

Story author Tony Compolo, a College Professor in Pennsylvania, was giving a new student a tour of the campus, and Tony asked him a thoughtful question.

TONY: HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED?

STUDENT: I AM 20 YEARS OLD.

TONY: I DIDN'T ASK HOW LONG YOUR HEART HAS BEEN BEATING?

STUDENT: MOST OF MY LIFE HAS BEEN THE MEANINGLESS PASSAGE OF TIME,
BETWEEN ALL TOO FEW MOMENTS OF FEELING ALIVE

As Simple as Breathing...

Age 20 and already cynical! A few moments of feeling alive! Going through the motions, no enthusiasm for life. That was the mood in the Upper Room: Disciples dreading the future, waiting for something to happen. The sunny days with Jesus, when they felt alive, were gone. We call Pentecost "Church's birthday" God brought hope/life when there was nothing but gloom/despair. It was a breath of fresh air, the 2nd time God breathed into his people. At creation, he shaped us from clay, breathed into us his breath. But something went wrong. We rebelled against God, were driven from Eden, had to live under a curse. Death entered the story! In every life there is a time when breath stops. The body falls into dust from which it came. It also happened to Jesus: a time when he breathes his last. The weight of world's sin crushed him, his lungs collapsed. His body, made of dust like ours, hung lifeless on Cross. Until his dust is raised to life. His new life wasn't temporary, marked by shame/sorrow but life eternal, a life of victory. This was God's plan from the start: to breathe new life into dead people.

STORY...a young pastor went to his 1st church with enthusiasm but found worship services poorly attended. Most people thought that the church was dead. He pled for greater commitment, but nothing worked. He decided to conduct CHURCH'S FUNERAL. Sanctuary was packed. He put a CASKET up front, eulogized the deceased, talked of what Church had done, grieve its untimely demise, then invited them to come view the corpse. They came up, only to see a MIRROR reflecting their own faces.

Churches close every year, not because they've completed their work but because they've spent their time trying to pay bills, keep the doors open; their focus is on survival, not mission. We still need Pentecost.

IN THE UPPER ROOM...

Circumstances beat us down. We face our limits, reach our breaking points. We need God. Come to the Upper Room: Disciples cower in fear, trying to avoid the detection of Jewish leaders, still confused about what to do. They are weary of waiting on God to do something. This isn't just about what God did once upon time. Pentecost invites us to ponder where God is at work today? We are a part something big. God is up to something but it isn't CHURCH BUSINESS AS USUAL. Maybe we'd rather be safe than sorry. Give God an inch, he will take a mile. He'll take your life. He nudges us, uses us to say/do things that we'd never imagined ourselves saying or doing. On his last night with them, Jesus said something that blew their minds.

IT IS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE THAT I GO AWAY BUT I WON'T LEAVE YOU ORPHANED, I'LL SEND A HELPER, A COMFORTER WHO'LL GIVE YOU THE STRENGTH YOU NEED TO CARRY ON MY WORK. WAIT IN JERUSALEM UNTIL YOU ARE CLOTHED WITH GOD'S POWER.

STIFLING THE SPIRIT...

Their advantage? Come on! The one who caused the lame to walk, the blind to see; who raised the dead and taught us things about God no one had ever said. How can it be our advantage? Jesus says: I'm going away but someone else is coming. I'd like to say more but you can't bear it now.

Imagine: Jesus would be more POWERFULLY PRESENT after his Resurrection than before it. His words "clothed with power" struck home. Without the Spirit, they were as naked as jaybirds. God's power isn't coercive like the world's power. God didn't force them to do anything. But we can stifle the Spirit and ignore God. Yes, it is easier to run the Church on our terms, not be bothered by God's plans. All we have to do is be organized/civilized/careful. At least, we are in control.

STORY...a youth came to the Elders meeting, propose a plan for Evangelism for Church. He'd gone to a conference, excited to go into community. If only a few members went door to door, they could reach people for Christ. One Elder interjected.

Elder: We aren't that kind of church. We don't go door to door to bother people. We are concerned for our reputation in town God save us from being more interested in our reputation than being true to our mission.

WHAT HAPPENED OUTSIDE THE HOUSE...

