

## WHY CELEBRATE PENTECOST!

Acts 2:1-13

June 5, 2022

**During the church year** – we are very familiar with the two Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, and we wouldn't dare miss not celebrating them, or attending special church services, concerts, and cantatas during that time, plus get together with friends and family members. There is much celebrating taking place during both of these Christian holidays, even for those who aren't believers. Then, there's a third holiday in the church year, which is equally important. In fact, it is essential to our Christian faith; however, many Christians tend to neglect, and often not even acknowledge this important event. This third event is called Pentecost, and this important day in church history is rooted in the account we read from Acts 2, celebrating the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles (10 days after Jesus' Ascension, and 50 days after Jesus' Resurrection) and Peter preached a sermon and the gathering crowd responded. That day the Holy Spirit came while 120 of Christ's disciples were gathered (actually hiding out in fear) in an upper room in Jerusalem. Many of us think that the celebration of Pentecost marks the beginning of the Christian church, but it's thousands of years older than the birth of the Christian church. Pentecost is one of the three major holidays on the Jewish calendar that occurs 50 days after Passover and goes all the way back to the time of Moses, about 3500 years ago, not 2000 years ago.

For the Jews it is the fourth holy festival or feast of the Jewish cycle of seven festivals, which are outlined in **Leviticus 23**. The first thing we need to note about this feast is the fact that according to Jewish tradition, the very first occurrence of the Day of Pentecost happened on the day God gave Moses the Torah, the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone, at the foot of Mount Sinai, when God spoke directly in an audible voice to His chosen people Israel through thunder and fire and all kinds of marvelous signs. That event took place exactly fifty days after the crossing of the Red Sea, hence the origin of the word "***Pentecost = 50<sup>th</sup> day.***" We need to also remember the Apostle Paul's words to the church about the importance of these feasts and why we need to acknowledge them and continue to celebrate them, because Jesus came to fulfill the Scriptures including the Jewish festivals. **Colossians 2:16-17**, "***Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come, the reality,***

***however, is found in Christ.***” Christ came to fulfill all of the Jewish festivals, and what the Israelites had been practising on these specific feast days since leaving Egypt, were rehearsals for things to come in the future. According to the New Testament, we are told that the first three Jewish feasts have been fulfilled at Jesus’ first coming and He will fulfill the last three feasts at His second coming. What we are seeing here in this feast of Pentecost is a parallel between the Jewish feasts of Pentecost in the Old Testament and the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. God’s gift of the law was pointing to God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, and while the first was an outward gift, the second is an inward gift that would change hearts!

The Bible declares that there are three pilgrim feasts that all Jewish men must attend – Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. It was during this annual Jewish festival of Pentecost, when a great many Jewish pilgrims would have traveled to the city of Jerusalem to thank the Lord for giving them the Torah, and it was on that specific day that God chose to fulfill the promise that was made by two Old Testament prophets, Zechariah and Joel, and also made by Jesus during the Last Supper. Both Zechariah and Joel prophesied that one day God will write His law on the hearts of His people by His Spirit. God didn’t want the Law to be written in stone any longer, now His desire was to give them a new heart and put a new Spirit within them, helping these rebellious Jews to walk in God’s ways and keep His commandments, and fulfill the calling to be a blessing to the nations.

When Peter stood up to preach to the gathering crowds on that day when the Holy Spirit fell on the 120, he said that prophet Joel’s words were being fulfilled this day, ***“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men shall dream dreams, and on my menservants and my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they shall prophesy...And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”*** (Acts 2:17-21). The time had come when God would live within anyone who would call on His Name, declaring Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Is there any wonder three thousand of them accepted Christ that day as they experienced the fulfillment of Scripture! At the very first Pentecost God birthed the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, and now God was birthing the church – Christ followers from every nation, tribe, and tongue!

The coming of the Holy Spirit was first given to Jewish believers; therefore, we must understand that the roots of the church of Jesus Christ are Jewish, as Paul

reminds us in **Romans 11:16-17**, *“Since Abraham and the patriarchs are consecrated and set apart for God, so also will their descendants be set apart. If the roots of a tree are holy and set apart for God, so to will be the branches. However, some of the branches (Jews) have been pruned away. And you, who were nothing more than a wild olive branch (Gentiles), God has crafted in – inserting you among the remaining branches (Jewish Believers) as a joint partner to share in the wonderful richness of the cultivated olive stem (nation of Israel).”* Paul is painting a picture here of Israel as God’s olive branch, the descendants of Abraham who were chosen and set apart by God to represent Him on this earth as His Kingdom people. We believers are the Gentiles, who by the grace of God have been grafted into the people of God, so we can’t cut ourselves off from our spiritual roots, Israel. Therefore, the church cannot ignore their Jewish roots and the Jewish feasts are not just about something that happened to Israel thousands of years ago to help them remember and celebrate God’s goodness to them. They are for us today as well, all because they have not only historic and theological meaning, but also prophetic significance. They point to the Messiah, both to His first coming and His second coming. They not only point to the coming Messiah; they will actually be fulfilled by Him on the very same day they are being celebrated!

