

Renewal - Part 6

Pentecost

Acts 1:4-5, 7-9

1. Renewed Spirit.

- Acts 2:1-4

Spirit-filled holiness is not ultimately about the absence of sin; it's about the presence of Someone.

2. Renewed testimony.

- 1 Corinthians 2:4

The Spirit didn't come at Pentecost only for the sake of the witnesses themselves, but for the sake of their proclamation for others! In Acts, the gift of the Spirit empowers prophetic mission rather than promotes personal piety! (Dr. Richard Thompson)

3. Renewed unity.

- Acts 2:42-47



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Pentecost: Renewed Spirit

How are you sleeping these days? Did you know you don't really *choose* to fall asleep? The best you can do is choose to put yourself in a posture and rhythm that *welcomes* sleep. You lie down in bed, maybe on your back or on your favorite side, you close your eyes and breathe slowly, putting your plans out of your mind. But the power of your will or consciousness stops there. You want to go to sleep, and you've chosen to climb into bed—but in another sense sleep is not something under your control or at your will. You call up sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of a sleeper, but you can't make it arrive...But there is a moment when sleep "comes" settling on this imitation of itself that you've been offering to it, and you succeed in becoming what you were trying to be. Sleep is a gift to be received, not a decision to be made. And yet it is a gift that requires a posture of reception—a kind of active welcome.¹

The same thing is true when it comes to being filled with the Holy Spirit. You prepare your heart and mind, you step into the Christian life, you seek Jesus and the fullness of the Spirit. And he fills you. He is a gift to be received that requires a posture of reception.

We're continuing in our "Renewed" series, talking today about the most important part of your renewed life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ: the filling of the Holy Spirit.

I'm going to share with you some very important theology today, okay? But this is far from being purely academic; this can powerfully alter your whole life and being.

Today is the day of Pentecost – it's the day that commemorates the Holy Spirit becoming available in the lives of believers. Before this day, the way people met the presence of God was in the Temple. That was the place where people would go to be near God. *Then* – then came the day that is recorded in the book of Acts. It marks the day that the presence of God took up residence in the lives of people, making our very physical bodies the new Temple of God's Spirit. Pentecost is the event that renewed the Spirit of God to the people of God.

On this 1,991st anniversary of that day (give or take a year or two), I'd like us to revisit that event and see what difference it makes in our church today. If we don't get what Pentecost is about, if we don't experience what happened at Pentecost, then this church might as well be a philanthropic club – nothing more than maybe a religious Rotary club, or more likely a religious country club.

¹ Adapted from John Starke, "Catching Sleep and Catching Revival"; John Starke, *The Gospel Coalition* (7-8-15)

But we were created to be in a relationship with God and our purpose in this world is to show and to share the love of God in the full power of the Spirit to everyone. That's what this whole "Renewed" series has been about. Your joy and purpose and meaning in life is found as you spend your life for God and for others. The more you spend your life on yourself, the less joy and purpose and meaning you have. The more you spend it on God and others, the more joy and peace and contentment you will get in your own life. And that's a hard thing to do; in fact, we can't do it in our own strength, because the Holy Spirit is the key to making it happen, and he is the key to joy and purpose and meaning in your life. The Holy Spirit unlocks the power to live that kind of life. The Holy Spirit is how God imputes, imparts, and implants what Jesus did for us on the cross into our lives.

First of all, I encourage you to read Acts chapters 1 & 2 today sometime. We don't have time to read those two chapters here, but it won't take you long to do it. In the meantime, let me summarize it.

Acts is literally part two of Luke's Gospel story. Luke-Acts is really one story, written by Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, we get the story of Jesus: his birth, life, death, and resurrection. In Acts we see Jesus' final days with the disciples after his resurrection and before he ascends into heaven, then we see the Holy Spirit take over from there, and the Christian church is born and grows as God works in amazing ways and as people respond to the Holy Spirit working in the church right up to today.

So the story of Pentecost picks up in chapter one of Acts, with Jesus giving some last instructions to the disciples. In verses 4 and 5, Jesus says this:

"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5, niv)

Then the disciples ask some questions, mostly about end-times dates and God's final Kingdom. But Jesus doesn't answer their questions; instead he calls them back to the *most important thing* as he answers:

"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight." (Acts 1:7-9, niv)

I honestly don't know why so many believers spend so much time trying to predict whether we are in the end times or not, when Jesus made it so clear that we are instead to focus on being filled with God's Spirit and with introducing people to Jesus.

