

Sermon: “Something Got a Hold of Me”

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When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews[a] and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

... Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Acts 2:1-15; 37-41

When the angel of the Lord appeared to the virgin Mary, she received these words from the Lord: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Not only does this verse foreshadow the miraculous birth of the Savior to come, it is also a reminder that the spirit responsible for the birth of Jesus is also the same spirit responsible for the birth of the church. The gift of the Holy Spirit fulfills the

prophecy of Luke 3:16, when John the Baptist proclaims: “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” And the same spirit that descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism in the Jordan River is the same spirit that fills the disciples in the upper room in Acts 2. Brothers and sisters, I don’t want you to miss this: Bethlehem is God with us. The Cross is God for us. But Pentecost is God in us.

Therefore, Acts chapter 2 must be interpreted in the light of Acts chapter 1. And specifically in contrast to verses 4-8 where the risen Lord instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father which was the Holy Spirit. And that leads us to our big idea for today: obedience is a prerequisite for a move of God.

Naaman would never have been cured of his leprosy had he not obeyed. The walls of Jericho would still be standing this morning had the children of Israel not obeyed. The ten lepers in the New Testament would never have been cleansed of their leprosy had they not obeyed. We would still be sinking deep in sin if Jesus had not obeyed his assignment on Mt. Gethsemane. Because he started praying, “Abba father, with you all things are possible. Remove this bitter cup from me. Nevertheless, let not my will, but your will be done.” And he went to the cross and died a sinner’s death but rose the third day with all power in His hand.

Obedience is better than sacrifice because all sacrifice does is try to make up for what obedience would have prevented in the first place.

I had a dream the other day that I was in the golden years of my life and my grandchildren asked me a series of questions. They asked me: Papa, what did you do when you realized that 1.75 billion people lived in poverty? What did you do when you realized that one billion people go to bed hungry every day? What did you do when you realized that there was a generation who were being consumed by the darkness of the Adversary? Did you love on them? Did you preach Jesus to them? Did you pray for them? Or did you simply say, I have my own problems.” Unfortunately, I woke up before I gave the answer. Yet, I hope and I pray that when that time comes, my life and my ministry will tell the story that we preached Jesus. Loved folk. Served God. And lead souls to Christ.

That was Jesus’s last instructions to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. Acts 1:8 records Jesus this way: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The Acts of the Apostles, written by the Gospel writer Luke, is our reminder that the Good News of Jesus Christ didn’t stop with His earthly ministry. Because even after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, we see the birth of the church and are reminded that there was still work to be done and Good News to be shared.

When you read the Acts of the Apostles, you will discover something in it that you don't see in Matthew, Mark, and John. When they write their gospel story, it reads like this: Jesus lived. Jesus died, and on the third day He rose again.

Yet, Luke takes it one step further and argues that the Gospel story is more like this: Jesus came. He lived. He died. He rose. He ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit came down. And one day He's coming back again.

That shouts at me. Because one day I will see Jesus face to face.

And just like God shaped Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed into him his *Ruach*, breath of life, the same came be said of the church on the day of Pentecost.

Pentecost was the day that the Father sent the Holy Spirit. And She came and breathed into the church the *Ruach* breath of life. And since that day, the church became a living entity to preach and teach and lead the lost to Christ until he comes back again.

Pentecost means "fifty days" and it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the beginning of the Jewish Passover. It was essentially an agricultural feast where the Jews presented unto the Lord the first fruits of their labors. However, this day later came to be associated with the reading of the Law because it was believed that on this day Moses received the law at Mt. Sinai and delivered it to the people of Israel fifty days after the angel of death had passed through Egypt slaying the firstborn of Egyptian households to secure the release of God's people from slavery.

The Bible records that the resurrected Jesus walked among his disciples for forty days following his Easter morning resurrection, and on the fortieth day ascended back to the Father in heaven. Gathered in an upper room, we find the disciples restlessly waiting and praying to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had foreshadowed. However, ten days had passed since Jesus had ascended into heaven and the promise of the Holy Spirit had not yet come.

What I find interesting about this text is not just the obedience of the disciples to wait (because we've said that obedience is the prerequisite for a move of God) or the understandable fear that kept them locked behind closed doors due to the threats of the Roman government. If they could crucify Jesus, can you imagine what they would do to them. No, what's interesting to me is a particular, yet arcane, fact found in Acts 1:15.