Some Christians want just enough religion to be respected but not enough to change the way they live. They want to go to the dance without having to dance.

Story...Sara Miles was raised as an atheist, happily living a secular life as a restaurant cook, indifferent to religion until she walked into a Church in San Francisco on a whim. A Communion service was underway. She ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine and it happened. At 46, her life was radically changed...what she called unexpected and inconvenient conversion to Christianity. "I wasn't interested in becoming a Christian, much less a religious nut but it changed in 1 beautiful/unplanned instant.

An inconvenient/unplanned moment. God surprised her. Has he surprised you? Don't leave Pentecost feeling "left out", as if such moments happen to everyone but you. God will find a time and a way. Suddenly, all heaven breaks loose, Luke says, dramatic signs, spoke in languages uncommon to rural Judean rednecks. Such unrestrained joy is the stuff of myths. We file it away as an old tale.

Quote...of one cynic if it were up to most Christians, churches would put lightning rods on their steeples instead of crosses. When lightning struck the early church, we'd prefer protection from it ever happening again!

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS...

There is a bigger meaning to Pentecost than warm fuzzy feelings. The "special effects weren't Luke's main point. What happened inside the house wasn't nearly as big as what happened outside the house: What was born at Pentecost wasn't another institution/religion but a movement. Once timid Disciples hit the streets sharing the Good news. It wasn't a momentary thrill. They now **had** a purpose worthy of their lives. The Early Church was a JESUS MOVEMENT; they weren't trying to start a NEW BUSINESS. They put Christianity on the map. They now **had something to say**, something worth saying. The key was keeping the story straight, not to make it about them, but to focus on Jesus. The Church not only has a mission; God's mission has a church. Every day can be a Pentecost; the Spirit is at work. God wants to work in/through our lives. God is on the move. Are we?

STORY...a Choir in Texas came down aisle, singing "Up from Grave He Arose". A woman, wearing shoes with slender heels, got her shoes stuck in floor grate covering air register. She slipped her foot out of her shoe, kept going. The man after her reached down, pulled up her shoe, but the entire grate came up! He smiled, kept walking. The next man stepped into open register, disappeared. A voice from the depths

Voice: Are all of you out of the way? I am coming out now.

Girl: Come on up, Jesus. We'll get out of the way.

THE CHURCH ON THE MOVE...

Time to get out of God's way, to make good on our good intentions! Time to be the person God is using instead of the person he might use. God provides what is often missing in Church: the POWER to put into practice what Jesus wants us to do. Could it happen now? Do we still believe in a God who BLOWS THROUGH CLOSED DOORS, sets on HEARTS ON FIRE, or have we come think of God as old/tired by now?

STORY...a young girl attended church with her Grandma, startled when a few people started shouting, jumping into the air.

GIRL: GRANDMA, LOOK AT HOW HIGH THEY JUMP. IS IT WHAT GOD WANTS US TO DO?

GRANDMA: HE DOESN'T CARE HOW HIGH THEY JUMP; WHAT CONCERNS HIM IS WHAT THEY DO WHEN THEY GET DOWN.

It wasn't HOW HIGH the Disciples jumped that makes Pentecost but what THEY DID WHEN THEY CAME DOWN. They started acting like Jesus acted, loving the way He loved. There's no better proof that Jesus was who he said he was than Disciples' BEFORE/AFTER PICTURES. They mature before our eyes. They go from being SPECTATORS to PARTICIPANTS, from observing Jesus work to doing Jesus' work. When they opened their mouths, they sounded like him; when they laid their hands on sick, it was as if Jesus himself touched them. They started doing things they'd never seen anyone but Jesus do...

STORY...preacher Leslie Weatherhead visited chapel in London where John Wesley, founder of Methodist Church, was converted. He saw a plaque on the wall, May 24, 1738, when John Wesley was converted Weatherhead sat there, and thinking of Wesley, an old man with a cane came down the aisle. He saw the plaque. Not seeing Weatherhead he read the words out loud, and then dropped to his knees...

Man: Do it again, Lord! Do it again for me!

Closing...Lord, do it again. All across your church and all around the world: Do it again, Lord. Renew us. Send out of our Upper Rooms of fear and into the world to be your people!