Anyway, thankfully the disciples obeyed and went into the upper room to wait and pray (and they also took care of a couple of minor organizational housekeeping things).

Now there's one more thing I want you to see in this before we jump in, and that is the significance of *why* God did this on the actual day of Pentecost. Pentecost was

one of the ancient Jewish springtime festivals or feasts. The Jews celebrated Pentecost to commemorate God's giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. That's super important to understand. That was a key event in the life of the Jewish people – God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses so it would guide the Jewish people. They describe the life God has for his people, but all it did was prove that they couldn't do it because of sin. The gift of the Ten Commandments was supposed to help people to know God better and obey him, but instead it set the stage for what would actually happen at Pentecost in the book of Acts after Jesus had been resurrected. Where Jewish Pentecost was about the Law, Christian Pentecost would now be about the Spirit of Life who gives us the power and the ability to actually obey the Law and live life to the fullest. Do you get that?

Pentecost means "fifty" and takes place fifty days after Passover. We know by the Bible that Jesus was with the disciples for forty days after his resurrection. He was crucified on Passover. So simple math tells us that the disciples spent ten days together in prayer and spiritual conversation, waiting for what Jesus had promised them. At the end of those ten days, on the day of Pentecost, there would be thousands of people gathered at the Temple from all over the known world. So with all those people in one place, God gave them and us the...

1. Renewed *Spirit*.

Thanks to this event, our original God-breathed spirit was renewed, the God-likeness that we were created with in the beginning before we sinned.

We won't read every verse of chapter two, but I do want to read these first ones:

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:1-4, niv)

Imagine that you are in that room – first, you hear the sound of a rushing wind. We read that, and we tend to think that it was something like a gust of wind, like we have around here that blows down from Ellensburg and across the valley. But that's not what it describes.

Have any of you been in a tornado? I've read that the wind that accompanies one sounds literally like a freight train going right over you. When you read this passage that says "rushing wind," a tornado is what the original language means when it says they all heard it. The sound of the wind was so loud that all the thousands of people gathered outside at the Temple were shook by the noise too.

The word for "wind" in both the Hebrew – the language of the Old Testament (the word "ruah"), and the Greek – the language of the New Testament (the word "pneuma"), both of those words are translated three different ways: they can be "breath," "wind," and "spirit." Here's what's cool: in Genesis we read that God

“breathed into” man’s nostrils the breath (or spirit) of life. (Genesis 2:7). We see this multiple times throughout the Bible that wind is a symbol for the Holy Spirit (e.g., Ezekiel 37:1-14). In the New Testament, Jesus made this connection when he said:

“The *wind* blows wherever it pleases.....so it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8, niv)

So clearly, the thunderous sound of the rushing wind is to alert the disciples of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

But just in case the disciples were confused about what the *sound* of the wind might have meant, God also gave them the symbol of fire. God uses fire a lot in the Bible. He used the smoking firepot to seal his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:17). God appeared to Moses in a ? burning bush (Exodus 19:18. See also 3:2 and 13:21-22; Psalm 104:4; Isaiah 66:15).

Something else: it was widely held in both Jewish and Greco-Roman writings of Luke’s day that fire was associated with prophetic inspiration, or being inspired to speak for God. So the fire that comes to rest above the heads of the disciples is God clearly saying that all of them – normal folks, men and women – were now being inspired by the Spirit of God to speak for God (see Numbers 11:29!).

These two signs were there to leave no doubt at all that these men and women were being filled with the presence of God himself through his Spirit; they convey the awesomeness of the presence of God.

But if that wasn’t enough, there was a third thing that happened: we are told that the disciples began to speak in other tongues. Now, you might wonder what that means. There’s no doubt in this passage that the disciples all thought they were speaking their own native language as they were telling people about Jesus, but what they were saying was being heard by all the people from all over the world in their own mother tongues. This was a reverse of the curse of the Tower of Babel. The Christian Church began with a powerful emphasis on being a multicultural church!

So miraculously, the 120 believers were filled with the Spirit to share the Gospel in ways that the people listening would be able to hear it.

The Holy Spirit was renewed to the disciples, and here is a key statement, church: the Holy Spirit is also renewed to us – to empower us to both show and speak to other people the great news of God’s love in ways that they will understand.

