

*Poured Out for All* – Acts 2:1-8, 12-21

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Happy birthday to the church of Jesus Christ around the world! For it's on this day that the Spirit came and created the fellowship of believers that has been the agents of God's love and grace ever since.

We churches haven't gotten it right all the time—by far. We've succumbed to devilish temptations more times than we can count over our long history. Yet, the church has no other contemporary that can match its faithfulness for extending the love and mercy of Jesus to the world.

There are such significant elements to this Pentecost story that make for great lessons of how God has chosen to act in the world in ways that indicate divine concern for all creation and how that concern is manifested through diverse voices.

And of course, this is encapsulated in the astonishing events that captured the attention of the gathered crowd in Jerusalem.

Imagine the scene as the winds howled and tongues of fire appeared, and the people all began speaking in their own languages. The Parthians, the Edomites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judah, and Capadocia. And so many others from so many other places all in this place and all hearing each other speak in their own native tongues.

In the Pentecostal Church today, this might not be so unusual. But to the gathered masses then and to most Christians today, it was out of the ordinary. The Spirit came and got people's attention in ways they were unfamiliar with.

In fact, speculation was that these people acting crazy were simply drunk. They were acting out of their minds because they had had too much wine.

But Peter, ever the one on a given day to take charge and clear the air, said, "No, they're not drunk. What is happening is simply a fulfillment of what the prophet Joel had indicated. That God would pour out the Holy Spirit on all."

So, God acted in a way that was different, with the intention that all would be the recipient of God's continued mercy and presence.

It's a reminder to us that the Holy Spirit calls us to act in ways that may not be what we are familiar with. How we worship, how we serve, and who we welcome are brought into focus by a Spirit that comes in startling ways at times for everybody and nudges us to greater things.

Jonathon Tran, who teaches ethics at Baylor University, tells the story in *The Christian Century* of a woman accused of killing a college student in a hit-and-run accident seven years earlier. (The young man she killed lived in the residential college Tran directed at the time.) Her defense was that she didn't do it, or if she did, she doesn't remember it. She began by claiming she only hit a stop sign; when presented with evidence that it was a person, she said over and over that she "only" hit a homeless person. David, the student she killed, spent his summers serving homeless people.

For seven years, the woman told herself and others she didn't do it. She knew she didn't do it, she said, because God told her so. God telling her that it was a stop sign she hit allowed her to go on with her life. There was of course no going on for the victim's family.

"For most of the trial," Tran wrote, "I sat ten feet from the defendant. She spent much of the time hunched over, tissue in hand, faced scrunched up in seeming anguish, dabbing her eyes repeatedly. It was impossible not to feel for her, and certainly for her family and friends. Sometimes I wondered, though, whether her tears were for show. Maybe she was pretending in order to garner sympathy from the jurors. If she felt this bad, why didn't she ever go to the police to confirm whether David had died? She had moved on with her life, but his family couldn't; why not give them a chance to be released from some of their anguish?"

"More frightening than the possibility that she was faking it," Tran wrote, "was the possibility that she didn't know whether she was faking it, that she had lost sight of the difference between real tears and fake tears. We're talking about a person so self-deceived that for seven years she honestly did not know whether she killed a person. This woman seemed so far from the truth, so defined by deceit, that lying—about David, about the homeless, about the tears—seemed beyond her.

“Jesus said that the truth will set you free. David’s family tried to say as much to her. After the verdict was given and she was sentenced to ten years in prison, they were given the chance to offer victim impact statements. In a trial full of extraordinary moments, nothing was more extraordinary than what they said and did.

“David’s mother offered this mercy to the woman who killed her son when she ended her statement by saying, ‘It has been seven years, four months, and two days since I entered this new life. You will at some point leave your prison cell. I will live in grief for the rest of my life. But let me be clear, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, we ‘do not grieve as others do who have no hope.’ I believe with everything I have that someday God will take the pieces of my shattered life and put them back together. And he is waiting to do that for you.’

“David’s father followed this by saying to his son’s killer, “David would want to be the first person to wrap his arms around you and draw you to Jesus.” (“One Person’s Self-Made Hell,” Jonathan Tran, *Christian Century*, May 2024)

How does that sentiment authentically get expressed if not for the incredible, almost miraculous, work of the Holy Spirit? A woman killed a young man with her car, evidence of it was plentiful, and she denied it ever happened. Short of a mental illness, a denial as the one she proclaimed would have been maddening and infuriating to any parent whose child was killed. And yet, these parents somehow addressed their son’s killer with hope and compassion.

That is crazy talk. And yet, just like at Pentecost, the Spirit moved and came upon them. And they acted with genuine mercy.

Miracles the Holy Spirit induces are rare. And yet, the Spirit acts in ways that, while not miraculous, can still change lives.

In the midst of destruction, the Spirit brings rebuilding. That’s literally true when a storm ravages a community and leaves it shredded and in pieces. But it’s also true of individual lives that get wrecked by circumstances out of one’s control: a car crash that maims a victim for a lifetime, a family broken up by a parent’s misbehavior, drug or alcohol addiction that knows no limits in tearing a victim and his or her families

apart, the pain of witnessing a loved one die from a terrible disease, or the scourge of poverty that leaves people struggling with the weight of how they will survive.

In all these storms, the Spirit can do things to rebuild lives. It may be painstakingly slow and filled with setbacks. But healing and new life can happen because God is with us in these blowing winds and making the impossible possible.

And nobody is immune from the Spirit's reach. Peter quotes God who says through the prophet Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." Everybody is within reach of the Spirit's healing and life-giving breath.

And that Spirit is most often manifested through individuals and organizations that practice the love of God and neighbor Jesus calls us to. You're going to hear about one such organization in a few moments, an organization whose work we can support through our giving to the Pentecost offering. The Spirit is working amid an organization called Come to the Water.

And the Spirit is working among so many other settings and circumstances.

Many descriptions of the Spirit are among us. Some liken the spirit to a breath that blows away the dust and makes everything clean, or some liken it to refreshing cool water to a parched throat, or a cleansing brush fire that burns away all the thick undergrowth so that something new can rise out of the ashes, or to a potter who starts with an odd-shaped lump and molds and shapes it into something beautiful, or to a renovator who uses what is already there and strengthens, refreshes and revitalizes what's there, or to a loving spouse whispering reassurances of love and support, or to a parent guiding and helping a confused child, or to a tour guide who points us in the right direction to see things that we would otherwise have missed, or the Spirit is likened to that gentle tap on the shoulder that makes us realize, "Hey, that's me that needs a new beginning and new direction."

The Holy Spirit revitalizes, renews, refreshes, empowers, creates, reminds, guides, and comforts those in the church and those outside the church. It's poured out for all.

Jesus said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...And he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

The winds of the Spirit blow upon all and bring renewal and healing—blessings that are to come.