**Acts 2: The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost**

It’s a great pleasure to be with you and share from Acts chapter 2 as we approach Pentecost. There’s something rather special about sharing from a passage of Scripture around the time we believe that the events occurred. You may remember that last time I was here I spoke on the last section of Acts 2. It is – probably – pure coincide that this time, we are almost at Pentecost and so I am speaking on the first part of the same chapter.

This passage is tremendously exciting because it records for us pretty much the beginning of the Church. if you go back into the first chapter of acts you will see that the community of Christ followers at that time was around 120. Most of them were people who had been part of the Jesus movement before the crucifixion and resurrection.

I find it particularly encouraging and remarkable that shortly after he was restored by Jesus in that touching and emotional encounter on the beach, Peter is now taking a leadership role. If you have ever felt that you have made mistakes and let God and others down, then have a look at Acts chapter 1 and chapter 2. Here you see a man who has been restored by the mercy of God but then takes hold of his new status with zeal and commitment and starts to run with it.

Shortly before the Ascension, Jesus was sitting with his disciples and told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit was to endow the Apostles with power to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. He was to give the church the impetus to cross all manner of cultural and social barriers.

*1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.*

Verse 1. Acts 2 begins on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover. I think the fact that this tiny Christian community were all together in one place was highly significant. Jesus had told them to wait; the verbs here are all the second person plural, that is, *you* plural. Jesus had asked them as a community to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit and they listened to him and followed what he said.

The Holy Spirit was about to come, to fall upon them and equip them with power and skills to witness to the person and work of Christ and what that would mean for humanity. So it is really important to think that at the beginning of what we might think of as an explosion of Gospel power and witness, which was to go in all directions, there is an essential unity of purpose and message. After all, God is one, his message is one, and his community is one. We have the benefit of these powerful words of Paul in Ephesians 4, written some years after Pentecost: *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* 3*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* 4*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;* 5*one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* 6*one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

The Spirit is a Spirit of unity but not uniformity.

2*Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.*

3*They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.*

4*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26954a)*] as the Spirit enabled them.*

Verses 2-4. The Spirit comes, with a number of observable manifestations. Those present heard what sounded like a violent wind, which filled the whole house. It is surely no accident that in Hebrew the word *ruach* means *spirit* and *wind*. Tongues of fire came down and rested on each of those present. In the Bible, fire very often represents purification. The Spirit comes with physical representations of power and purity, which he passes on to those whom he chooses to bless and use. It is a tremendous scene; followers of Jesus, who were probably still confused and anxious after seeing their Lord executed, return from the dead, and finally depart now remember his promise of the Spirit.

Now he has come. What is striking is that having been given this power and having been purified for service, these patient Christ followers are ready for action. The power of the Spirit enabled them to speak in various human languages. This supernatural ability was given for the purpose of the Gospel, to communicate the truth about Christ to the diverse group of Jewish people who are present in Jerusalem at the time. This filling with the Spirit at this point was not for personal glorification or even personal edification, but to allow these early Christians to point their Jewish cousins to Christ.

5*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*

6*When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.*

7*Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?*

8*Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?*

9*Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26959b)*]*

10*Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome*

11*(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”*

12*Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”*

verse 5 to verse 12. In this section from, we see another illustration of unity and diversity. The message is going out to all kinds of people, from various kinds of background, but it is fundamentally the same. This is how the Spirit illuminates the person and work of Christ and points people to him. People have different needs and situations, and very different backgrounds, and in that sense sometimes the way we communicate the gospel may be slightly different, but it is the same gospel.

The great Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky, comments that in Christ humanity is raised together, as one, while in the Spirit we are raised individually and given different gifts and abilities. The work of the Spirit is subordinate to the cause of Christ, as diversity serves unity. What a message for the church today!

We can see this long list of different people. They were mostly Jewish, although there were some converts to Judaism, but their first languages were quite different. But at that crucial time in Jerusalem, in the light of the remarkable events around the Passover, these people were able to hear the message of the Gospel in their own languages.

v.11. They heard the wonders of God. We don’t know what was said, but it must have been centred on Jesus, explaining the grace and mercy of God and connecting that back with the Old Testament. It must have been a remarkable thing for these people from various parts of the eastern Mediterranean to compare notes about what they had heard. They knew that something special was happening, as verse 12 tells us. They were amazed and perplexed. What did this mean? They were after all mostly God fearing Jews, who were in Jerusalem for religious observance. Some of them would have known their Old Testament well enough to wonder if God was doing something new.

13*Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”*

Verse 13 is a reality check. I find it encouraging and discouraging in equal measure that some people could have heard this remarkable multilingual activity and witnessed the amazement of those present and still live in denial. We see the same thing today. Truly, when people laugh and talk of miracles in terms of too much wine, we are reminded that there is nothing new under the sun.