I want to speak to longtime Nazarenes here, because being sanctified, or filled with the Holy Spirit is important to us. If you are an older adult and you grew up in the Nazarene Church, one of the things you were probably told is that we are sanctified so that we won’t sin anymore. That you should seek and get this filling of the Holy Spirit so that you’ll stop sinning, and you will be sanctified, which is mostly true. But somehow, we’ve come to think Spirit filling or holiness or sanctification is all about us and it means we are pickled and preserved until heaven. If that’s what you think, I need to correct you here: if you think sanctification or Spirit-filling is *only* so *you* can stop sinning, you are missing the whole point! God gives us his Spirit and

sanctifies us *so that we can be proclaimers of God's love – by loving God and loving people!* Acts chapters one and two don't say anywhere that we will receive the Holy Spirit so we can stop sinning (elsewhere in the New Testament, but not here), but we *are* told that we are filled with the Spirit so we can receive power to be Jesus' witnesses. Now listen to me carefully here, because I'm not saying the issue of sin isn't dealt with at sanctification, because it is. But *Spirit filled holiness is not ultimately about the absence of sin; it's about the presence of someone – the God of love who empowers you to tell of his love to others!*

True, a by-product of the Spirit is that sin loses its power over us, but that's only for the real purpose. The real purpose is the Spirit empowers you so you can love God and love people and tell them about Jesus.

Something else I want you to see church: we might think that Spirit filling is a personal thing, for ourselves to experience. But there is nothing in the language of this story that says that the reception of the Holy Spirit is an *individual* event. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes upon *people*, not individuals. Luke concentrates on the Spirit being poured out on the *community* of individual believers. As they prayed together and sought Jesus together, the Spirit was poured out on them, and they had power *together* to demonstrate the Good News of God's love. Does this sound like something we need to do, church? That is what it means to be the church – being Spirit filled together proclaiming the Good News! And to make the point even further, that leads to a...

2. Renewed *testimony*.

The next thing we see is Peter standing up on behalf of the other disciples to preach to the crowd. Keep in mind that as he does this, the other disciples have been powerfully telling those around *them* about Jesus. In Acts 2:14-41 we get Peter's first sermon, and let me tell you, it's a great one.

I think I've told you this story before, but I can remember my first sermon. I was in college and a group of my friends and I went to Portland – we took a spring break from school and lived on the streets and in the shelters of downtown Portland. And we volunteered at the Portland Mission. At the mission, for homeless folks to get dinner, they had to sit through church first and listen to a sermon, and that's where I got to preach my first one – what I thought was a pretty good sermon. It was difficult though, because they were cooking dinner in the next room while I preached, so it smelled really good. Anyway afterward, as the people are waiting in line for dinner, one of the homeless guys walked up to me, and I was sure he was going to compliment my great sermon. He shook my hand and then said, "You sure talk a long time." I learned a valuable lesson that day: even a great sermon isn't great when it's too long and people are hungry. The sermon gets worse the hungrier you get, right?

Well, Peter preached a great sermon – not because of supper or his oratorical skills, but because of the Spirit’s power. The Apostle Paul talked about the same thing. He said:

“My message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 2:4, nlt)

You can see Peter’s Spirit-filled sermon in Acts two. We don’t have time to read it all, so again, I hope you will read it later today. What’s written in Acts is probably shorter than what Peter actually preached, but Luke gives us the main point of it. There are some things I want us to see in this. First, Peter does an amazing job of quoting the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is God (2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 110; Deuteronomy 21:23). But there is something else, too: less than two weeks before this event, before Jesus ascended, the disciples were asking Jesus about when the end times were, and Jesus told them not to worry about that, but to focus instead on being filled with the Spirit and telling others the Good News. Well between then and this point, just a week and a half later, Peter figured that out, because he’s preaching on the arrival of God’s Kingdom, and he’s using a very famous passage from the Old Testament prophet, Joel. (Joel 2:28-32) It’s a prophecy all about the end times. All the Jews would recognize it. But Peter is preaching the truth that the Kingdom of God isn’t some geopolitical kingdom that will rule the world, and it’s not some far away end of the millennia thing in heaven. Peter is clearly saying that because of Jesus, the Kingdom of God has arrived *here and now*. This is very important, folks. Christianity is not about being saved for heaven someday; you know, pray the “sinner’s prayer” and then just hold on and don’t sin too badly before you die and then you get to go to heaven. *Christianity is about bringing the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven*. We are to live out the love of the Kingdom of God, and bring the Kingdom of God where we live, and to everyone we meet and know. We do this in the power of the Spirit. That’s what Pentecost has done, so we live in peace, we live in love, we don’t bad-mouth and slander and gossip, we treat *all* people with love and respect no matter who they are or where they come from or what they are doing. Because if the world is going to see that God is real and that there is hope for them today, they *must* see his love in us. They will see it in you by the filling of the Spirit. It won’t do any good to tell people that “someday you get to go to heaven!” because they want to see if the Kingdom is real *now*. And that’s what Peter and the disciples are preaching and what they lived because of the Holy Spirit. And that’s the Gospel you and I are renewed in the Spirit to live and testify about with confidence. That’s why we are given the Holy Spirit! A friend of mine who is a professor and wrote a commentary on Acts said this: *The Spirit didn’t come at Pentecost only for the sake of the witnesses themselves, but for the sake of their proclamation for others! In Acts, the gift of the Spirit empowers prophetic mission rather than promotes personal piety!*²

