

**Text: Acts 2:1-21**

**Theme: Pentecost – When wimps became warriors.**

**Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi on Pentecost Sunday, 12/06/2011 at 10.30am.**

---

Before Pentecost the disciples had a power problem: they were helpless, timid, clueless, powerless and ineffective. Does this describe our situation in relation to our calling as Christians? But Jesus said to his ineffective disciples: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." (Acts 1:8) Then it happened and the picture was changed. The disciples were waiting to launch a movement they didn't know how to launch. Why are we surprised when God shows his hand now and then? Don't underestimate God.

A ship strayed off course near San Diego some years back. It became stuck in a reef at low tide. Twelve tugboats were unsuccessful in their attempts to budge it. Finally, the captain instructed the tugs to go back home. He sighed, "I'll just be patient and wait." He waited until high tide. All of a sudden the ocean began to rise. What human power could not do, the rising tide of the Pacific Ocean did. It lifted that ship and put it back into the channel. Something like that happened to the early church on the Day of Pentecost. They were all together in one place confused, unmotivated and fearful when suddenly the tide of God rolled in.

On the day of Pentecost it was as though all heaven broke loose! The winds of God blew. The divided group of fearful disciples was fused into a mighty oneness. Divided thoughts were channelled toward the one goal of the coming Kingdom. And thoughts and words and understanding were clear to all. Peter, who had recently denied Jesus, preached a sermon that must have scared him when he heard what he was saying. "God has raised this Jesus [whom you crucified] to life...Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33). And about three thousand persons were added to God's new movement of hope and love on that day.

Now the disciples, who previously had dared not move, couldn't be stopped. They were bubbling over with the Spirit; they were radiant; they were incandescent. Through the Holy Spirit, God in Christ, Christ in the disciples, the disciples in the world - and still it is so wherever the Holy Spirit is experienced and obeyed. What God did through a handful of weak men and women in the time of the Roman Empire, he can do through committed men and women in today's world. 'God's arm is not shortened.' (Isaiah 59:1) What God creates, he quickens.

After Pentecost, it was all different. The Holy Spirit indwelt Peter and the other disciples. And this Christian movement possessed the Roman world. Christ's deeds were multiplied. He could heal and forgive and give new life in Jerusalem and Rome at the same moment through his followers. Today it is the same all over the world. The Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God) dwells in all who are open to him, and through them he does his work, and his works are increased a million fold. He is no longer limited to one segment of time and space; he is free to heal and forgive and give new life at any spot in the world at any moment of time. The catch - where there are true, committed agents of his Spirit.

None of us can cope with life adequately without the touch of God, who is the real centre of

It is impossible to follow in the way of Christ without the Spirit of Christ. **Without the Holy Spirit, Christianity is a burden too heavy to be borne - a discipline too difficult to be obeyed - a goal too distant to be achieved. But, by the touch of the Spirit we are enabled. We can cope! You can have a nervous breakdown trying to be a Christian without Christ.** A true experience of the Holy Spirit touches these essential relationships: husband and wife, parent and child, management and labour, black and white, rich and poor, east and west. Are we ready to break into the new dimensions for which we were designed? We know that "the power that lifts us up is greater than the power that drags us down." But, are we ready for it?

As the Spirit filled the original followers of Jesus, he gave them this special ability to speak different human languages. He could have just filled them with passion and they could have praised God in their own tongue. But he deliberately gave them the ability to speak in foreign languages. Why? He did this for the purposes of evangelism. The Holy Spirit and evangelism are a perfect combination. The Spirit loves to focus on the identity and mission of Jesus. This is what we do in evangelism.

News of what was happening spread quickly. Jews from all over the world had crowded into the holy city to celebrate the sacred feast. Curious crowds gathered outside the house where the disciples were staying. Each one listened with amazement to the disciples testifying in their own, local language. There was such turmoil that some supposed that the disciples were drunk. It fell upon Simon Peter to interpret to the crowd what was occurring. They were not drunk, he said. The prophecy of Joel was being fulfilled. God was pouring out His spirit on His people. And Peter began telling the good news of Jesus. When he had finished, about three thousand souls were added to the church.

How we long to have such excitement in the church again! How we long for the mighty tide of God to roll in once more! Imagine the police called to our church because the neighbours complained that we appeared drunk and disorderly. That will never happen. The church was born in excitement. Church ought to be the most exciting place in the community. By that I do not mean that we ought to be rowdy just for the sake of being rowdy.

A reporter once covered a campaign rally. He watched as the politicians made their speeches to the loud yells of the people. When one finished, the reporter asked a fellow who had taken a leading role in the cheering, "What did you think about the speech you just heard?" The reply came back quickly, "I didn't come here to think. I came here to holler!"

There are churches where people don't come to think. They come to holler. We do not desire that. Still, the church ought to be the most authentically exciting place in town. Why? Let me suggest some reasons.