If you still have your Bibles open, verse 15 says that 120 persons are gathered together waiting and praying. How many people are gathered waiting and praying? 120. You must understand that 120 is not some random number. One hundred twenty is not just some number that is a multiple of 10 and 12. In fact, 120 is a number that has significance in Jewish culture. For if you do your homework, you will discover that under Jewish religious law, it took 120 men gathered together in the same place to establish a valid synagogue. I know what you're thinking. Matthew 18:20 says: "If two or three are gathered in my name, I will be there also." And that's true when it

comes to Jesus. But when it comes to establishing a church in Jewish culture, it took 120 men to deem itself a synagogue. So, what's gathered here in our text is not some random grouping of disciples but enough folk to establish the formality of a religious institution that could worship God and be about God's business.

And that's what I love about God. God is intentional. He is deliberate, precise, and knows what He is doing. In response, your job, our job, is to keep the faith, be obedient to His word, wait on Him, and know that He is God. Sometimes God will bypass what you hope for to give you what you really need. Sometimes your clearest view of God will be in the fires and the trials of life. And even when the world throws you a curveball, know that we serve a God that can use all things for your good. Because God is intentional.

That's why when I'm down and out and need a word from the Lord, when my money is funny and my change is strange, when I find myself with problems that seem bigger than my prayer life, when the doctor gives me a bad report, when my home life is shaky, when my children are struggling, when my boss is acting the fool, when over my head I see trouble in the air, I don't need a convenient, casual experience with God. I need a God that is intentional about meeting me at my point of need.

It's interesting to me that when it comes to making that paper or buying that new gadget or being in the right organization, we are so intentional. But when it comes to worship, when it comes to Bible study, when it comes to prayer, when it comes to tithing, when it comes to church attendance, when it comes to sharing the good news of Jesus, we are so casual and nonchalant. Beloved, hear me when I say this: you can't have a personal relationship with God with a casual Sunday morning experience.

Nobody just stumbles into intimacy with God. You must be intentional.

Now notice what happens with intentionality. The Holy Spirit shows up.

Acts 2:1-2 say: "When the Day of Pentecost had come, they were all together [the 120 men] in one place. 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."

Now listen to the New King James translation: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they [the 120 men] were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting."

Did you catch it? Not only did the Holy Spirit show up but they were gathered together in one accord. Maybe that should be our barometer with respect to the power of Pentecost is in this place. Not only should the power be measured by our intentionality, but it should also be measured by our love for one another.

Maybe that's why so many of us are walking wounded today? We've come from places where there was no love. Places steeped in conflict. Places saturated in controversy. Places where folk were more concerned with dividing than with discipleship. More driven to be right than to do the right thing. More consumed with finding a boo than in finding Jesus. More moved by the show than seeking salvation. More focused on gossiping than giving God the glory. And as a result, we have created a generation of folk who attend but don't commit, who consume but don't sow, who would rather be entertained than hear the good news of Jesus Christ, and who blame the hypocrisy of the world on the church. Yet, the Lord sent me here to tell you who the real enemy is. It's not the church. It's the adversary. Because the devil knows that if he can keep you isolated, keep you frustrated, keep you angry, keep you broken, keep division in the body of Christ, there can be no full manifestation of the Holy Spirit to empower you or the church to do God's work.

But when the church is one accord, the Holy Spirit shows up. When we love on one another, yokes are destroyed. When we pray together, the devil gets nervous. When we work together, purpose isn't petty. When we serve together, communities are transformed. When the church operates under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, mess and conflict and confusion become unwelcomed spirits in this place. Because: the Holy Spirit will not let you sit next to me and not speak to me. The Holy Spirit will not let you run around the church and not lend a hand to someone in need. The Holy Spirit will not let you do all that dancing and all that screaming and let you rejoice when I'm in trouble.

The Bible says ... When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they (the 120 men) were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And verse three says: Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

In other words, not only did they hear something, but they also saw something.

Let me explain this to you. The speaking of tongues that we see here in our text is different from the *Gloriosa* that Paul speaks about when he writes to the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 14, we see the people speaking in tongues, but Paul warns them that they are out of order because they are speaking in tongues without interpretation. And this act of the Holy Spirit as recorded by verses three and four is different from the manifestation of the Spirit that Paul writes about in Romans 8 when he says that when we don't know how to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf with sighs and groans too deep for words. That's not the manifestation of the Spirit that we see in Acts 2.

I submit to you that if you read the text carefully, maybe the purpose of Pentecost and this demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit was to equip the church to minister outside its four walls.