At the Last Supper meal – we read in **John 14:25-26** that Jesus promised His disciples that after His death and resurrection, God would send them a Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would teach them things and help them to remember everything He had taught them during those three years they travelled the Palestinian countryside. And then, right before Jesus ascended back to His Heavenly Father, He tells His disciples to wait for that promised gift before they did anything else, *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.”* (Acts 1:4). God chose this specific day to send His Holy Spirit because of the great number of pilgrims that would be in Jerusalem. On that day, in this holy city, would be Jews who had been dispersed to every part of the Roman Empire, speaking every dialect and language spoken throughout the Roman Empire. Ironically, as the Jews were celebrating the giving of the Law to a nation that was now free from slavery and on their way to the Promised Land, God was also beginning a new season and calling for followers of the risen Christ – the harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God – to set others free from the bondage of sin. So, for Christians, Pentecost marks the birth of the Christian church; the day

when Peter preached his very first sermon, and in response, there was a harvest of 3000 souls on their way to the new Promised Land (eternal life).

**Ten days after Jesus' Ascension** as these 120 frightened disciples were gathered one Sunday morning in unity and prayer – God sent them the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in **Acts 2:2-4**, *“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.”* It was the roar of God’s breath that filled that room as the gateway between Heaven and earth opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon the 120, and this roar of Heaven, the breath of God, released a sound over the city of Jerusalem that drew a large crowd. *“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken”* (Acts 2:5-6). And we are also told how those who heard reacted to the sound in **Acts 2:12**, *“Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’”* They were both dumbfounded and astonished by what was happening – as a result they were ready to hear the Gospel message. God got their attention and opened their hearts to receive the Good News!

I think it would be foolish for us to think that in a large international city like Jerusalem that a group of people speaking in foreign languages would attract a crowd of thousands. There must have been something supernatural that would cause thousands of people to stop what they were doing, to leave their homes and businesses to gather around a group of strangers. I believe it must have been a truly miraculous sound from God or the sound created by a great number of angels that broke through the barrier between Heaven and earth that day, and summoned the people to hear the Gospel message that Peter preached that day and respond in such a dramatic fashion!

On that day, these once frightened men and women had suddenly and miraculously become equipped and empowered to carry on the ministry Jesus had begun, and within the very city, where Jesus was crucified. In fact, within this gathering crowd there must have been those who had jeered Jesus on the cross seven weeks earlier when they travelled as pilgrims to attend the Jewish Feast of Passover. On

this day, Peter (the Apostle who had denied even knowing Jesus because of fear of arrest) boldly preached a sermon in which he tells these Jews that the man they jeered and crucified was in fact the Messiah – the Son of God. And, because of Peter’s bold preaching, the people were crushed, realizing what they had done in ignorance to their Messiah that day. And miraculously the Christian church was born as recorded in **Acts 2:41**, *“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”* Contrast this with what happened at the first Pentecost when the Law was given at Mount Sinai, when 3000 had lost their lives because Moses’ brother Aaron, who Moses had left in charge while he ascended Mount Moriah to meet with God, fashioned a golden calf as their god and they ended up worshiping this idol. This incident is to remind us that the giving of the Law brings death because the law points out our sins, while the coming of the Spirit brings life, eternal life, because of the grace of God!

**What happened to Peter that day?** How did Peter go from being frightened, to being fearless? How did Peter go from being a coward, to being courageous? How did Peter go from denying Jesus, to proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah? The only logical answer is that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and that’s why Pentecost Sunday continues to be a crucial and important day for the church. It is critical that the church be equipped with the infilling of the Holy Spirit to carry out the work that God has for every believer. The disciples could never have carried out the Great Commission using their own natural abilities, and neither can we. We need the constant infilling of the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of the church, especially in reaching the lost!

