

Good Morning! Two weeks ago, I asked you if you knew what today was and you didn't do very well, now, I am going to ask you if you know what *today* is? Yes! Pentecost Sunday. I preached last Pentecost Sunday right here. I would have used the same sermon, but I know you all pay such close attention to my sermons that you would remember it, right? ☐

Last Pentecost, I focused on the gathering where 120 men were gathered (Acts 2)² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

This was the Holy Spirit, the Advocate Jesus referred to when he told the disciples he was going away again. In John 15, Jesus says, "When the Advocate comes, who I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You are also to testify because you have been with me from the beginning." Jesus was with them for 3 years, he died and left them, after he was resurrected, he came back, and they were elated. Now, once again they are full of sorrow when he says he must leave. He is telling them the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth will be there for him, acting on his behalf but they are unsure what that means.

That violent wind and tongues of fire changed everything because this was the catalyst that empowered the disciples to go forth preach God's word to Jews and non-Jews. I want to stop for a minute and think about that fire that didn't burn anyone – isn't that reminiscent of Moses and the burning bush? And what does fire represent? Purification and the wind, maybe the breath of God? This was the trigger event that empowered the disciples. Acts 2:12 tells us that ² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." These Galileans were back-country Jews who spoke their own dialect clearly, they were not educated enough to speak other languages! But Peter tells them, "No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Peter? The same Peter who denied Christ three times? Now he is boldly standing before a crowd preaching and all who were gathered understood him their own language! The disciples were understood by everyone so they could testify about

Jesus, his life, his death, and his resurrection. They saw these things firsthand – They were witnesses to all that happened, and all that Jesus taught them. This is how they would spread the word –to spread the word to both Jews and Gentiles.

This was the opposite of Babel. Remember in Genesis when the people all spoke one language? From Genesis: “⁴ Then they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches Heaven. Let’s make ourselves famous so we won’t be scattered here and there across the Earth.” ⁵ God came down to look over the city and the tower those people had built. ⁶⁻⁹ God took one look and said, “One people, one language; why, this is only a first step. No telling what they’ll come up with next—they’ll stop at nothing! Come, we’ll go down and garble their speech, so they won’t understand each other.” Then God scattered them from there all over the world. And they had to quit building the city. That’s how it came to be called Babel, because there God turned their language into “babble.” From there God scattered them all over the world.

But in Pentecost, language was no longer a barrier for the Holy Spirit’s arrival changed all that. The dividing wall between people was broken down. As the Book of Acts and Paul’s letters attest, from that time on, the early Christians were vividly aware of God’s Spirit leading the new church. In Hebrew, the words for *Spirit*, *wind*, and *breath* are nearly the same. The same is true in Greek. In trying to describe God’s activity among them, the ancients were saying that it was like God’s breath, like a sacred wind. It could not be seen or held: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8). But the effect of God’s Spirit, like the wind, could be felt and known. What were these gifts?

Gifts: Paul also writes that the Spirit bestows spiritual gifts on believers. In 1Corinthians 12:8-10 he lists nine, which vary from one person to another: “the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.”

The Holy Spirit is God’s present activity in our midst. When we sense God’s leading, God’s challenge, or God’s support or comfort, we say that it’s the Holy Spirit at work. People wonder was there really a Jesus? If there was not a Holy Spirit, the disciples never would have been able to accomplish what they did. Although they were all, except for John, murdered by stoning, crucifixion, etc., but they never denied Jesus. They always testified to His life and His works. Without them Christianity would never have started.

Where do we find the evidence of the Spirit at work? When we are in deep prayer, we can sense the Holy Spirit as we ask for help or guidance. Haven’t you felt overwhelmed by a problem of an issue and as you are praying, you feel that sudden sense of calm or clarity – that is the Holy Spirit. Haven’t you ever had the feeling you need to call someone? You do and they are ill or going through a rough time – you are the phone call or the visit they needed. It is the pull that makes you check on a neighbor or

family member – it can just pop into your head – that is the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we're even more aware of the Holy Spirit when we are gathered here in the church with our church family. It could be in worship as we are praying or singing a hymn that really touches you. It could be during coffee hour, or when we work together on some project or fair. Somehow the Spirit speaks through the thoughtful and loving interaction of God's people. Sometimes the Holy Spirit stops us from participating in things we should not do, like participating in gossip – we think, “I don't want to be hurtful, and I don't want to judge”. That is the Holy Spirit, who brought the church into being, is still guiding and upholding it, if we will just *listen*.

As I was praying this morning, I thought about a Celebration of Life, I officiated a few weeks ago. The gentleman's name was Drew MacDonald and he attended Swift in the 70's with his family. When he came here, he found there was no Sunday School. As he had children, he wanted a Sunday School, so he started one. Not only did he start one, but he and his wife managed to get a bus donated so he could go around on Sunday morning and pick kids up to attend. Hi wife Carol, told me how they formed a couples club and got a lot of things going including redoing the old cow barn into the Swift Activity Center. She talked about how they shoveled chicken manure out of the barn and worked to get it cleaned out, then got the technical school to renovate it. She spoke of how much fun the group had and how much Drew loved this church. Although they had moved away many years ago, he wanted his life celebrated at Swift and his ashes spread on Cape Cod.

This my friends, is exactly how we Christians should use our gifts. This is what the fire of the Holy Spirit can do. This church is alive today because of those who went before us and used their gifts. We need to make sure that is what we are doing today, or no one will be standing on our shoulders. It will be like my old church on the North Shore which is now luxury condominiums. We should be reminded by the flame that is on our logo that we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to use our gifts and participate.

For example, the box on the coffee hour table that says Watoto. I stood up several years ago and said if everyone in the congregation just puts in \$1.00 a month, we will be able to support two children in Uganda – the box is usually empty each Sunday. The men's breakfast used to be well attended and they met at a restaurant for breakfast, then Pastor Joe said Christine would cook for them and if they put the money they would spend for breakfast into a collection container, they could support one man at Teen Challenge each month. Now only 4 or 5 men meet and even though Debbie Fortier prepares a feast for them, no donations are taken – everyone forgets.

We try to support these organizations as well as Bloom, the girls division of Teen Challenge. Christians support these organizations, not the government. Why? Because they will only support them, give them grants if they take Jesus out of these programs. Jesus is the reason these programs work! They will never have the same success rate without faith. We must use our gifts in our church like the men who mow,

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The Wind Blew and Then What? Ann Burnham, CLM

or like Vicki Heckman and others who plant flowers to keep our church beautiful, people who make coffee, teach Sunday School, bake, clean up after church.

I **love** this church and I will never get over seeing my old church die. The last Sunday service there, the pews were packed. Everyone reminiscing about the wonderful things that had happened and how much they loved it. What happened?? Somehow, they stopped, and let 6 or 7 people carry the burden until they could carry it no more. The church lost its fire – it lost the Holy Spirit.

We must never let that happen because I cannot think of a more loving and warm congregation. We must work together and keep this church alive for the next generation and the generation after that. We must open ourselves to let the Holy Spirit work through us.

I hear politicians say, *God Bless America*, but I wonder if they mean it. This country was built on God – I say God Bless America and I mean it! And I say God Bless Swift Memorial Church.

Amen.