

Celebrate the ABC's of Pentecost!

A sermon based on Acts 2:1-21

Perhaps for one of the hymns this morning we should have sung "Happy Birthday" because this morning we celebrate a very special birthday. Now if it's your birthday today, and I didn't know it, I'm sorry. But I don't mean we should sing to you. But this morning, we celebrate the birthday of the church. Today we celebrate Pentecost.

Fifty days after the Passover, the Jews celebrated one of their three major feasts, the Feast of Pentecost (also known as the Feast of Firstfruits, or the Feast of Weeks). Jews from all over the world traveled to Jerusalem annually to celebrate this festival in the only place God had authorized to celebrate. But on this particular Pentecost celebration, something different happened. The Holy Spirit, that Counselor that Jesus promised, came to the apostles in a spectacular way. And it changed everything. It changed the disciples and it began the spread of the gospel with 3000 coming to faith that day! For that reason we mark Pentecost as the birthday of the church.

This morning as we celebrate the church's birthday, let's take a look at the ABC's of Pentecost: When the Holy Spirit came on the apostles he gave them three things... A) Ability, even the special ability to speak in different languages, B) Boldness, the courage they'd need to carry out their task, and C) Clarity. For the first time they really understood God's plan of salvation and how it all fit together. Ability, Boldness, Clarity are the ABC's of Pentecost. They're what the Holy Spirit gave the apostles that day and they're what he gives us still today.

A is for Ability. How did the Holy Spirit give the apostles ability? In a very extraordinary way. As the Holy Spirit rested on the apostles three very unusual phenomena occurred. First, there was a sound like a violent wind tearing through the house, loud enough to get everyone's attention right away. Second, they saw something like flames of fire resting on each of the apostles' heads. But it wasn't exactly fire. None of them were burned. None of their hair was even singed. And if these first two signs didn't get everyone's attention, the third certainly did. All of a sudden, each of the apostles, most of which were uneducated laborers, without ever having gone to school and without ever having to study, could all speak in foreign languages. Everyone who was present heard the wonders of God in his own native tongue.

These three signs—the sound like a wind, the flames like fire and the foreign languages—served a very special purpose. They were attention getters. Advertisements, if you will, that something big was going on. These signs were given to the early Christian church as they launched their mission. And they served to spread the gospel like wildfire. The apostles were given special abilities by the Holy Spirit so the gospel could quickly reach every nation, tribe and language. And what abilities they had!

But what about us today? Does the Holy Spirit come to us? Of course he does. Though not in the exact same way as he did that Pentecost Day, the Holy Spirit does still come to us as well. He comes to us, not with the sound of a violent wind, but with the quiet whisper of his Word. He comes to us, not in flames of fire, but in the waters of Baptism bringing us to faith in the message of the Gospel. He points us to Jesus.

So why don't we get special abilities to carry out *our* task? Well, to be honest, we do. While my preaching may not be accompanied by the sound of a violent wind (unless I blow into the microphone), while I may have to study hard to learn Greek and very hard to learn Hebrew, God has given me gifts. While 3000 people may not come running to Light of the World this morning to hear what I have to say, God has given me abilities. And he's done the same for you.

He's given all of you gifts and abilities. What are they? Paul described a few to the Romans, "***6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.***" (Romans 12:6-8) God has given to each one of us, talents, skills and abilities. He's given us gifts and treasures. He's given us everything that we have that we might use it all to share the message of the gospel with others. And he's given us more than those abilities...

B is for Boldness. The Holy Spirit not only gives us the abilities to share the gospel, but he changes our attitudes to give us the courageous to share the gospel just like he did for the apostles...

A few weeks before the Festival of Pentecost, on the days and weeks following Easter, where did we find the disciples? Do you remember? They were hiding "behind locked doors" it says. They were terrified that those who brought about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus would now pursue his followers and put them to death as well. Scared and feeling all alone, those eleven men were anything but bold. But now, with the Holy Spirit resting on them, look at how they changed...

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine." 14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...

The apostles weren't scared anymore, were they? Now they were out in the open, preaching publicly, preaching boldly. They didn't care if they were thrown into prison. They didn't care if they were physically abused. They weren't intimidated by threats and wouldn't stop preaching even when they were faced with martyrdom. The worst their enemies could do was to kill them. They couldn't touch their salvation.

Peter and the Eleven, who were so recently hiding out, now openly and boldly answered those who mocked them. With courage Peter stood up and answered those who asked of the special Pentecost signs, "What does this mean?" He told them that this was prophesied. Go home this afternoon and read the rest of Acts 2. See how Peter boldly preached the law condemning the crowd for their sins that sent Jesus to the cross. Read how he boldly shared the Gospel; giving them the comfort of God's forgiveness.

