

Sermon for June 4, 2017

Pentecost

"The Bible Said It!"

Acts 2:1-21

The Bible said that on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and they spoke in various tongues. I didn't say it. Joe didn't say it. The most current poll didn't say it. The government officials didn't say it. Even the experts didn't say it.

The Bible said it. It said that the disciples were gathered on the day of Pentecost 10 days after Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. And as they stood in prayer there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind! It was so loud that it attracted the attention of all the people in Jerusalem. And there was a visible presence of the Holy Spirit resting on each of the disciples. And they spoke in different languages and proclaimed the Good News in the native languages of the many peoples gathered there.

Now some people scoff at this account. They say that maybe the disciples simply overcame their fear of the Romans and came out and started telling people. So the account we have in the Bible was just an embellishment that came out their emotional fervor. In other words the disciples were intoxicated with confidence. Others say that maybe the disciples memorized the speech in different languages for the express purpose of telling the good news to different people. Their desire was not to fool people, but simply to tell them the Good News. But years later those who witnessed the event saw it as miraculous and so described it in the terms we have it. But isn't that the kind of thing that even the people back then said. They said, "These Jesus people are drunk."

People then and now look for excuses and explanations because they don't want to admit that the Spirit of God can enter people's lives in dramatic and life changing ways. "Well preacher isn't that just a bunch of emotionalism?" they suggest. Or they say, "You know that people who change like that often don't stick with it; they just fall back into old habits." Or "Well, you can't teach an old dog new tricks." And so all religion is explained as merely the human will being taught ethics, and the role of God coming in and radically changing someone is downplayed. "People change" they say "because they work at it, not because God comes in and changes them." And so out of fear they explain away the coming of the Holy Spirit.

But the Bible said that the Holy Spirit came. It wasn't the preacher who said it. If it had just been me then we could explain it away and say, "You know that Alex has an imagination." If Joe or anyone else had said it you could say, "Well he or she must have misunderstood." If the experts had said it you could say, "Well they have made big mistakes before." If the government had said it you could say, "They have a political ax to grind here." If the latest poll said it then you could say, "Yeah and how many of those people believe Elvis is still alive."

But the point is that the Bible said it. And I guess that is the real issue here. Do we trust the Bible more than the opinions of our friends, experts, and 4 out of 5 dentists surveyed? Do we really believe the Bible?

I am not talking about some blind unthinking belief. God gave us brains and expects us to use them. Some of the Bible is poetic. It says that God will cover us with his wings (Ps 36:7). That doesn't mean God is a great big chicken. It is poetic language that expresses the idea of God protecting. Some of the Bible is fictional stories or parables told to illustrate a truth. Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons..." He wasn't reporting an incident that happened. Jesus was clearly telling a fictional story that illustrated the love of God. Some of the Bible clearly presents itself as parable. But the Book of Acts claims to be history. Luke states at the beginning that he is attempting to describe the course of events as they have been told to him by the eyewitnesses.

Do we believe him? If it were just some guy named Luke we could question his motives. And Luke's motives are clear: he wants people to believe in Jesus. But what Luke wrote is not just Luke's words. It is part of the Bible: God's Word. And do we trust it not to lead us astray. Are we willing to accept or at least grapple with what it says?

And what do we think the Bible is? Is it just some ancient writing by people who lived long ago? Could it be the collected time tested wisdom of two of the great monostatic religious communities? Could it be two thousand years of religious evolution recorded for our enlightenment? It is at least all that, but could it be more?

And what does it say here? You know a lot of times people say they believe the Bible but they don't really know what it says. First of all it says that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples at Pentecost. This is not a poetic expression. It's an historical account colored as all historical accounts are by the perspective

of the one reporting it: a 1st century believer in Jesus. The Spirit of God came down in a real and tangible way and entered the believers. It was that Spirit that gave the disciples abilities that they previously didn't have. Namely the Spirit gave them that ability to speak in other languages.

This means that God does come into people's hearts and lives and changes them. It's not a matter of the disciples discovering a hidden confidence in Jesus that led them to go out into the street. All that lived in them before was fear. It was God's Holy Spirit that gave them the courage to go out into the street to proclaim the Gospel. They didn't unearth some hidden linguistic potential that was buried in them. God came in and gave them the ability to speak in those languages.

So the Bible says that God came into people's lives and gave them abilities they didn't already have. And God still does that. God still pours out the Spirit upon disciples and drastically changes them from the inside out. It's not a matter of exerting our moral will or relearning or uncovering hidden potentials. Our moral will by itself is corrupt and our potential is to sin. God needs to come in and make the change.

The second thing it says is that in the last days the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. You know we usually picture twelve men with tongues of fire on their heads preaching in twelve languages on Pentecost. That is because there were 12 apostles: all of them men. But the Bible clearly says that all of them were gathered and that the spirit filled "all of them" and they began to speak in other tongues. That "all of them" included a number of women named in Acts 1:14. It included the women who had gone to the tomb and others including Mary the mother of Jesus. These women were among the preachers proclaiming the Good News that Pentecost Day. For further evidence that it was more than the 12 apostles consider that in 2:7-11 more than 12 languages are mentioned.

The Bible clearly says that in the last days the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. When we hear the word "prophet" we think of someone who tells the future. In the Bible the role of the prophet is to proclaim the Word of the Lord. Sometimes that word was a revelation about the future but often it was not. Now in Bible times the prophets received direct revelation from God and then they proclaimed them. But today we have the inspired record of those revelations the Bible. So preachers study the Bible and led by the Spirit proclaim it.

In short I am prophesying now by proclaiming the Word of God. And the Word of God says that your daughters shall prophesy. I know that many "Bible believing" Christians do not believe that God calls women to preach, but that is not what it says here in Acts. It says that God called the women among the disciples to preach and that the Holy Spirit is poured out on women and some of them are called to prophesy. Don't believe it because I said it or because the United Methodist Church says it. Believe it because the Bible said it.

The third thing it says is that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That is why the Spirit has been poured out so that all can hear and have the opportunity to believe. And all who take that opportunity and call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That means everyone. It doesn't matter what their family background or racial background and how long their hair or rap sheet is or isn't. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The Bible says it! Calling on the name of the Lord doesn't mean just coming to church or giving to the church. It means personally calling upon Jesus and asking him to be your Savior. It means confessing that you are a sinner and that you need a Savior and then asking Jesus into your heart. Then you shall be saved.

If you want to be saved call on Jesus. Don't believe it because I said it or because Peter said it. Believe it because the Bible says it.

Have you asked Jesus into your heart? Have you dedicated your life to following Jesus and his teachings and example? Have you personally and publicly committed your life to him? If not then do it today!

The Bible, not Alex nor the church, the Bible says that God pours out the Spirit upon those who do. The Bible says that everyone, male or female, rich or poor, churched or unchurched, who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. It also says that when the Spirit comes into our life it changes us. It gives us abilities we never had before. It gives us the ability to have faith we never had, strength we never had, and the ability to love like we never have before.

2000 years ago on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus and "all of them" proclaimed the Good News to the people in the streets. Open your minds and hearts to the presence of the Divine! Let the Holy Spirit come into your life and empower you to love as Jesus loved. Allow God to inspire you to proclaim the good news.