² Richard Thompson, *The New Beacon Bible Commentary: Acts, A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (The Foundry, Kansas City, MO 2016)

So the disciples spent time in prayer, seeking Jesus, making themselves receptive to the Spirit, and the Spirit suddenly filled them all as a community in such a powerful way that they could communicate the Good News of God's Love in ways that others could understand it. We are here as a church, a community of believers to proclaim the love of God in Christ to our neighborhood! The Spirit filled the disciples so they could carry on the work of Jesus with God's presence right there with and in them. He didn't fill them for their own sakes, but for the Gospel – so they could better follow Jesus and show the love of God to others. We are renewed to proclaim the Good News!

Do you really want to spend your life just marking time? Or do you want to be sold out, all out, seeking Jesus and bringing the very heaven of God right here on earth, loving people and showing and sharing God's love with them? What do you want your life to count for: sitting in church, attending Bible studies, or seeing transformational miracles happen all around you in the world, as you bring the Kingdom of God?

You see, *we don't seek holiness for our sake, we seek Jesus for the world's sake!* That's why we come together – to seek Jesus and let him fill us with his Spirit and use us for others and for the Gospel, but too often we are distracted and then just drive off without getting the fullness of the Spirit!

But here's the amazing thing: when we seek Jesus for other's sake, instead of for our sake, THAT'S when we become the church! Finally on this Pentecost Sunday, see...

3. Renewed ***unity***.

Luke brings this part of the story to a close by giving a broad over-view of first-century church life. And here's a clue if you plan to read the rest of Acts (and you should!) – Luke is giving a foreshadowing of what the Spirit can renew to the church *today*. Luke is giving us a picture of what God wants the community of believers to look like *today*. This is what Jesus died to create, and this is what the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost to empower. So let me read the description, and as I read it, I want to ask you to judge yourself. Ask yourself, "Am I acting in these ways toward my brothers and sisters in Christ?" Okay? This is the description:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47, niv).

The church was renewed to passionate unity. They were devoted! That means wholeheartedly, it was their primary motivation and ambition and goal. And as a

result, many, many people joined in with them and came to faith. People of different languages and cultures, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, slave and free. And they were fiercely committed to their unity.

Would you be willing to die to protect the unity of your church? They did. Or would you just say, “Oh well – they’re doing something I don’t like, so I’ll just go join another church.” The disciples were devoted to Scripture and to one another. In other words, their bond toward one another in Christ was as valuable to them as the Word of God itself. And why not: every true believer in church has the very presence of God the Holy Spirit within them; of course we should treat each other well! The early church shared meals together and they were devoted to praying together. How often do you pray together with people in church? I don’t mean that you sit there while one of our pastors prays. I mean in your home as a couple. Or do you get with a friend and pray, and your friend prays, and you pray some more, and your friend prays some more? This passage doesn’t say they were devoted to a Sunday School class or Bible Study. This says they were devoted to praying *together* – they loved it and couldn’t wait to do it again.

Guess what that kind of renewed unity produces: such a powerful display of the presence of God among them that outside people couldn’t deny it and couldn’t wait to join them.

Do you want to see God move in power in our church? He’s the same God. We say we believe in the filling of the Holy Spirit. We say we are a church of Jesus Christ. Then let’s pray and seek Christ so the Spirit might be poured out on our church, filling us so the Gospel could be proclaimed boldly through our lives and language, and let’s be a church that is passionate about our unity.

We are going to pray together, and I encourage you to pray for this in your home and in your small group, too: that the Spirit will be renewed in our lives, that the Gospel will be lived out and proclaimed boldly by us as a church, and that we will live in fully renewed unity with each other, so that together we may go live out the Good News in our world!

Prayer... Renewed: Spirit, testimony, unity

Benediction

May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he’ll do it! (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, tmt)