

Acts 2:1-12, John 15:26-16:15
Day of Pentecost: God Dwelling In Us

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What are the most celebrated days in the Christian calendar year? What are the seasons to which the Church annually gives particular attention? We can probably all immediately think of two. In December, we enter the season of Advent, culminating in Christmas – the day when we celebrate the birth of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Christmas is the gift of Emmanuel; God-with-us. Christmas is the fulfillment of God’s promise to us to send the Messiah, the Saviour, the Redeemer.

Then a couple of months later we enter the season of Lent, that long, sober, and reflective season which leads us to the cross. It is a season of repentance and lament, a season where we come face to face with our own mortality. It is a season that brings us to Holy Week, beginning with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, moving to the night before his arrest where Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, broke bread with them, and went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Thursday night leads to Friday – the day of Jesus’ death by crucifixion. Then on Sunday morning, the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead.

Christmas and Easter – arguably the two most celebrated days in the church. Advent and Lent – likely the two most well-known seasons of the Christian calendar. But there is one more day which is as important to the worldwide church as Christmas and Easter. There is another day in the Christian calendar year where God’s people are given a gift; where God fulfills a long-awaited promise to His people; a day where, like Christmas and Easter, the trajectory of the world changed. It is the day of Pentecost.

This morning, I want to help us realize that when we begin to see that Pentecost is as integral and critical to us, the church, as Christmas or Easter, we will perhaps begin to recover our sense of mission in this world. When we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating the fulfillment of the promise that God would dwell among us, with us. When we celebrate Pentecost, we are celebrating the fulfillment of the promise that God would dwell in us. So when the day of Pentecost is as celebrated as the birth of Jesus or the death and resurrection of Jesus, we will more properly begin to live as followers of Jesus Christ, in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

Some of us have perhaps never heard of Pentecost. Others, like me who grew up in a Pentecostal church, have heard sermons about Pentecost regularly preached throughout the whole year. Because in my upbringing, what happened during Pentecost is not simply a one-day recognition but something celebrated throughout the whole year. So what is Pentecost? What happened on that day two thousand years ago? And what does that mean for us, God's people and God's church? Before we explore these questions in more depth this morning, I want to provide a bit of Biblical and historical context to the day of Pentecost.

Born a Jew, Jesus lived and dwelt on this earth during the first century. There were three major annual festivals that Jews celebrated: Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. In the book of Exodus in the Old Testament, Moses went up Mt Sinai and received many instructions or laws from Yahweh. Among them were three annual festivals: the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of harvest, and the feast of ingathering. Pentecost is also known in the Old Testament as the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvest, and the Latter Firstfruits. So Pentecost gets its origin

from the agricultural feast which celebrates the first fruits of the spring crop. Pentecost was a time where God's people gave thanks to God for His provision. During this feast, the firstfruits of the crop were presented as an offering. The festival dates back to the beginning of Israel and was part of Jewish identity. It is celebrated fifty days after Passover – pente meaning five.

Well, what happened during the annual festival of Passover in the first century? Several weeks ago, we were reminded that Jesus chose Passover as the occasion to explain what his death and resurrection were about. Jesus chose Passover as the moment to explain his vocation, his purpose, his mission on earth. We learned several weeks ago that Passover is about God's people being freed from slavery and oppression, about God's people being liberated from bondage. But we also learned that at its core, at its heart, Passover has more to do with God than God's people. Passover is for the purpose of God revealing his glory; of God showing us who He is; of God manifesting Himself to the world. Jesus chose Passover as the occasion to explain his death and resurrection because at its core, at its heart, the cross and tomb are about the glory of God.

And so fifty days after The Father glorified the Son and the Son glorified the Father, fifty days after Jesus defeated sin and death and evil; fifty days after Jesus' victory over the forces which oppress and bind us; fifty days after the Kingdom of God was inaugurated on earth; fifty days after Jesus bore all transgressions, wounds, infirmities, and sorrow; came Pentecost. Fifty days after all that God fulfilled another promise. Fifty days later God sent the Holy Spirit.

