

Pentecost Sunday – Acts 2:1-21

Do you ever think about why we are here? In this place, at this time, doing these things with this group of people? What led to this?

Pentecost, (or Whit Sunday as it used to be called), is a Jewish festival which under the law of Israel was to be observed with great rejoicing 50 days (seven weeks) after Passover. That is, in Christian terms, about seven weeks after Easter. The section we have read from Acts chapter 2 records extraordinary events that took place at the first Pentecost after the first Easter. Little wonder, as we'll see, that this day came to be known as the birthday of the church. People had seen a few Pentecosts – but nothing like this!

We learn from this passage at least two things:

Firstly, the Plan of God for the world. The spread of Christianity beginning that day in Jerusalem where it began all the way to here on the other side of the world is anchored in the clear plan of God for the world.

We pick this up at several points in this first half of Acts chapter 2. About 120 followers of Jesus are gathered, including those we know as the apostles.

It's extraordinary. The loud blowing of a violent wind is heard. Each disciple has what seems to be a flame of fire just above their head. And they all begin to speak foreign languages they had never learned.

Little wonder that some of the Pentecost pilgrims from all over the Jewish world thought they were drunk. For Peter that's not true. It's only 9 o'clock in the morning!

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No, no , he says, this is about the plan of God for the world.

Peter turns to the writing of the prophet Joel, one of the minor prophets of the Old Testament. He reminds his hearers that Joel spoke of the last days, of the days before the great and glorious day of the Lord, of the days when everyone no matter Jew or non-Jew could call on the name of the Lord Jesus and be saved. Everyone. No matter what their culture. No matter what their language.

That's why the disciples, who were native Jews of Galilee just like Jesus himself, now spoke in the native languages spoken by all these Jewish visitors to Jerusalem from all over the Jewish world. From the east to the west; from the north to the south; whatever your language you heard these uneducated Galileans speaking of the Messiah and his wondrous death and resurrection for sin.

It may astound you to hear and see such a thing, says Peter. But this is the plan of God for the world. Just like Joel says about the last days, what you see before you is that God has poured out his Spirit on all people. So that across all levels of the new community of God's people the Spirit will cause them to prophesy, to speak the words of God about Jesus.

And more than that the purpose of this speaking is so that people will hear of Jesus. And, as he says in verse 21, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

God's people empowered by God's spirit speaking God's word about Jesus so that people will call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

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The truthful word of Peter on that amazing occasion is that this is not something weird but the deliberate carefully worked out plan of God for the world. And friends, it hasn't changed.

Secondly, there is also a reminder in this passage that all this is only possible through the power of God given by his Spirit. Let me say that again. To clearly, faithfully and truthfully proclaim the message of the wonders of God in Jesus with the offer of salvation to all who call on that Jesus is only possible through the power of God given by his Spirit.

How did these uneducated, common women and men change from being fearful, contradictory and inarticulate about Jesus? Only by the gift of God's Spirit.

How did they become bold proclaimers of the truth about Jesus and successfully urge people to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus for salvation? Only by the gift of God's Spirit.

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In the same way that anybody since becomes a proclaimer. It may not be with the same spectacular events as described in Acts chapter 2. But as the apostle Paul will say, following the Lord Jesus himself, it is only because of the work of God's Spirit that people are able to both proclaim Jesus as Lord and bow before him in acknowledgement of his Lordship over their lives.

In London in October 1786 a meeting was held when some very famous Christian leaders including William Wilberforce, John Newton, and the founders of the Church Missionary Society gathered to discuss the question: "What is the best means of planting the gospel in Botany Bay?"

Under God and driven by his Spirit the answer to their prayers was in the person of the Rev Richard Johnson, Chaplain to the first Fleet which arrived in Botany Bay on January 26, 1788. They quickly sailed North and decided their settlement would be built on the shores of what is now called Sydney Harbour. Despite persecution, illness, and the general load of work, having to build his own house and a temporary church building, Johnson faithfully proclaimed the gospel of Jesus. He urged convicts, military, free settlers, administrators, and the local aborigines to call on the name of the Lord and be saved. But it didn't stop there.

Empowered by the same Spirit, and proclaiming the same message of salvation through Jesus, our brothers and sisters, our forebears in the faith made sure, often at great personal cost, that this gospel would be proclaimed and churches planted further North in Queensland, and then in Central Queensland, finally setting up the Diocesan structures under Bishop Dawes. And the rest is history. Or is it?

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Bishop David in his charge to Synod last year reminded us that although there is much to do to strengthen and train the present people of God in our diocese, we must never lose sight of God's great plan for the world, that God will use us to accomplish that plan, and that he will continue to empower us by his Spirit for that great and wonderful task.

Let's pray that God will continue his great work among us, in us, and through us, so that many more of our friends, families, neighbours, fellow Australians, indeed people from every nation, will hear of Jesus and be able to call on the name of the Lord and be saved.