



**Power of the Holy Spirit, Power to Believe
Acts 2: 1-21 (NRSV)**

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Scripture Acts 2: 1-21 NRSV

²When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷In 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. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Anchor Verse

¹¹...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

Anchor Theme

The Power of Pentecost is the promise of the Holy Spirit, unleashed in our lives, every day. Our power to believe in the Holy Spirit makes Pentecost not about an event, but an experience.

Background Story

As a disclaimer, I need to say, that I am Catho-Bapto-Metho with a sprinkling of Pento. My mother raised my brother and I as Catholic, I accepted Christ at age 16 and baptized in the Baptist church. I left the Baptist church to answer God's call because my pastor at the time said, "at least the Baptist can talk a good game when it comes to ordaining women". All to say I heard the Holy Spirit talked about in many different ways.

My most vivid memory of hearing about the Holy Spirit was when I heard this sentence. "Holy Spirit? I know about some unholy spirits, but I don't know anything about the Holy Spirit." I was maybe age 11 or 12. I was walking down the steps of the neighborhood Baptist church that ran a summer camp for the neighborhood kids. One of the church members who helped with the camp had been chastising a man at the bottom of the steps who was clearly very drunk and had come by the church to ask for money. When she got done pointing out all his sins and transgressions, she said, "I'm going to pray that the Holy Spirit fill you and you stop drinking." To which he replied, "Holy Spirit? I know about some unholy spirits, but I don't know anything about the Holy Spirit."

I would be an adult before I really understood that the Holy Spirit was not the antidote for drunkenness but instead the *presence* of God and a *present* from Jesus Christ.

The Christian holy day of Pentecost, celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter, fifty days after Easter commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ while they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Weeks, a major pilgrimage feast. Jewish pilgrims from the whole of the diaspora would flood into Jerusalem for the celebration of Torah and the wheat harvest. It was during this celebration that the Holy Spirit came with power on the disciples and the other followers, just as Jesus himself had told them to expect (Acts 1:8).

Engaging the Text

I think you would agree that the most demonstrative piece of the whole experience of Pentecost is captured in verse 11, which concludes, ¹¹*...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.*" But in our efforts to understand what happened on that day and the importance for us now, we've missed the mark because so much attention has been paid to the expression of speaking in different languages, that the point of what was being said has been completely missed. *"...we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."*

We never learn what was actually said, the actual words, only that the sound of many different languages being spoken at once was enough to make onlookers think they were drunk, at 9 o'clock in the morning, just like the man on the steps of the church clearly was! What could they have possibly been saying? What deeds of power were they attributing to God? Were they deeds they themselves experienced or were they stories heard from others? The answer is...we don't know.

However, let me ask you this, if you were going to talk about God's deed of power what would you say? Where would you start? Where would you stop? Is there even such a thing as a beginning and an end when talking about God? The reality is that God's deeds of power are not confined, nor defined, by the limitations of time. In short, God's time, *kairos*, is not our time, *chronos*, and our time is not God's time. Rather than trying to make sense out of what is the beginning and end of God's deed of power, maybe the more important question is, would you see God's deeds of power

as connected to the Holy Spirit?

The simple point worth remembering today is that the Power of Pentecost is the promise of the Holy Spirit, unleashed in our lives, every day, every day since that day our text retells. Our power to believe in the Holy Spirit makes Pentecost not about an event, but an experience.

In fact, Pentecost is just a kairos (God time) moment divinely designed to infuse our Chronos (our time) moments from the moment we are baptized to the moment we die. And that infusion is the power of the Holy Spirit. That my friends is not an event, it's an experience. The power of the Holy Spirit is an experience, a daily reoccurrence, not a day to remember.

In John 14:26 Jesus said, *"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."* Well, here is the Promise Jesus made in John 14 fulfilled here in Acts 2. The Power of Pentecost is the promise of the Holy Spirit. And the promise of the Holy Spirit is not just for a moment but for a lifetime.

How then, do we get to the place where we stop seeing Pentecost as an event, a day to celebrate on the Christian calendar, and instead embrace the power of the Holy Spirit, so that our everyday experiences can be impacted and infused by the Holy Spirit to allow God's deeds of power to manifest in the world through us? Now that I do have an answer for...It is the power to believe.

You see, in many ways we are still living our lives as those faithful followers were on the Day of Pentecost. They were celebrating the Festival of Weeks. The text says those attending were devout Jews from every nation. Didn't they know the Old Testament? Isaiah said, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me". The Holy Spirit spoke to Ezekiel and departed from King Saul. And isn't there a reference to the Prophet Joel in this text. Had they not read Joel? Did they, like us, get stuck at Leviticus and gave up trying to read the rest of the Old Testament? (Just joking) Then why were they amazed, perplexed and bewildered as Acts 2 describes them? I don't think it was because they didn't know and understand the presence of the Holy Spirit, I think they had forgotten their power to believe. And, why then, and now amazed, perplexed and bewildered when we see God at work in the world? Even in the midst of a destructive pandemic, we say glimpses of the Holy Spirit,

- The women making masks,
- the young boy or girl who started collecting items for healthcare workers
- restaurants turning into food pantries,
- doctors and nursing providing pastoral care,
- neighbors being neighbors.

I think we too had forgotten the power to believe.

The Power of Pentecost is the promise of the Holy Spirit, unleashed in our lives, every day. Our power to believe in the Holy Spirit makes Pentecost not about a one-day event, but a lifelong experience. May your days to come be Pentecost filled days, experiencing God's deeds of power, through the Holy Spirit.

May it be so. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.