



But You Can't Stay Here

Acts 2:1-21

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Do you see it? The white cloth of the Easter Season is gone ... something's different in here today ... but I can't quite put my finger on it.

I started out last week's sermon by saying this is a two-part sermon. The first part is marked by Jesus' ascension, a reminder that *You don't have to go home* ... indeed, the disciples didn't go home. Unlike the days following Jesus' death and resurrection, where the disciples made their way back to Galilee, following Jesus' ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem. They had been instructed by Jesus to go and wait for the power that was to come. And so they did ... they went to Jerusalem and they prayed continuously in the temple, blessing God.

The scriptures don't specify a timeline for how many days the disciples waited for the Spirit's arrival, but the day of the Spirit's arrival is called Pentecost, which means *fiftieth*, so deductive reasoning suggests they had to wait about 10 days (because Jesus ascended on the fortieth day after Easter). However, the *disciples* didn't know the power of God was to arrive on Pentecost, they just knew they had to wait for the power of God to arrive.

Before we get to the arrival of the Spirit on that first Pentecost, imagine for me what it might have been like to be a waiting disciple.

I imagine the tedious nature of waiting was even harder 2000 years ago. We know that the disciples were in the temple praying continuously, but there had to have been moments of pause and rest in between prayer sessions. Jesus had told them to wait until the power of God arrived to give them further instructions and movement. What does one do in Jerusalem in the first century to pass the time? They weren't playing Angry Birds on their phones, or Minecraft on their iPads. I doubt they were sending messages to each other through the app of the day (aka, carrier pigeons). Perhaps they sat in the local coffee shop shooting the breeze, literally, because the wind was flowing quite freely through the square holes on the front of the building.

How long can one go, in a period of waiting, before they start to get antsy because the waiting is taking too long? Shall we test this?

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That was only 60 seconds ... and I can see some were already shifting in their seats. We do not like to wait. In fact, in today's world, customer surveys indicate that most people aren't willing to wait more than 10 to 15 *minutes* in a line, and are only willing to wait *two* minutes on hold on the phone.

Waiting can be a challenging thing, especially when we don't know how long we will have to wait.

The disciples did not know what to expect, or when to expect it, they only knew that Jesus had promised them that the power of God was coming, and they needed to be ready for it when it came.

“When the day of Pentecost had come, [the disciples] were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

You've been waiting for ten days for the next movement of God. Jesus told you to wait until the power of God arrived. And now, you and your friends, this cadre of disciples, have all gathered in a closed room, and there comes a rush of wind from heaven, and it comes in the form of divided tongues, as of fire, and one of these tongues rests on each of them.

Let's be honest, this is not what you thought you were waiting for. This is freaky ... stuff. ... Divided tongues? Like that of a serpent? ... And of fire? ... A rushing wind of flaming snake tongues bursts forth out of nowhere, and one of those tongues rests on each of the disciples. I can imagine the disciples were shocked. ... This is what we were waiting for?

As those tongues overtake the bodies of the disciples, they began to speak in other languages.

Keep in mind, the commentary that is included in Acts is not being spoken out loud. There is no off-stage narrator telling the disciples that what is happening is that the Holy Spirit is taking over their bodies. The commentary, the text that tells *us* this is the work of the Spirit, is all offered after-the-fact for our benefit as readers. The actual events were happening in real time that morning. I would say it left the disciples speechless, but that's not true; they were filled with speech – speech from many different languages.

Perhaps it was the movement of the Spirit, like a mighty rushing wind ... or perhaps it was the boisterous speech of the disciples, which came out like an international chorus ... or perhaps it was the combination of the two ... but the noise from the room where it happened was so loud, that a crowd began to gather. “There were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound, the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard [the disciples] speaking in the native language of each.”

The narration seems to be missing some movement in the story. Are the disciples still gathered in the room where the Spirit happened, and all of these bystanders are looking in? That seems unlikely, as such a crowd would hardly fit into such a room or be able to distinguish the voices of the disciples when only a few could actually get their heads in the door. As the story is often remembered, the disciples, filled with the Spirit, have moved out of the room into the street, and there, in the public space, the gathering has accumulated a mass, and is still growing.

