

May 23, 2021

*“A Game Changer”*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Acts 2:38-47; Galatians 5: 19-23

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Throughout the ages there have been certain things and events which have occurred that have made such a significant impact on our lives, we refer to them as being “Game Changers.” They change the way we live and sometimes they even alter the course of history. Some examples are things like the wheel, the printing press, the light bulb, the automobile, the television, the computer, the Internet, the smart phone. Events like the Revolutionary War, the Fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11. Even companies like Amazon that changed the way we shop. Or Facebook, and the creation of social media. Certainly COVID was a game changer for the past year and a half. And today we heard about another game changer – Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples.

Now why is Pentecost a game changer? Because at Pentecost, the church was born, Christianity itself was born. And suddenly, ordinary people, from everywhere – talk about diversity – were called into action to be the agents and messengers of God’s good news. You see, prior to Pentecost, it’s all about Jesus. Jesus ushering in God’s kingdom of love, forgiveness, peace, hope, joy. And his followers.... well, they were doing just that – following him, listening, learning, being led by the Master. At Pentecost however, all that changes. As Professor Marvin McMickle says, “On Pentecost, you and I are called away from our roles as spectators into the role of central characters in God’s work in the world. As a result of Pentecost, we are now equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit so we can become actively involved in the work of salvation and redemption. Pentecost is the day Jesus officially passes his power to us.”<sup>1</sup> And Jesus said this would happen. Just before he ascended back to heaven, he promised the disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me, everywhere.” And indeed, the Holy Spirit came powerfully on those who were gathered in the Upper Room that day. We heard, “All at once, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house. Then, what looked like flames, or tongues of fire appeared and settled on them. And they all began speaking in different languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.” Surprisingly, having been filled by God’s own Spirit, all these people began talking about Jesus, boldly and confidently sharing his good news. And a crowd gathers to hear what they have to say. Then Peter gets up and preaches, and three thousand people become charter members of the very first church. They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to prayer. They shared what they had with great joy and generosity. And

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin McMickle, “The Power and Purpose of Pentecost,” Preaching.com

the Lord added to their fellowship – the church grew. And from this point on, the world would come to know Jesus Christ through the empowered efforts of those who call themselves a Christian.

Which means that today you and I are called into action. We are responsible for sharing God’s message of love and salvation in this world. Can you believe this? You should. But I agree, it does sound somewhat daunting, doesn’t it? Can we really make a difference? But that’s where the Holy Spirit comes into play. At Pentecost, the power of God’s own Spirit becomes available to each and every one of us. Pentecost means that God no longer only dwells with his people. God dwells in his people. God’s Spirit dwells in you and me – if we let him in. Now you may be thinking, “how can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?” Well, the truth is, there is no magic formula to somehow harness the power of the Holy Spirit and be filled. But I would suggest that you consider this. Ask not “How much of the Holy Spirit do I have?” But rather, “How much does the Holy Spirit have of me?” How much does the Holy Spirit have of me? And St. Paul gives us an easy way to measure this: by how much of those fruits of the Spirit we display in our lives. How much love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and generosity and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control is revealed in what we do and say? This is important. You see, it’s by those fruits – our words and actions that we make a difference. That’s how we share God’s message of love and salvation. No matter who we are, or where we are in life.

Let me share an interesting parable. A monk, traveling through the countryside, found a very precious gemstone. He picked the stone up, turned it in his hand, gazed at its beauty, then put it in his knapsack and carried it with him. A few days later he chanced upon a fellow traveler who was in need, hungry and worn. The man begged the monk, asking if he might have something to share with him, some food to eat. The monk opened his knapsack and reached in to take out some of the meager food he had to offer the man, when suddenly his fingers fell upon the gemstone. So he took out the gem and gave it to the traveler. Overjoyed by his good fortune, the traveler thanked the monk profusely and then went on his way. A few days later, however, that same traveler searched out and found the monk. He begged him again, only this time he pleaded, “You gave me a valuable gift, the precious gem, but please give me something even more valuable...give me that which prompted you to give me the gem in the first place.” That is the power of the Holy Spirit. A power that allows you to be more free of the things of this world, a power more ready to share and be generous. A power that enables you to live in such a way that others want what you have. They want to know Jesus Christ because of you and the fruits you bear. That is how we become actively involved in the work of redemption and salvation of this world. Imagine if we all lived out the fruits of the Spirit!

Yes, the day of Pentecost was a game changer. The church was born, and ordinary people – like you and me, became responsible to share the story of Jesus Christ. And just think of that story again. I like the way Pastor Andy Stanley tells it. “A small band of Jewish dissidents defied a superpower and a religious system that had been in place for a thousand years and, in the end, prevailed. At the center of this grassroots movement, originally referred to as *The Way*, was a Jewish carpenter whose messages centered on a “kingdom” that wasn’t directly connected to this world. He spoke in parables that identified with common people. Yet he insisted that those who followed him love the Romans and pay those onerous taxes. He alienated the influential and the powerful. He offended practically everybody. After only three years of public ministry, he was arrested, humiliated, and executed. Sounds like the perfect way to start a movement, doesn’t it?

But it gets even stranger. After his execution, Jesus’ dispirited and desperate followers, claimed that he rose from the dead and that they had seen him! Touched him. Eaten with him. Then within weeks of this alleged resurrection, dozens and then hundreds of people within walking distance of where Jesus was buried believed this nonsense and began telling others. Before long, Jerusalem was filled to the brim with followers of the Way. When resistance from both Rome and the Jewish authorities broke out several members of the original group were executed and the followers scattered.

Now if the uprising had been like the dozen or so similar uprisings that occurred during this same time, it would have passed as a mere footnote of history. But this one was different. Everywhere they went, followers of *The Way* insisted that God had done something unique in their generation; he had raised a man from the dead.

In a relatively short amount of time, this Jewish knockoff religion replaced the entire pagan pantheon of gods as the primary belief system of the Roman Empire, the same empire responsible for crucifying its central figure. Doesn’t really add up, does it?

But the story of *the church* is not just unexplainable, it’s undeniable. The Roman Empire is long gone. Ancient Judaism died with the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 AD. But today one third of the world’s population claims some kind of faith in Jesus. He taught for only three years, yet twenty centuries later, he is worshiped on every continent on the planet. That is an amazing story. And it’s a story in which we have the privilege of participating. Actually it’s a story we are responsible for

sharing. Like it or not, we are the stewards of the church for our generation.”<sup>2</sup> And so, let us open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit today. So that each one of us fulfills our role in the story of Jesus Christ – by the fruits that we bear, and by our participation in the church he created to proclaim his name.

I want to end today with us praying together in song. I think you’ll know it – it’s a prayer asking for the Holy Spirit to fall afresh on our lives. Let us sing together.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me,

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me,

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Pastor Andy Stanley, “Deep and Wide, Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend.” pg. 52