

Reaching Out

Acts 2:1-21 (May 23, 2021)

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2When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Historical Context

People of Jewish faith and/or ancestry have come from all over the Empire for Pentecost. It’s a religious feast. It’s religious, and it’s also a feast. The purpose of this feast is to celebrate the first harvest (wheat), and give thanks to God for the blessings of food and sustenance. It is much like our country’s modern Thanksgiving, but with more religious overtones.

Theme: Reaching Out

In the Pentecost story, the disciples are empowered to speak some 15 different languages and specifically to speak the languages of the “devout Jews from every nation” in Jerusalem (verse 5). Just imagine Parthians, Mesopotamians and Cappadocians, as immigrants or visitors in Jerusalem, hearing their mother tongues spoken for perhaps the first time in years!

This gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift expressly for those *outside the Jesus movement*, those who had lived displaced in a language-world not their own. It is a spiritual gift given *for the outsiders* listening. God’s gift reaches outward to those outside of this immediate circle of Jesus followers. It seems that one mark of the Holy Spirit’s gifting is that it empowers us to connect to others.

Pentecost was the Jewish celebration 50 days after Passover that marked the giving of the Torah and was also the time of giving first fruits at the temple. The gathered disciples would already be celebrating God's gifts, unawares that another gift was coming. This new gift of mother tongues turned them outward, toward those outside their movement.

The church birthed at Pentecost carries this deep DNA, to make a home in God's life and invite others, in a way they can understand, to make a home in God's life, too.