14*Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.*

15*These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!*

Verse 14. Peter’s natural positive and confident nature had been encouraged and put at the service of Jesus after the restoration at the beach. In addition, the Spirit is now working in and through him. We can already see the change in Peter’s attitude and leadership as he stands up and takes careful charge of the proceedings. What is happening here is not a matter of drunkenness, but is in fact the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. As well as providing power and linguistic ability, it seems that the Holy Spirit also allowed Peter to quote freely and appropriately from the Old Testament.

16*No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

Verse 16. Peter refers to the prophet Joel, a prophet probably of the 5th century BC, who preached God’s judgment and restoration on his people. They had faced all kinds of natural and mad made disasters and many were discouraged. Yet in the middle of their troubles they were asked to repent and trust again in God. Tradition has it that Joel was speaking at Pentecost, when the Jewish people were supposed to bring their offerings to the temple. How appropriate then, that Peter quotes from Joel at Pentecost and invites people to repent and embrace all that God has for them, including a ‘restoration’ to a status they could hardly have ever imagined. Jesus is the temple and the sacrifice and the priest and God himself! God intervenes supremely in what Jesus did on the cross, not only taking the Jewish people back to a status of acceptance before God, but going much further, by giving his Spirit and offering a new salvation to them and the rest of humanity.

Peter’s quote from Joel runs from chapter 2, verses 28 to 32.

17*“‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.*18*Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*

Verses 17 and 18. We usually think of the last days as the time between the first and second coming of Christ. Immediately after the Ascension, and with Jesus’ instruction to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Spirit, it is almost to be expected that something remarkable will happen. Verses 17 and 18 describe a new era in the interaction between God and his people.

The coming of Christ has changed everything, says Peter, quoting Joel. This is it; what the Old Testament prophet recorded for us is now here. The Spirit has come and began to pour out his power on God’s people, all of God’s people. Expect your sons and daughters to communicate the thoughts of God to the people. In other words, God’s people, his ordinary people, will serve as his mouthpiece. Young and old alike will see new things from God. Both men and women will serve the Lord by speaking for him. I think this is what the reformed theologians were talking about around 1600 years later, when they talked about the priesthood of all believers. We are all ministers now, and powered and purified by the Holy Spirit to share the wonderful things of Christ.

19*I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.*20*The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*21*And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26971c)*]*

It is difficult to be precise, but I like to think of verses 19 to 21 as more focused in the period just before the coming of Christ. The context here, blood and fire, billows of smoke, darkness, tends to refer to God’s judgement and intervention, which is why verse 20 ends, ‘before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord’. Verse 21 sums up what Joel and Peter are saying: everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

This is a great prophecy and democratisation of God’s message, as it will soon go beyond the Jewish people, into the world, taken by ordinary people, rather than a small group of prophets. You remember that this quotation from the Old Testament is following on from the command that Christian witness should begin in Jerusalem and then go out into Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In a sense, the disciples communicating the truth about Jesus to Jews from all over the ancient Middle East, was part of this process of taking their message further and further away from Jerusalem, crossing distance, cultures, and eventually religious boundaries.

22*“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.*

Verse 22. In the meantime, at this very early point in the development of the church, the focus is Jewish people. This is why Peter builds on the general teaching from Joel by focusing on texts that would have made sense to Jews.

Jesus had been a controversial figure, to be sure, and I’m certain that even a few weeks after the crucifixion, there were people who were still discussing and arguing about what had happened. Those present here being addressed by Peter, were faithful Jews, who probably would not have had much time for Jesus and his rag tag group of followers.

So I think it is wonderful that Peter begins by describing Jesus as a man accredited by God ‘to you’ by miracles, wonders and signs. God has taken the trouble to prove to these Jews that Jesus was his representative. I can almost imagine some of these Jewish people asking, *What? Accredited to me? I don’t know what you’re talking about*. Peter’s point is that while you may not be sure of who Jesus is, God is placing the matter right in front of you, because these miracles, wonders, and signs, were done before your very eyes by God. Peter even adds the words, *as you yourselves know!* Peter is bold, confident of his message, and the leading of the Spirit.

23*This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,[*[*d*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26973d)*] put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

Verse 23. He backs up a little to clarify to the Jewish people present that the death of Jesus was actually part of God’s plan. You may have thought that Jesus was a small-town rebel, another five-minute wonder who wanted to take on the might of Rome. Wrong! This man’s death was planned by the God you worship, and in fact you in some way are responsible.

24*But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

Verse 24. Peter describes the resurrection, claiming that the fact that Christ was raised by God himself is another form of accreditation, if you like. Also, in the face of Christ, death itself is powerless. Aren’t these tremendous words? It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. I love that. Humanity’s greatest enemy and ultimate fear is rendered powerless by the person of Christ.