Now I want to make one more point about the context of the day of Pentecost – the day where God fulfilled His promise to send the Holy Spirit to live in us, the fulfillment of the promise of the divine to dwell in us. Not only do we often ignore or forget to celebrate Pentecost, but we also often ignore or forget the last command of Jesus. What is his last command to His disciples? We may immediately think it's the last verses of the gospel according to Matthew, where Jesus said "*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.*" The last command, we think, is the great commission. But that's not it. The last command of Jesus before he ascended into heaven is actually quite different from the command to go. The last command is more like the opposite of the command to go. Jesus' last command to his followers is "stay", "wait".

Listen to the words of Jesus as recorded by Luke: "*I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay, remain, settle down in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*" And again the words of Jesus recorded by Luke in the book of Acts: "*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.*" The last command of Jesus is not 'go into the world'; it is 'wait for what the Lord has promised'. And so the day of Pentecost, the day of the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Holy Spirit, happened while the disciples were waiting. God fulfilled his promise to his people while His people waited for God to act.

It leaves me wondering how we make decisions and take actions, both as individuals and as a church. Are there times when we lean too strongly on Jesus' command to 'go' and forget his command to 'wait'? Do we sometimes need to wait longer before going? Now, waiting need not be passive or lethargic or stagnant. Waiting, in the Biblical sense of waiting, is not about stopping work or retreating away from decisions and risk or avoiding people or places. Waiting isn't some passive activity that comes with the expectation that as I go about doing nothing, God will make things fall into place. Rather, waiting demands doing. It requires attentiveness, concentration, alertness, readiness, discernment.

Consider, for example, a hunting trip. I've had the privilege of being on a moose hunting trip and a sheep hunting trip. While I enjoyed and am grateful for both hunting experiences, I preferred the sheep hunting trip for one reason. There was absolutely no waiting – we just walked and hiked and paddled and hiked some more to try and find the sheep. We were never still, except for a few eating breaks. I am sure that had we actually seen sheep, the pace of the trip would have changed dramatically. But for the moose hunting trip, we went to one spot (and I'm not going to say where). And there we stood or sat and waited. We waited for hours, until I couldn't feel my legs anymore, until I forgot why I was standing there waiting. But as we waited, we weren't passive. There was work to be done. There was the moose call, there was a sense of staying vigilant, attentive, concentrated, focused, alert, ready. We waited and listened. And when a noise caught our attention, we concentrated on that. That is the kind of waiting I'm talking about. It is waiting that comes with concentration, attentiveness, discernment, alertness, readiness, focus.

So the day of Pentecost is a day that demanded the disciples' attention, focus, concentration, discernment. The day of Pentecost happened while the disciples were waiting for God to fulfill his promise to send the Holy Spirit.

Let me go back to the gospel of John to understand what exactly is being promised. On the night of his arrest, the night of his betrayal, the night before his death, Jesus gathered his disciples together in the upper room. He washed their feet to show the extent of his love for them. Then he shared a meal with them, gave thanks, broke the bread and drank from the cup. After this, we listen to the Farewell discourses in John 14-17. It is here where we hear the heart of Jesus. It is here where we come to understand what Jesus understands his purpose on earth. It is here where we hear Jesus preparing his disciples for his leaving. After all, Jesus repeats several times "I am going away". Jesus had come from the Father and was now going to be returning to the Father. So Jesus desired to help prepare his disciples for the absence of his physical presence on earth.

When speaking about his departure, he says something very peculiar and strange: "It is for your good that I am going away". Apparently, the absence of Jesus on earth is actually to our advantage, to our benefit. How?

Let's go back to a theme we explored several weeks ago: Temple. What is the purpose of the Temple? Well the temple is the place where God's glory dwells. The Temple is the place where heaven and earth meet. It is the most sacred of all places where the divine intersects with humanity; where heaven and earth merge and are one. One theologian describes the Temple this

way: it is the “divine dwelling place of the God of Israel which set them apart from other nations. [...] the temple, its vessels and all that was in it were depicted as representing the entire universe and the heavenly hosts. The Temple was regarded as the place where Yahweh lived and ruled in the midst of Israel and where, through the sacrificial system which reached its climax in the great festivals, he lived in grace, forgiving them, restoring them, and enabling them to be cleansed of defilement and so to continue as his people.” So the temple isn’t only about religion but is also about identity, politics, economics, government. The Temple was at the epicenter of their identity such that physically, entire cities were built around the temple.