What gave Peter such courage? The Holy Spirit; the Counselor that Jesus promised would come to give them power and truth. That same Holy Spirit that's poured out on us through the Word and the waters of Baptism...

Paul wrote to Timothy, "***For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power...***" (2 Timothy 1:7) That, dear Christian friends, is the same Spirit that belongs to each one of you. Are you normally

shy? When it comes to the Gospel, there's no need to be timid. You have the most valuable information that anyone could ever have. You have the truth of God's grace to you in Christ.

Imagine that you were to put your name in a raffle to win an all expense paid trip to Hawaii and you found out that not only did you win, but your boss heard about it and, wanting to thank you for being such a faithful employee offered two extra weeks of paid vacation so you could go. Would you tell your spouse or your friends, "Oh, hey, by the way, I just found out I won a free trip and some extra vacation time." If a Newsminer reporter called you up for an interview would you refuse because, "No, I'm much to shy to talk about what I won"? Of course not! You would be excited to tell everyone you could your exciting news (whether you knew them or not)!

How much more exciting is the news you really do have! You have an all-expense paid trip to paradise. And I don't mean Hawaii. You deserve to die, but that's not what you're getting. You get life! You deserve hell, but instead you get heaven. You were given a gift worth far more than two weeks of paid vacation. You were given eternal life in the paradise of heaven with Jesus forever! There's no reason to be timid or shy. You have the most valuable information that anyone could have and the Holy Spirit gives you the boldness, the courage, to share it. Who cares what the enemies of the Gospel do to you? The worst they can do is to take your life. They can never touch your salvation.

Be bold witnesses and the Holy Spirit himself will give you the words to say. He already gives you the Bible and he makes it clear to you...

C is for Clarity. At the Ascension of Jesus, the apostles still didn't really get what Jesus was all about. They asked him, "**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**" (cf. Acts 1:6) "Now are you going to kick the Romans out of our land? Now will you bring in that time of peace you promised? Now do we get to become rulers and kings?" Their picture of God's plan of salvation was fuzzy at best, but not after Pentecost. Now it was clear.

Peter said, ¹⁶ *...This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:* ¹⁷ *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.* ¹⁸ *Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.* ¹⁹ *I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.* ²⁰ *The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.* ²¹ *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*

Now Peter got it. Now he understood. Everything happened to Jesus just like the Old Testament prophecies said they would. Everything was happening to them now just as the prophets foretold. Though only ten days earlier, he didn't really get it, now he told the crowd, "Joel told you this would happen. What did you expect?!" Now Peter understood that Jesus wasn't talking about a physical, political peace. He was talking about peace between God and man. Now Peter understood that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Now he understood the gospel: God is coming again soon in judgment on this sinful world, but "**everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**" The Holy Spirit gave Peter that clarity. And he gives the same to us...

On our own we could never understand the Bible. It might look like a book of rules on what to and not to do. It might look like a self-improvement book on how to live a better life. Or it might look like a nice

collection of stories that makes for a good read and that's about it. But with the Holy Spirit, it all makes sense. We understand that the Bible is *Christocentric*, that is, it's all about Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible reveals that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who came to live a perfect life on earth and to die on the cross taking the punishment we deserve saving us from hell. The Holy Spirit gives us that clarity.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "***Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.***" (1 Corinthians 12:3) We may not have tongues of fire on our heads, but we do understand the Scriptures and God's plan of salvation through the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit has given that clarity to all of us. Not just Pastors, not just the men, but everyone can have the clarity that the Holy Spirit brings about, regardless of sex, age, or status, just like Joel prophesied... "***...sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit...***"

By the Holy Spirit, we all understand what we deserve. We know that we ought to suffer an eternity of hell for using our God-given abilities to pursue selfish gain and for being too timid to stand up for Jesus. And by the Holy Spirit, we understand what we get. By God's grace we don't get hell, but eternal life through Jesus. It's not about what I do or don't do. It's all about what he ***did***. Now we get it.

Now let's share it. Peter made it clear that the Last Days of Joel's prophecy began with that Pentecost celebration. We are living in the Last Days right now. All that is left in God's plan of salvation is the closing act of Judgment Day; that great and glorious day of the Lord when "***The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood...***" and he comes to take us home.

Now, dear friends, is the time for us to act. Now is the time for us to prophecy, that is, to speak on God's behalf. Now is the time to use the ABC's of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit gives. Use your gifts and abilities to spread the good news. Witness boldly as you preach the message that has been made clear to you. Tell others of God's law and the impossible demands he makes. And tell them of God's grace... that "***everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.***" Amen.