**As modern day Christians** – we need the power of the Holy Spirit to turn the world upside down, as the early Christians did. However, today the Holy Spirit is mostly feared and miss-understood; thereby under-utilized or completely avoided by many believers. As well, some Christians believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for today, it was only for the early church to get Christianity up-and-going, and then the gifts disappeared. However, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are crucial and needed for today like never before because there’s still a great many around us who are lost and need to hear the Gospel message at a time when our world is drifting out of control and heading for destruction. So, this is an important day for us here at SCCC, and for every Bible believing church, for this basic reason, at Pentecost we move from being spectators sitting in the stands to becoming participants in God’s work of redemption and salvation in a world that is no longer centered on the absolute truth of God’s Word.

Once we receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we join God in the work He is doing in the world as His representatives! Christ's disciples spent 3 years travelling with Jesus, watching Him perform miracles, cast out demons, teach God's kingdom principals, and raise the dead. His followers spent 3 years mostly as spectators; however, now that Christ had returned to His Heavenly Father, Jesus had turned the reigns over to them, to do what He had done and even greater things. On the Day of Pentecost, His disciples were no longer spectators; the time had come for them to step up and carry on the work of God's kingdom, and the Holy Spirit was essential to help them accomplish this great task. That's why Pentecost is to be celebrated annually as a major event in every Christian church to remind us of our divine calling to take the Gospel message to the ends of the earth!

**Retired American black pastor Marvin McMickle said this about Pentecost,** *“On Christmas, Jesus was born into the world and laid in a manger. There were no disciples present for that event. What do you and I do on Christmas that is central to the story? **Nothing!** On Easter, Jesus was raised from the dead with all power in His hands. Once again, there were no disciples involved in bringing that event to pass. So, again there is **nothing** for us to do on Easter except celebrate and give thanks for the work Christ has done on our behalf. On Pentecost, though, all of that changes – you and I are called away from our roles as spectators into the role of central characters in God's work. As a result, we do not watch what somebody else is doing for God but are being equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit so we can **become actively involved** in the work of salvation and redemption. That is what Pentecost is all about; it is the day Jesus officially transfers to His disciples the responsibility of spreading the message of salvation.”*

So, Pentecost is the day when each one of us here at SCCC are reminded of our responsibility of spreading the message of salvation, as we are invited once again to get actively involved in what God is doing in our families, in this church, in this community, and throughout the world. This is the day that we are encouraged once again to get out of the comfortable stands as observers and get out onto the playing field and join the game!

**The purpose of Pentecost Sunday** – is to remind every Christian that they need to receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit to carry out the ministry that God has prepared for us to do. As believers. even though we have acknowledged that Christ died for our sins and our sins have been forgiven – even though we have received Christ and been baptized – there is still another crucial step that each one

of us needs to take. And YES, once we become a Christ followers, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, as the Holy Spirit comes to reside within us, but we are not empowered for ministry until we are filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, we cannot worship properly, or pray in power, or serve unselfishly, or love others, or live victorious lives, unless we have been filled and empowered by the same Holy Spirit that fell upon the 120 disciples in Jerusalem that day 2000 years ago. In that well known chapter on the gifts of the Spirit, found in **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul tells us that we have all been given spiritual gifts to equip us to do Kingdom work, but we cannot fully utilize those gifts we have been given, until God has filled us and transformed us by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, we need the power of Pentecost to fall upon us to effectively use the gifts God has given to the church!

On that very first Pentecost Sunday, the city of Jerusalem was filled with people from every nation, every race, every ethnic group, every language, and every social background, and when the Holy Spirit fell, the disciples began to speak in other tongues. Tongues is a wonderful gift from God and is used predominately for our own benefit. But in this case, it was a sign of the Spirit's infilling. Now, some Christians continue to believe that you are not filled with the Holy Spirit unless God gives you a special language that you have never learned; however, I know many wonderful Christians that are filled with the Holy Spirit and don't speak in tongues. Tongues is one of those gifts you only receive if you desire it; however, on that day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues was important to bring these foreign Jews to Christ (so they needed to hear the Gospel message in their own language).

In the book of Acts, tongues was a visible sign that God was doing something new, as was prophesied by the prophet Joel. As well, the gift of tongues was also important when Peter preached to those very first Gentile believers, to Cornelius and his household, letting the Jewish followers know that Gentiles are also included in God's promise of salvation and can be filled with the Holy Spirit. I believe the gift of tongues is something every Christian should ask for, especially as a personal prayer language!

