

Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost; June 4 & 5, 2017

He was hands down the greatest preacher this world had ever heard. He knew how to use his words and craft the perfect sentences. He could use his words to paint the perfect illustrations. You could listen to him preach for hours. Tens of thousands of people had come to listen to him speak. He knew how to cut people to the heart. He knew how to comfort them with his love. He had done things this world had never seen. Yet, when the people began to see that he had not come to setup the kind of “church” that they had wanted, they began to drift away. Finally, his Church watched their preacher be killed on a cross. The preacher’s name was Jesus. The people had killed Jesus of Nazareth – the Son of God.

This Shepherd, however, did not remain dead. On Easter Sunday, he arose. People once again heard him preach for the next 40 days. Their hopes were once again raised. Then he left his little flock to once again return to his throne. Little his flock was. Luke tells us in the chapter before our text: **“In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty).”** Before Jesus left, he gave his disciples the command: **“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** How in the world are they going to do that task? I can imagine that they felt just a little overwhelmed by the task that lay ahead of them.

But Jesus gave this small group of believers a promise: **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”** **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”** They may not have fully understood what those words meant, but they trusted Jesus. They returned to Jerusalem and they began to wait. While they waited, they kept meeting together. They met together in homes. They met together in an upper room (Acts 1:13). They met together in the temple courts. (Acts 2:45). They talked with each other. They prayed together. They helped each other to grow in their faith. They were all good things. But God had bigger plans for them. He wanted all of them to be his witnesses. He wanted all of them to be missionaries.

They were not fulfilling the whole purpose that God had for them. The purpose of the church isn’t just to talk about Jesus among ourselves. The purpose of the church is to be God’s mouth to speak to people who don’t know who he is. Jesus tells all of us: **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** Jesus gives us that same command. This is not easy to do. It requires that we move out from our comfort zone. It’s easy to talk about sharing the message of Jesus with those who don’t know it, but it is much harder to actually do it. Jesus realized that it would not be easy for the disciples to carry out this task, and he realizes that it will not be easy for each of us. In order to carry out that task, Jesus gave the Church the POWER to fulfill its purpose. So, he told them to stay in Jerusalem until that happened.

God had a plan. The festival of Pentecost was not new to the Christian Church. Pentecost was one of the three main festivals that God had asked Jewish people in the Old Testament to return to Jerusalem to celebrate. It was celebrated 50 days after the Passover. It was the Festival to celebrate the early harvest. It was a festival that was celebrated to give thanks to God for the blessings that He had given them. But this time God had a difference harvest in mind. People from all over the world had come to Jerusalem. Perhaps, as many as a million or two. The stage was now set. It was now time for Jesus to make good on his promise.

One of the rooms where they were meeting was filled with this tremendous sound of wind, but there was no wind. But that wasn’t the gift he had promised. Flames of fire appeared above people’s heads, but hair was not burning. A miracle – yes; but still not the gift he had promised. Suddenly, the Apostles could speak in languages that they had never learned. People were utterly amazed, but that wasn’t the gift. THE GIFT was that all were filled with the Holy Spirit. God had given his Church the power it needed to carry out its purpose of going to all nations. They stop just sharing the message of Jesus with just each other, but now they find all kinds of people from all over the world to share the message.

That power enabled them to share the message of Jesus with others. It is that message that can do things that no one ever could. It is that message of Jesus that takes hearts of stone and turns them into hearts on fire for Jesus. That message is the **“power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”** Perhaps, the house that they had been

meeting in was near the temple. If so, he could be speaking in front of thousands and thousands of people. Peter gets up before the crowd that had come to see what was happening, and he starts talking about Jesus. He gets directly to the point. You **“put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”** *You killed God!* But God raised Jesus back to life. Now repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. That power worked in the hearts of 3,000 people that day.

Have you ever wondered why Luke records the number of ABOUT 3,000? I wonder what God’s point is with giving the number of 3,000. God doesn’t tell us why he had the number recorded. Nowhere else in the New Testament is there another number that is given that is connected to the results of proclaiming the Gospel. Are we to look at the number and go “wow?” Look at the power of that message! Absolutely.

Or, perhaps, is that the number was small? If the city of Jerusalem had a million or two there for this festival 50 days after the Passover, then this number is small. Many of these people were not unbelievers. They had to come to Jerusalem to worship God. So, what does Peter do? He connects the dots between the Old Testament and the message of Jesus. Jesus was raised from the dead -- miraculous signs, witnesses, roaring wind sound, flames, speaking in different languages. Out of 1 million people – how many people believed? Only 3,000. Maybe, God’s point is: *What happened with all the rest of the million people?* God had work for his Church to do.

Perhaps, he says ABOUT is that he wanted the Apostles and the believers to do the preaching and sharing; and leave the counting to him. They shared the Word of God, and they let God do the counting. It wasn’t their job to do the counting. It was their job to be witnesses. God says that it is his message that has the power to make people believers. Yet, that doesn’t let his believers off the hook. They (and we) cannot just sit back and do nothing and let God work. God pours out his Spirit and tells us to speak: **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”** (Rom. 10:14) He tells us to: GO!

This task of making disciples is not going to be easy. This was going to take work and it was going to take time. They could only carry out this task with the POWER of the Holy Spirit. It was going to be done with the believers all working together. God gives us, all of us, the task of carrying out this work. It is going to take us all working together. There are lots of ways to do that. We pray for the work of the Church. We do the tasks that are behind the scenes that others may not see. We support this work with our generous offerings. It is sharing the message of Jesus with the people you work with. It is sharing Jesus with the people in our own home and families. Friends, this is our mission that our Ascended Lord gives us. We are not alone. He gives us his Holy Spirit to give us the power we need to carry out this task. That is the message of Pentecost. Amen.