

## The Real Miracle of Pentecost

Today is the traditional 'birthday' of the Christian church. Some congregations will celebrate with a birthday celebration complete with cake and party horns, balloons and the like. Some congregations urge those attending worship service to wear red to symbolize the Holy Spirit. Many times, sermons would be centered around the miracle of the disciples being able to speak in the native languages of the Jewish visitors to Jerusalem who were there to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost or First Harvest. The question would then be posed of whether the miracle was one of speaking or hearing. The problem with this approach (and it is one which I have taken in the past myself) is that when we celebrate the birthday of the church or debate what kind of miracle happened is that we tend to take our focus away from God and from the real miracle.

The real miracle that happened on that day in Jerusalem was the miracle of God coming to us in an unusual way. In the past, God came to a select few people who then told the people what God wanted. In this fulfilling from the prophet Joel, everybody is able to proclaim God's words so that all may hear them. It doesn't matter if you are young or old, male or female, slave or free, when God gives the Holy Spirit to people, they are able to proclaim the Good News. But as it is with anything else that God has given us, humanity has tried to control this miracle of the giving of the Holy Spirit and determine who can have it, who cannot have it and when it can be given.

Of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit is probably the hardest part to comprehend. One way to demonstrate how the Spirit works, we can use this balloon. Without any air in it, it is not very useful. You can probably think of some hacks that can be done with it, but that is not the intended use of the balloon.

It is interesting that the word for "spirit" and "breath" is the same in biblical Greek. (Incidentally, in Hebrew it is the same word as well.) In the creation story, God breathed into the man He had created and in John's Gospel, Jesus breathed on the apostles, giving them the Holy Spirit. At our baptism, we received the Holy Spirit, we were breathed into. (Breathe into the balloon; ask members to do the same). We are breathed into when we come to services and get renewed (Breathe in the balloon and ask members to do the same). We are breathed into when we participate in the Lord's Supper (Breathe into the balloon and ask members to do the same). We are breathed into when we sing songs to God (Breathe into the balloon and ask members to do the same). We are breathed into when we hear the Word of God preached faithfully (Breathe into the balloon and ask members to do the same). The fact is, we receive the breath of life in many different ways.

What then are we to do with this gift of the Holy Spirit? Like any gift that we receive from God, it is to be used for others. It is not to puff ourselves up to show others how important we are; rather, we are to use this breath to follow the example of the apostles and take the Gospel outside the house and give witness to God's deeds of power. Using the balloon as an example, we go out into the world by releasing the balloon, letting the air inside the balloon to direct our efforts. We may want to direct where the Spirit leads us, but like trying to get a balloon to go where you want it to, is nearly impossible (Let the balloon go). Just as we never know where the balloon will go, because the air escaping directs the path of the balloon, we never know what paths the Spirit will lead us down. We may want to try to control when the Spirit escapes us, or when we want to 'use' the Spirit, but usually we just end up making an irritating noise like this (take balloon, blow it up and let air out slowly making it squeak).

The important thing to remember is that we are filled with the Holy Spirit and that we should let the Spirit guide us where we are to go. We may not have the confidence that where we are going is where we should be going or have any idea of where we are going. We may not think that we have the abilities to go where the Spirit is guiding us. At this point, we need to have faith in Jesus, trusting that we would not be led astray. It is this kind of trust that led the apostles to give public witness to Jesus. It is this kind of trust that led Paul all through *Gentile* lands giving witness to Jesus and the mighty works of God. It is this trust that took a suburban boy out of his comfort zone in Buffalo, NY and place him in rural Minnesota to minister to God's people. It is this trust that can lead any congregation to do things greater than what could have ever been dreamed.

Much has been said about the state of the church and where it is going, what it will look like, what it means to be 'church' and even questioning if it will survive. I believe that God will make sure that the church will survive. After all, God is not about failure and will make sure that we are given by the Holy Spirit what we need to successfully accomplish what God wants us to do. As long as we approach it with the understanding and trust that God is in control and will help and guide us to go where we are to go and in the process giving up our efforts to control everything, then things will work out.

May we always allow the Holy Spirit to guide us where we must go, to where God wants us to go.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/ItYxWkDQMjc>

Service: <https://youtu.be/gYc3rAsQ-2M>