25*David said about him: “‘I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*26*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope,*

Verse 25. The next short quotation that Peter uses is from Psalm 16. He very cleverly reminds his listeners that these are the words of David, one of the greatest heroes of the Jewish people, a King, deliverer, prophet, and patriarch. And we know that God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne for ever. For many Jewish people, hearing about David in these terms would probably have sent tingles up and down their spines.

Look how Peter uses the passage. *Your hero King David said these things about Jesus of Nazareth*. I imagine you would have been able to hear a pin drop.

According to David, Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is the Shepherd of Psalm 23. It is because of this man, Jesus of Nazareth, this God-man, that David will not be shaken. Jesus then, is much more than any man could ever be.

27*because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay.*

Verse 27 is probably the most significant for Peter’s audience. God will not abandon Jesus to the realm of the dead. God will not let his holy one see decay. Jesus will not remain in the realm of the dead and his body will not deteriorate. These would have been difficult words for most of these Jewish people to understand. It would have been unclear what kind of person David was talking about. But Peter makes it crystal clear by connecting these words with the resurrection of Christ. Remember, regardless of what these Jewish men may have believed about Jesus, no one, Roman or Jewish authorities had produced a body. All they had was an empty tomb. The realm of the dead was empty and there was no decaying body.

28*You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’[*[*e*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26978e)*]*

Verse 28. Not only this, but this curious figure is familiar with the paths of life and is sitting in joy in the presence of God himself. This Jesus is all about life and joy! No ordinary man this then.

29*“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.*

30*But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.*

Verses 29 and 30. Having used David to point to Jesus, Peter now goes beyond Israel’s greatest human king. Our great hero and patriarch David is dead and buried. We all know that. But it was David himself who talked of his descendant being on the throne, as God allowed him to see in some way that is Jesus, the anointed one, the specially chosen one of God.

31*Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.*

32*God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.*

33*Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear*

In verse 31 and 32, Jesus makes exactly this identification between the person discussed by David and Jesus of Nazareth. Not only that, but in verse 33 we learn that the sending of the Holy Spirit is the act of Jesus himself. Peter is tying together the dramatic events of Pentecost with the ancient prophecy in the Psalm.

34*For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand*35*until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’[*[*f*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26985f)*]*

Verse 34 and 35. Peter makes one last comparison between David and Jesus. Jesus has recently vanished, having ascended to heaven, which David, for all his greatness, did not. Jesus, the descendant of David, is greater than his ancestor, because he has ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of God himself. The greatness of Jesus is clear in Peter’s use of Psalm 110:1. Jesus will use the backs of his enemies to rest his feet!

36*“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

The summary is in verse 36: Let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. This message of Christ is for every Jewish person and then in accordance with Acts 1:8 and Genesis 12:3, for all humanity.

Through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit Peter has delivered a short but pointed gospel message to the Jewish people present. He has connected together recent events they were all familiar with and parts of the Old Testament Scriptures which they all respected and believed in, to show that the long promised Messiah has finally arrived in the person of Jesus Christ.

The splintered proclamations about Jesus in various languages found in the eastern Mediterranean contained one central message, which Peter builds upon by quoting the Old Testament and showing the exact fit with the person and work of Christ. There is one single message here, which began with a diverse and even chaotic delivery. Those present must have been amazed that one message could initially have come through so many people and then be summarised so powerfully and scripturally by one man.

37*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

38*Peter replied, “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.*

39*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

40*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”*

41*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

Verses 37-41. The response is clear. Those present were convicted and many repented and received baptism, to join the Jesus movement. Their sins were forgiven and they too received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Jesus is for all, everyone that God will call. And that day alone, 3000 people were added to the church.

Thinking about what this passage means us today, we are in a very different time and culture and do not share the Jewish background of those with whom the apostles were speaking. As we communicate the truth of Jesus today, many of the details will be quite different and we will often be starting from a very different position from Peter.

What this episode teaches us so well however, is that it is absolutely vital that we are unified as we go out into the world. We are together, with a common aim and a common Lord, and are empowered and purified by the same Spirit. We may start from different points and use different languages and even different illustrations and metaphors to communicate the gospel, but we must preserve our unity and yield to the Holy Spirit as we ask him to show us how to proclaim and demonstrate the unchanging Word of God to people in need of this same Lord and Messiah.

Conclusion. The Spirit came upon the followers of Christ and empowered them to communicate the gospel to all kinds of people. As the gospel was about to be sent to various parts of the ancient world, there is a careful balance of unity and diversity, as people submit to the message of Christ and the power of the Spirit. The restored and Spirit-filled Peter exercises leadership and ties in the events of the day with powerful prophecy from several hundred years in the past. The result of this brave and appropriate proclamation under the Lord is repentance and faith and the expansion of the Christian community. Be encouraged at Pentecost!