The event of the Spirit is amassing a large gathering in the streets. Consider, the Jews who have gathered are asking about the different languages being spoken, and it appears that at least a couple of people are gathered from each of these areas – because they hear the disciples speaking in their *own* language. Picking up in verse 7, we read, “Amazed and astonished, [the Jews who had gathered] asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

Don’t miss this moment.

There is no clearer passage in the whole of the Biblical text that affirms that the movement of the Spirit looks first and foremost like a non-homogeneous gathering of people filled with interest and intrigue at the declaration of God’s deeds of power. Yes, we can pull the same conclusion from Revelation. But the witness of the Spirit at its arrival invites us not to delay such a gathering until the nations are reunited at Megiddo, which is where Revelation 16 says the eternal gathering will begin.

The first act of the people of Christ after receiving the gift of the Spirit is to gather and proclaim the glory of God in the midst of a gathering that is filled with individuals from all over the world. It is the work of the Spirit for such multi-cultural and multi-ethnic gatherings to come into existence. And one might argue that if this is the *first* act of the Spirit, that any gathering that is mono-cultural or mono-ethnic is pushing off the invitation and work of the Spirit in their midst.

Such an assertion is further proclaimed in the sermon that follows this initial commotion.

Some of the Jews who had gathered began to sneer, and they said, “[The disciples] are filled with new wine.”

“But 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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of The Lord shall be saved.’”

Just before the ascension, Jesus had opened the minds of the disciples to understand their work in the context of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. Here, just ten days later, Peter is offering that same kind of teaching to the gathered crowd of Jews who did not understand the outpouring work of the Spirit through the disciples.

It seems to the crowd, or at least some members of it, that the disciples are drunk. The witness of the disciples seems outlandish. The multilingual nature of the disciples seems bizarre. This early morning commotion and proclamation of God's deeds of power is unexpected – even in Jerusalem, the holiest of cities for the people of God. But Peter assures them, these disciples are not drunk, they are living witnesses to the work of God in the world – they are filled with the Spirit, and they are testifying on behalf of the name of the Lord.

The disciples are doing, not what they know to do, because they didn't know to do it. Again, remember our text from last week, just before the ascension, Jesus told them that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” That's the next step of the story. Jesus drew them the map. But they needed something more to make that happen. They needed the power from on high.

And then the Spirit arrived.

And now ... now they are doing what the Spirit has empowered them to do, which is exactly what Jesus told them was going to be the next step: to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Following the arrival of the Spirit on Pentecost, *the first thing they do* is to begin speaking to people from all nations, in the native tongue of each, declaring the good work of God. They are declaring the promise of new life. They are testifying and witnessing to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

When the glory of God is made available ... when we get out of our closed doors and proclaim the love of God in the midst of the community ... when we let the Spirit move us in counter-cultural directions ... when we yield our will to the will of God ... when we stop resisting the work of the Spirit in our midst ... the outcome is an expansive gathering of people from all nations, tribes, and tongues, curious about and giving praise to the work of God in the world.

The ascension of Jesus offers the initial invitation, “You don't have to go home ...”; and then the arrival of the Spirit makes clear, “but you can't stay here.”

We can gather every Sunday in this place to receive the invitation of God, to worship the resurrected Christ, and to ask for the guidance, care, and strength of the Spirit ... but if we do not go forth into the world to proclaim the deeds of God's power, or to engage through invitational relationships, or to testify to the love of Christ in our own lives, or to cause enough commotion that people are curious if we're drunk in the morning ... then are we really filled with the Spirit? Have we really given ourselves to the power of God that creates unexpected curiosity in the form of multi-... multi-everything gatherings? Because this is what happens when the Spirit arrives. We are driven from our isolated social halls and places of comfort to create and engage in community in invitational ways to share in life, to share in love, and to share in the glory of God with everyone. May we be so filled with the Spirit, that we might go forth, not just today, but every day, to proclaim in word, deed, action, and thought, the glory of God. Let us be filled with the Spirit. Amen.