

When The Spirit Comes

Acts 2:1-21

INTRO:

Have you ever seen the special effects in the old movie the Ten Com-
mandments?

I mean particularly the walls of water in the Red Sea as the Israelites pass through when God rescues them from the Egyptians.

Not so great by today's special effects standards, I suppose, but pretty spectacular in its day.

Which brings us to the story of Pentecost that we will think about today. In a way, the special effects of Pentecost –

the wind, the flames, the talking in different languages –

these are a bit primitive by today's standards.

They can also get in the way of our really hearing the story. We'd be missing the point if we went home today talking about the special effects:

- *What do you think about speaking in tongues?*

- *Why don't we see more of that sort of thing today?*

- *And so on...*

So instead of talking about the special effects of Pentecost, let's talk about the underlying story.

How does Pentecost fit into our *Christian* story?

ME:

I have never seen the old Ten Commandments movie, at least that I can remember.

This past Lent when it was on television, Eddie Henry encouraged me to watch it.

And I tried, I really did.

But the *difference* in the way they make movies now and the way they made movies then has pretty much ruined me for watching old movies.

They just seem to move along so slowly.

I am sure it is my loss.

I did watch the scene of the Red Sea Walls of Water on YouTube though, *and it was amazing!*

The little boy saying the wind opened the sea and the older man saying that God had opened the sea with the breath from his nostrils.

That's what it looked like!

But the special effects are only part of it, they only help to tell the story.

YOU:

What do you think of old movies? What do you think of this old movie, the Ten Commandments? Do the special effects distract you from the story or do they help to tell the story?

Well as we “**watch**” an even older “**movie**” in the book of Acts, let’s notice the special effects. Let’s try not to let them distract us from what God is trying to tell us through this movie, this story from Scripture.

Let’s pray as we open our hearts to God’s Word:

GOD:

Acts 2:1–21 (NRSV): 2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes,

Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

14 But 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. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, 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.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

WE:

Pentecost. Let's put Pentecost in its context by thinking back 50 days to the story of the arrest, trial, execution and resurrection of Jesus. These events all took place in the context of the celebration of the Passover.

Passover is the **celebration**, the **remembering**, the **honoring** all that God in rescuing the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and leading them out toward a promised land. After they had escaped the Egyptian army by miraculously passing through the Red Sea as we watch in the movie *The Ten Commandments*; they came to Mount Sinai where Moses was given the Ten Commandments. The receiving of the Ten Commandments is what Shavuot, or Pentecost, celebrates.

It is important for us to understand that for Jews, *the Ten Commandments are the beginning of life!* Having been freed from slavery, the Ten Commandments answer the questions:

- **What now?**
- **What will we do with our new found freedom?**
- **How will we live fully, deeply and truly?**

The Ten Commandments give a clear vision of how to live like God wants us to live:

- ***with joy and justice, service and satisfaction, duty and delight.***

At Passover we gain our freedom to live, at Pentecost we learn how to live well.

The number 50 reinforces this theme. In the amplification of the Fourth Commandment to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy, the **Sabbath** rest was extended to a year of rest for the land every seventh year; and after a **Sabbath** of **Sabbath** years – that is after seven times seven, the fiftieth year was to be a year of **Jubilee** – the forgiveness of all debts; the return of all land to the original holders; and release of those who had sold themselves into slavery for the payment of debts. The memory of this **Jubilee Year** echoes in each Pentecost.

We begin with freedom from slavery; we move to learning how to live in freedom and good and right relations with each other and with the land. And knowing in advance that we will mess it all up and will fail, there is a built in *reminder* and *re-balancing*.

Fifty days ago you were freed from slavery.

- **Slavery to those who would try to rule your life.**
- **Slavery to memories and scars from the past.**
- **Slavery from fear of death.**
- **Slavery from fear of failure; fear of loneliness; fear of rejection.**
- **Slavery to your crazy calendar and your smartphone.**

But haven't we already fallen back into our old patterns?

Haven't we already forgotten how to live well with this freedom?

Pentecost comes to remind us of this, and to remind us that we have not been abandoned. Yes, we do not have Jesus with us anymore, but the Spirit of God is here with us. And this is important for us.

When the Holy Spirit comes...

After a long time of only being followers and learners of Jesus, Jesus had left the disciples. But they did not disperse and go back home. Instead, they continued to meet together, “**constantly devoting themselves to prayer.**” Like us, they too were probably uncertain about what to do next. And like us, they *were* probably certain that they were **NOT** up for whatever was next. Like us they probably were starting to revert back to their familiar ways.

But they **stayed** and **prayed** together. And over the course of a week after Jesus had gone, and then eight days, and then nine days, and then . . . from the context of their **staying** and **praying** together; from the context of their being with Jesus; from the context of their having received freedom from slavery and a vision for living well; from this context *came the Spirit of truth to give life to their hearing, seeing and speaking – to their whole being.*

When the Spirit comes . . . We can live like God wants us to live.

When the Spirit comes . . . We can live like God called us to live.

The Spirit has come!

The Spirit is here!

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

When the Spirit Comes into and through the world of our lives we can see, we can hear, we can live into God's vision for humanity.

YOU:

Has the Spirit come in your life? How would you know if he had? How can you tune your life to better see, hear and experience the Spirit who has come just as Jesus promised?

CLOSE:

As long as we don't get distracted by the special effects of Pentecost – as long as we stay focused on the story – we will remember today how far we have already wandered from the freedom received only 50 days ago. We will remember how desperate we are to learn how to live well together and with all of creation. We will remember that when someone comes and asks about Jesus, that it will be you and I who answer. We will remember how badly we need one another to stay together and pray together to help us to stay open to the Spirit of truth. And **when the Spirit comes** with the bright

light bulbs of awareness and flames of energy, we will **remember** and **give thanks** for Pentecost. The Spirit will empower us.

In a recent book, Kenneth Boa compares a soaring eagle to Christians learning to soar through the power of the Holy Spirit:

God seems to like eagles. Thirty-three Bible verses mention them! Eagles are true flying birds, meaning they get off the ground by flapping, but they soar by thermals. Eagles begin flight training around four months old. But even before that, at about two months, they stand up in the nest and spread their wings when they feel gusts of wind. They're training to know the thermals! Thermals are the columns of air formed as heat rises from the ground. Because heat rises, these air columns push up and up, displacing the cold air around them. By staying in the warmth of the thermal, the birds continue to soar. Eagles become experts in this.

In this magnificent aerodynamic action, gravity isn't deactivated—it's still at work—but the higher principle overcomes gravity. Eagles drop down when they step off a branch. Then, they start flapping like crazy. Once they're in the air, though, their wings don't have to work very hard, and while soaring, they use a small fraction of the effort required to rise. They're almost at rest and can just enjoy the pleasure of flight.

*When we first begin following Christ (or practicing a spiritual discipline) we're like eagles spreading our wings. Once we start flapping, though, we lift up. Maybe after a few tries we're back down on the ground. But through repeated practice, we finally soar. Also, in Greek, the Holy Spirit is called *pneuma*, which means "current of air." Think about what this means for us! We flap and flap, but eventually we catch the current of air, and we*

soar. This is how the Holy Spirit works with our training. He's not only our coach; he's the power behind everything we do.