pouring out earlier?

It was just a tiny pour that I did, hardly enough to be of much...inspiration.

This is the kind of pouring out we need God to do:

[Pour water until container overflows]

To pour out and not stop. To keep pouring out the Spirit when times are hard,
and especially then! To keep pouring the Spirit when we can't feel it.

And that is what God does! The pouring out of the Spirit is continual.

There's not much use, in my view, stirring something up
just to get an emotional rise.

What we need is not a feeling, but presence and sustenance.

Regardless of what we feel,

God has been pouring out the Spirit upon us.

The mysterious work of the Holy Spirit can thrive
in such times of change and challenge
and use the disruption to open up space
for something new.

When I think about the times in my life when God has moved the strongest,
when I have experience the Spirit's work most deeply,
they are all times of disruption either in myself or in the world around.
It doesn't always feel like something spiritual is happening.
But the spiritual dimension is present with us at all times.

Recall from last week that Jesus told the disciples,

***“The Spirit will come upon you and you will be my witnesses
in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”***

And here Peter speaks to a group of people from at least 15
different regions representing most of the known world
and they hear the message the Spirit gave them.

This is a divinely prompted shift in life focus.

A fresh wind blowing disruptive change into the disciples
and extending out to the ends of the earth.

As we prepare to return to in-person worship together,
what direction is the Spirit blowing?

What fresh breath of air do we need to awaken ourselves
to where God is at work? [PAUSE]

The Spirit of God promotes the activity of God, and when we receive the Spirit,
we see our lives turn away from being concerned
about our comfort level and getting back to the way things were.

Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus didn't only die, he also rose again to new life.
Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus didn't only ascend to be with God the Father,
but he sent the Spirit of counsel, power, and new life to fill the church.

So God we ask you, as you once poured out your Spirit,
and as you have continued to pour out Spirit,
keep on directly, graciously (and unpredictably!)
pour the Holy Spirit into your people.

Sustain us, direct us, and give us what we need to speak and live
so that the world can understand your message of grace. Amen.