**So, at Pentecost, God was doing two wonderful things at once: 1)** God was bringing Jewish people from all over the Roman Empire to Christ, so they could take the Gospel message back to their native countries; thereby, helping to spread the Gospel message far-and-wide; **and 2)** God was establishing the world-wide church that consists of and welcomes people from every race, tribe, tongue, and region of the world. The church was never meant to be a segregated place, the

blood of Jesus not only washes away our sins; it also washes away divisions within the body of Christ, as the church is to look exactly like the coming future Kingdom of God where everyone is welcome. This is what makes the church unique, we are different in numerous ways, but still unified, accepting and loving one another, unique as we are!

**The gifts of the Holy Spirit are still for today** – these gifts were never intended to be temporary but are to be in constant use within the church until Christ returns. Paul confirms this in **1 Corinthians 1:7**, *“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”* So, we are not to fear these spiritual gifts, but to seek them out earnestly and zealously, as Paul continues later in this same letter, *“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophesy”* (1 Corinthians 14:1). These spiritual gifts are important and essential for the church, to help us minister to others, especially to love those who are very different from us.

**Even though the infilling of the Holy Spirit is for today** – unfortunately, not every Christian is filled. To carry on God’s kingdom work it’s crucial to be filled to overflowing, which, by the way, is not a onetime experience, but to be an ongoing continuous infilling, because the daily pressures and demands of life tends to drain the Spirit out of us, leaving us feeling weak and empty. So, we need to constantly come back, and drink once again from the foundation of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds us of this in **Ephesians 5:18**, *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”* Paul is making a connection here between getting drunk on wine and getting drunk on the Holy Spirit. Paul wants everyone of us to get intoxicated on the Holy Spirit! Alcoholics need to keep on drinking alcohol to stay intoxicated, it’s not a onetime deal and you’re drunk for life, but a daily habit. Likewise, with the Holy Spirit, we need to keep drinking to stay intoxicated. And what happens when a person gets intoxicated with alcohol? They lose control, they do things that they wouldn’t normally do, and that’s exactly what needs to happen when we become intoxicated with the Holy Spirit. We lose control so that God can now control us. As the body of Christ, we need to be continuously intoxicated with the Holy Spirit, falling more deeply in love with God, and more deeply in love with others!

We need to be the kind of church where the Holy Spirit is not feared or kept in a nice-neat box but allowed to move freely. We need to be the kind of church where people are free to get emotional; where people are comfortable to raise their hands,

or speak words of prophesy, but it's to be done with humility and respect, not for showmanship or to prove how spiritual you are. We need to be the kind of church that gives the Holy Spirit free reign and control in our lives, in our worship services, and in our gatherings. We need to have complete freedom to speak when the Spirit says to speak, and to be quiet when the Spirit says to be quiet; to move when the Holy Spirit says to move and stand patiently still and wait when the Holy Spirit says to wait.

After Peter preached on that day of Pentecost – the result was that the people were convicted of their sins. The Bible says they were *“cut to the heart”*, pleading to Peter and the other disciples, *“Brothers, what shall we do?”* To which Peter replied, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”* This promise still stands today, not only for us, but for our children, grandchildren, and everyone else. The Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are still for today. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is still for today, and my prayer is for you to receive the Holy Spirit – to seek to continuously be filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, so that you would be continuously intoxicated with the Holy Spirit as those early believers were on that Pentecost Sunday 2000 years ago, and turn the world upside down.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is also a sign of defeat to Satan. The Holy Spirit makes a public spectacle of Satan. **Colossians 2:15** describes Jesus' defeat of Satan, *“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”* At Pentecost Satan witnessed the results of his defeat. Satan saw men and women intoxicated with the Holy Spirit. He saw faith grow where doubt and fear once held them captive. He saw joy in their hearts. He saw their sins forgiven, blotted out as though they had never sinned. He saw the power and the energy of the Holy Spirit fill them so they could do what Jesus did and greater things. And Satan realized that both men and women had the authority to use the name of Jesus to perform the same kind of miracles that Jesus had in His earth walk. He saw God take these men and women out of Satan's grip and fill their hearts with love for God and for each other, where hatred, greed and jealousy had once reigned supreme. He saw selfishness curtailed, and the strangest phenomenon of all was to see men and women stand in the presence of God in bold confidence, without the sense of guilt, inferiority, or condemnation as Satan's accusations against them was silenced. Satan killed Jesus

to annihilate Him; instead, Jesus' death and resurrection gave new birth to this new creation called the body of Christ – the church!

At Pentecost the reality of Satan's defeat had finally took hold, so we have nothing to fear. And that's why it's important for us to celebrate Pentecost. So, let's never neglect celebrating this fourth Jewish feast and third holiday of the church year – Pentecost Sunday!