

Acts 2.1-13 | When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

<sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” <sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

## Acts 2:1-13 | Pentecost

There is a deep philosophical problem called the problem of the one and the many. The question is “how can the one coexist with the many?” Some ancient philosophers proposed that all things were one. Pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides proposed that all things are one, and that change is illusory. Many new age writers have adopted this perspective. All is one. We are all one, and our distinctness is merely an illusion. Heraclitus proposed that everything is change and diversity.

These deep questions play out in all kinds of ways, from physics to race relations. People are typically collapsing into one or the other. Into a oneness or a diversity. But you can see that oneness is like a tyranny. And diversity is disintegration. I think of this at a church culture level all the time. Edwin Friedman says, it is not hard to get people to come together it is hard to get people to come together and stay themselves. Even in interpersonal relationships, oneness is just codependency, and diversity is just abandonment. How can we come together and be truly one, while we are many and distinct? Pentecost shows us the answer to this question.

### 1. Wind, Fire

Acts 2.1-2 | When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

The early followers of Christ were gathered together in Jerusalem just as they had been instructed by Jesus to await the Holy Spirit. The day of Pentecost is the celebration of first fruits. It means 50th day. You can hear the five in Penta. It is 7x7 weeks after the Passover, plus one which puts it on a Sunday. It is a festival which celebrates the first fruits of the

harvest. The first fruits are evidence of God's faithfulness to provide. They are gathered together in one place, it is not necessarily the upper room it is not told to us where.

While they are gathered together on the feast day suddenly there came from heaven a sound like mighty rushing wind. The first thing that hits them is the sound, it is a dramatic. And the wind fills the whole of the house they are in. It is not like it blew in from the north, it is from heaven. Wind is associated with the Holy Spirit because wind and spirit are the same word. The Spirit is like the wind in that you can see his effects but you can't see him. You can see the effects of the wind but you can't see the wind. Ruah, Pnuema.

In **Genesis 8:1** God remembers Noah and sends a wind to blow over the waters to cause them to subside. In **Exodus 14:21** a wind separates the waters to part the Red Sea. In **Job 38:1** God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. In **Ezekiel 1:4** Ezekiel's vision of the throne of God begins with a stormy wind. The wind is the presence of God manifest for his people.

Acts 2:3 | And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

Then something they can see appears. Divided tongues as of fire appear to them and rests on each one of them. Fire rests on the people of God. Just as John the Baptist had prophesied. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11, ESV)

Jesus Christ is baptizing his church with the Holy Spirit and with Fire. Fire is a consuming force. It's devouring, even destructive. But it's also light and warmth. It refines and purifies. But this fire is like another fire we've seen before. In Exodus 3:2 the Angel of the Lord is standing in the midst of a burning bush. The bush is burning but not consumed. This is a dramatic spectacle. Roaring rushing wind inside a home, and flames apportioning themselves upon people who are not consumed but empowered like how fire is powerful. The Lord is starting something new. Like the world after the flood. Like the nation after the Exodus.

## 2. Tongues

Acts 2:4 | And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The people of God are filled with the Holy Spirit. Just as the Lord had promised them they would be in Jerusalem not many days after his ascension into Heaven. And this filling with the Holy Spirit manifests in them first in their speech. This will be true throughout the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit typically attends words. When someone is filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts, they begin speaking with power. You can think of this like how the

word of God in the beginning is effective to create the world and bring light out of darkness so too is the proclamation of the word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit effective.

Acts 2:5-6 | Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

The strangeness of it is that as these Jews from all different nations gather together they hear the proclamation of the mighty works of God each in their own native tongue. The tongues that the disciples are speaking in here are the native languages of their hearers. The fact that they are being spoken to in their native tongues is bewildering. But it is not the bewilderment of confusion, but the bewilderment of understanding.

Acts 2:7-8 | And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?

They would have spoken Greek altogether, many would have spoken Hebrew but they would not have known one another’s native languages. Especially not these anti-cosmopolitan Galileans. All the nations hear the glory of God in a way that is as if it is their story. Because it is their story.

Acts 2:9-11 | Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Luke wants us to understand the drama of this moment. He lists out the nations who are gathered there. It spans all the linguistic regions of the Mediterranean. And they are all hearing the mighty works of God. Which mighty works, well if I had to guess it was this one! “Christ promised the Holy Spirit to us, he ascended into heaven, a mighty wind came, tongues of fire appeared and fell upon us. See I am telling it to you now and I can tell you get what I mean!”

### **3. End of Babel**

After Noah leaves the ark having survived the deluge the Lord tells him something that sounds familiar.

Genesis 9:1 | And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

And then in the next chapter, we get the table of nations. A list of the 70 nations which descended from Noah. This is good news, Noah and his offspring have obeyed the command given to him by God. It is good that there are so many distinct nations. In fact it is in line with God's design to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

But in chapter 11 the people get an idea for a utopian one world government. At its center will be a technology which can ascend into the heavens. The Tower of Babel. Everyone has one language, one aim, and it is the glory of mankind made by mankind irrespective of God's commands. God sees them building and comes down to their tower. He sets a ceiling on human vainglory. He punishes them by confusing their languages.

Genesis 11:9 | Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

The Lord confused their languages and enforced his command to fill the earth. But consider what happened at Pentecost. The Lord did not give them all one language. He did not eliminate the nations and their distinctiveness. Instead he made them comprehensible to each other in each other's languages. Babel is undone at Pentecost. The gospel of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is comprehensible to every tribe nation and tongue on earth. This gospel is for you Egyptian, this gospel is for you Cretan, this gospel is for you Arabia, because Christ is Lord of Egypt, Crete, Arabia. The wonders of God are for you. The good news of Jesus Christ is for you.

All the nations of the Earth will say that Christ is Lord. They will not become some one World government, some tyranny. But they will submit to Christ as Lord. Unity comes down from above, it is not built from the bottom. But the aim of Babel although the highest in the world is not high enough. Only that which comes down from heaven could unite us together as distinct in our nations. The wind from heaven the fire from heaven. Only his gospel brings unity. Only his gospel brings diversity without disintegration. Different languages, same comprehension. There is nothing else like it.