Up until the birth of Jesus, the divine dwelling place had been in the Temple. But then God’s glory – the divine dwelling place – had been in Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, the divine dwelling place is where? Listen again to the reading from Acts: “*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.*” Listen to Paul’s words to the church in Corinth “*Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?*” Pentecost is the day we celebrate that God dwells in us. The Holy Spirit lives in us.

So what are the implications of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us? Well, to understand that the Temple is the dwelling place of God is to also understand that the Temple is the place where heaven and earth meet, where the divine and the human intersect. No longer are these worlds separate, distinct, pushed apart. But they have been brought together and collide. In the Old

Testament, there was an understanding and belief that heaven and earth would come together, would not remain separate and distinct but be united as one.

We see this in Jesus who declared “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”. Jesus prays ‘thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ In the gospel of John, when Jesus is questioned by Pilate, the entire conversation revolves around Jesus and the cross, the purpose of Jesus’ life and death. And what do Pilate and Jesus discuss? They don’t discuss what we might expect of them – sin and forgiveness. Instead they discuss king, kingdom and truth. Jesus came to glorify the Father. Jesus came to bring heaven and earth together. Jesus came to inaugurate God’s kingdom on earth. Jesus came to be the king of this world. And, yes, Jesus came to forgive our sins and heal our wounds. So it really should be no surprise to us that a main focus in all four gospels is the kingdom of God.

And, I have been suggesting to you since Easter, that this is the whole point of the Bible. Salvation isn’t about us being whisked away and carted off to some unknown, mysterious, vague place called heaven. The purpose of the cross isn’t so that souls go to heaven and avoid hell. As I’ve said before, when we make the cross and salvation primarily about the forgiveness of our sins, we turn the story of the cross into a story that’s primarily about me. Of course the cross is about the forgiveness of our sins. The cross is not less than that. But it is so much more. But when we come to see the whole Bible as a story about God, then it will shift our focus of the cross and salvation away from ourselves and onto God. The goal of our Christian faith, the goal of salvation, the purpose of the cross is not so we escape this earth and go to heaven. The goal of

our Christian faith, the goal of salvation, the purpose of the cross is the redemption of the whole cosmos so that God can and will eternally dwell with His people and will be glorified eternally.

You see, the ascension isn't about Jesus going away and encouraging his followers to look forward to the time when they will leave earth and go to heaven. The angels tell us 'Jesus will come again in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'. With that second coming is the restoration and renewal of the new heavens and new earth, when Jesus shall reign forevermore as Lord and King over all creation. But because of what happened on the cross, Jesus is already reigning, already King. But when he returns he will complete the work of bringing His Kingdom to earth as it is in Heaven.

So on the cross we see the fullest and truest expression of the glory of God revealed. It should then be no surprise to us that Pentecost also points us towards this same purpose, this same hope, this same goal. In Jesus Christ, the two worlds, heaven and earth, have met. John reminds us in his book that "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" In Jesus, all glory dwells. But Jesus ascended to Heaven forty days after his resurrection.

And on the fiftieth day after his resurrection, we get to the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is about heaven and earth coming together. Pentecost is about the glory of God. The divine Holy Spirit comes to make its dwelling in us. No longer do heaven and earth meet in the temple made of human hands. No longer is God's glory revealed in the Temple. No longer does heaven and earth

even meet in the person of Jesus Christ. No longer is God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Now heaven and earth meet in us because of the Holy Spirit. Now God's glory is revealed in and through us because of the Holy Spirit.

The Messiah came in a way no one expected: as a baby born in a manger. The glory of God was revealed in a way no one expected – through the death by crucifixion and resurrection of God's Son Jesus. And so it should be no surprise to us that our expectation of how God's Kingdom comes to earth, of how heaven and earth meet is not what we expect. For who would have expected that God would dwell in us, that heaven and earth would meet in us.