Do you still have your Bibles open? Look at verse four. It says that the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, started speaking in tongues and in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability. Now jump to verse six and eleven. And as they did so, folk outside the church began to hear the word of God in a language that was familiar to them and were drawn to them. In other words, the person who speaks English starts talking in Spanish. The person who speaks Spanish starts talking in French. The person who speaks French starts talking in Yoruba. The person who speaks Yoruba starts talking in Mandarin; before you know it, folk who never stepped foot in church started finding their way to the house of God.

That's how we change the world. That's how we unleash the power and the potency of the Holy Spirit. When the church makes a sound and the culture hears and sees the fire of the Holy Ghost in us and all around us, folk will be drawn to Jesus. That's our church growth strategy. That's our Kingdom Purpose. No fancy gimmicks. No special giveaways. Just a church filled with the Holy Spirit and people telling other people about Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah said: I'm going home. I'm not preaching another word in that name. But then something happened to him. And he said, "It's like fire shut up in my bones."

Somebody in here and online this morning said, I wasn't going to tell nobody. But I can't keep it to myself. God's been too good to me. So, I've got to say something. God has opened some doors for me that man has closed. So, I've got to say something. God has defeated some enemies for me. So, I've got to say something. God has provided for me and mine when I didn't even have a dime to my name. So, I've got to say something. God has made a way when it looked like there was no way. Is there anybody here who can testify, I wasn't going to tell nobody, but it's like fire shut up in my bones. I can't keep quiet. I can't be still. I can't sit here and be all sophisticated when I'm wearing God's clothes. I can't be quiet when I'm spending God's money, living in God's house, enjoying the life that God has given me. I tried to keep it to myself, but I've got to tell somebody!

How will we know that Pentecost has come? We will know it . . . when people from various backgrounds and experiences come to this church and still find relevance and hope in the house of Lord. When Welcome Home is more than just a slogan. It's how people feel every time they come through our doors. When that brother with braids and tattoos on every inch of his body can walk into the church and get a fresh and relevant word. When that sister who just got out of jail can find her place and purpose and passion in the work of the church without judgment or shame. When that single mother can find somebody to say: "The Daddy may be gone but you are not alone. I will help you with your child and I don't want anything from you." When that father

discovers his child is gay, but he proudly says, "I love God. And I love my child." When tithing and sacrifice and commitment and service are not just mere words in the dictionary, but they represent who we are and what we do.

Now, some of you all didn't shout. You didn't say AMEN. You didn't clap or wave your hands. That's okay. Because the more I spend time with the Lord and under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the more I come to understand that there's no homogeneity in the Holy Spirit. Say what, Pastor? Let me say it another way, the Holy Spirit is not homogeneous. Come on Pastor, that's the same word. In other words, I've come to understand that what Holy Spirit is for you may not be what She is for me. And that's okay. Because when I look at the text, verses 7-11 say the folk heard the good news of God in their native tongues. In other words, when the Holy Spirit made Her presence known, everyone didn't respond in the same way. Some folks worshipped in one language and some folks worshipped in another, but they all worshipped the same God.

Let me say it this way. When the Holy Spirit comes, God is not expecting everyone to worship the same way. Some folks will clap their hands. Some folks will pat their feet. Some folks will stand to their feet. Some folks will speak in tongues. Some folks will take a lap.

When it comes to praising our God, I don't care how you worship. I don't care how you praise His name. If you want to shout, shout. If you want to dance, dance. If you want to run, run. If you want to sit, sit. If you want to wave your hands, wave your hands. If you want to stand, stand. If you want to jump, jump. Just do me one favor. Just give Him glory!

The Bible says on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and filled the people, and they worshipped God as the Spirit gave them the ability to. Their worship was loud. Their worship was free. Their worship was spontaneous. Their worship was contagious. Their worship spread like fire on dry straw. And when the nonbelievers saw them, they thought the people were drunk. But Peter declared, "Don't blame it on the alcohol. Blame it on a man named Jesus." And when Peter got finished preaching, three thousand souls were added to the church.

Where I'm from we use to sing a song that James Cleveland made famous:

Something got a hold of me.
I went to a meeting last night.
and my heart wasn't right.
Something got a hold of me.

That's the power of the Holy Spirit. She will make you act right. She will make you talk right. She will make you walk right. She will make you give right. Is there anybody who can help me testify that something got a hold of me?

Yet, as much as I like that song, let me clean up its theology. It wasn't something got a hold of me. It was somebody who got the hold of me. And his name is Jesus Christ.

He walks with me.
He talks with me.
And He tells me I am His own.
And this joy we share as we tarry here.
None other as ever known.
~C. Austin Miles

That's why my testimony today is:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
Born of his Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Savior all the day long
This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Savior all the day long.
~Fanny Cosby