I grew up worshipping among a community of disciples at a Pentecostal church. So of course the Day of Pentecost was pretty important. Of course, the person and work of the Holy Spirit was regularly emphasized, and for that I am grateful. My understanding growing up was that the day of Pentecost was about our private Christian faith. It was about experiencing first-hand the personal presence and power of God in our lives. As is not uncommon, as I have grown older, I have come to understand a fuller picture of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. I think explaining Pentecost as the day where we receive the gift of the personal presence and power of God keeps our Christian faith private and safe. We are tempted to interpret Pentecost through the lens of my personal life, full of troubles and joys, full of ups and downs, with all its ebbs and flows. But it doesn't draw me deeper; deeper into the story of God, deeper into salvation, deeper into the heart of God, deeper into God's purposes on earth.

Understanding the Day of Pentecost to be about the personal presence and power of God in us rightly gives us strength, comfort, help. This is certainly one very real and important aspect of Pentecost. Yet when we hold that individual, personal view of Pentecost with the broader cosmos implications of Pentecost, we develop a fuller perspective and shift the attention away from ourselves and on to God. When we begin to grasp that the Day of Pentecost is also about heaven and earth coming together through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it will impact the life of the church.

We read in John's gospel a description of what happens when heaven and earth meet. We understand more about the implications of the Day of Pentecost, and indeed what it means for us, as we turn to Jesus' words to his disciples as he prepared them for his departure. To prepare his disciples for his leaving, Jesus chooses to tell his disciples about the Holy Spirit. He starts in chapter 14 and continues in chapters 15 and 16. In chapter 16 we read about the work of the Holy Spirit. And the work of the Holy Spirit is about what happens when heaven and earth meet and become one. So we realize that we find ourselves in the same place in which Jesus found himself. Just as Jesus, full of the Spirit, in whom all glory dwelt, stood in that space where heaven and earth met, so too do we, filled with the Holy Spirit, stand in the space where heaven and earth come together.

Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. It's important to first understand the meaning of world or cosmos. Cosmos in the Bible refers to human society organizing itself without God. Cosmos doesn't refer to the physical and material

world. It refers to human society resisting God, rejecting God. How does the Holy Spirit convict the world of sin? Well, I honestly don't know but I believe it has to do with prayer. It's really a mystery to me how the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin. But this I know to be true. The Holy Spirit convicted me of sin and convicted many of you of sin. Listen to Jesus' bold and audacious definition of sin. Jesus says in verse 9 "in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me". The definition of sin isn't being bad or moral attitudes. It isn't breaking God's law. In this verse, Jesus is saying that sin is unbelief; sin is refusing to come to Jesus to be forgiven and reconciled and receive him as Lord and Saviour; sin is not believing Jesus is who he says he is; sin is not trusting Jesus to be who he says he is. And so the Holy Spirit is at work convicting us – individually, as a church, and as a society - of our unbelief and sin.

The Spirit convicts us of righteousness, of right and wrong. And the Spirit convicts the world of judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged. The cross is the place where the world is judged and redeemed. The cross is the place where the devil is judged and dethroned.

The Spirit does that work of convicting and convincing but we are not passive, just observing the Holy Spirit do this work. The Holy Spirit dwells in us. It means we are the people who make it known to the world that by rejecting Jesus, we are also rejecting what it means to be genuinely human. We are the people who bear witness to how the world is meant to be through heaven and earth coming together. As God's people, we show the world that the world is properly ordered when we are not in charge but God is.

We live in that heaven-and-earth space through our living and our speaking. We pray to God about the brokenness that still exists in the world. And we speak to the world about God, about the right way of living that happens when we live under the rule of Jesus Christ.

When we do that, we remember once again this story is not about me or you. This is a story about God. We are reminded in verse 14 that the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus, not me or you or the church. The Spirit will take what belongs to Jesus and declare it to us and through us to the world.

So the Day of Pentecost is a day where we are sent into the world to proclaim that Jesus is Lord, Saviour and King. We don't retreat or run away from the world. But we are sent into the world not to become the world but to show what it looks like when heaven and earth meet. We do this as individuals and as a church. We do this by living under the lordship of Jesus Christ, by living in faith, hope, and love, by practicing generosity and chastity, joy and justice, humility and patience.

We show the world how to be human through our speech and our living together, as we struggle together to live in righteousness and holiness and unity, as we strive to be people who are known for their love for one another, and as we choose to obey Jesus. This is what the Day of Pentecost means. It is about living as the people of God, in whom Heaven and earth meet through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.