**There ought to be the excitement, first of all, of a people fuelled by prayer.**

Harry Emerson Fosdick, a church minister in New York City, once stood by the rail admiring Niagara Falls. The man standing next to him commented: "You know, right there is the

Love builds excitement. I'm tempted to ask how many of you watch soap operas on TV-either daytime or night time. Television is dull compared to the things that happen in the lives of real people! If the life of our church gets humdrum at times, it is because there is no real sharing going on of individual concerns and heartaches.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand attended the coronation of Edward VII as king of the British Empire. Someone asked him what was most memorable about his trip. He replied that on the way back to his hotel he passed a slum section in London. There in a dark alley he saw a boy about 12 years old sitting with his arms around a girl about 6 years old. It was late and cold and the boy had draped his coat around the girl's shoulders and put his cap over her bare feet. That was the most memorable part of the prime minister's trip. When people truly care about other people there is excitement. Exciting churches are praying churches, and they are caring churches. Truly those early disciples cared about one another. The second chapter of Acts tells how they ate together, prayed together, sang together, and had all things in common. No wonder there was such electricity in the air. An exciting church is a praying church, it is a caring church.

**Excitement comes from having a great driving purpose and seeing that purpose being realised.**

Those of you who are excited about your work know what I'm talking about. You have a clear-cut purpose and you can see it being fulfilled daily. Those of you who are excited about a hobby can attest to the same sense of exhilaration. So it is with the church. Churches that have a clear-cut understanding of who they are and what they are called to do are exciting places to be.

What is our purpose? It is to claim our community and our world for Jesus Christ. It is to bring the Kingdom of Christ into individual lives by showing them Christ's love. It is to find those who are unable to help themselves and flood them with the grace of God that requires nothing in return. That is our purpose and a mighty purpose it is. How do we achieve it? We achieve it by committing ourselves without reservation to His service.

Just consider the changes that Pentecost wrought in the disciples. The fearful became fearless. Facing the very same Jewish Council which had condemned Jesus, Simon Peter indicted them all for executing Jesus. When the Council warned the disciples not to teach in Jesus' name, Simon Peter replied, "We must obey God rather than men." Those disciples stood like steers in a blizzard, refusing to be intimidated. When Simon Peter and John were beaten within an inch of their lives, they rejoiced over the privilege of suffering for Jesus. The Amplified Bible says, "They were dignified by the indignity." (Acts 5:41) Sounds more like warriors than wimps!

The disciples, who had earlier been silent, began to shout the gospel. When persecution forced them out of Jerusalem, they just told the story over a wider area. The great missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones, was fond of saying, "Without the Holy Spirit, I'm a mess. With the

**First for living a Spirit-filled life: Ask each day for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit.**

In Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 18, Paul issues this command: "Be filled with the Spirit." Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit are those who crave it, who are willing to change anything the Lord requires, who are willing to serve as the Lord commands. We should be unwilling to live a single day without being refuelled by Almighty God.

**Second: Share your experiences of the Holy Spirit in church.**

When is the last time in your Sunday school class or your Bible study group that you shared what the Spirit has been doing in your life?

**Third: Attempt great things for God.**

**Remember: if you are not attempting something that you could not possibly achieve without God's help, your aim is too low.**

I like the story of two caterpillars which were crawling along a path. They looked up and saw a beautiful butterfly flitting around. One caterpillar turned to the other and said, "Charlie, you'll never get me up in one of those things." But God wants you to live over your head, borne on the wings of the Spirit. There are miracles God wants you to witness. There are scars He wants to remove, ministries He wants you to discover, fractured relationships He wants to reconcile. The question is: Do you have enough faith to take on something that looks impossible?

**Finally: Give God the glory!**

Make it a habit to tell people that you're living on borrowed power. Then when they ask, tell them where the power comes from. Notice in Acts 2, verse 11 what the disciples were telling people on the day of Pentecost. They weren't discussing their own credentials. They were proclaiming God's mighty acts.

The astonishment of Pentecost was not the babble, but the understanding. Strangers said: "We do not know these people ... we do not like these people ... but we understand these people. How is that possible?" The last time we encountered babble (at the "tower" in Genesis 11), people split apart. Now there's a second outbreak of babble, and people are coming together.

If we don't resemble the church at Pentecost, there are probably some good reasons. It's sad, perhaps, but there are some ways in which we are not like them.

**We Don't Pray Like They Did.** Jesus told his disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. This was a time of preparation and prayer, intense prayer.

Prayer is a powerful force in our lives. God doesn't need our prayers, but we need to pray them more than we might understand. Prayer gives us the opportunity to open ourselves

**We don't love like they did.** How those Christians loved one another! No one was in need, because they shared all things in common. No one was excluded. No one was forgotten. There were differences of opinion, of course. That is obvious in Paul's letters. Anytime you have a group of people, you have differences of opinion.

**We don't have a passion for service like they had.** They were on a mission, a mission from God. And that mission had something to do with the world for which Christ died. Before we can be filled, we must recognize our emptiness; by gathering together for prayer, in obedience, these disciples were doing just that. They recognized that they did not have the resources in themselves to do what they could or should, they had to rely on the work of God.

The idea behind the picture of **fire** is usually purification, as a refiner uses fire to make pure gold. Or fire can burn away what is temporary, leaving what will last. This is an excellent illustration of the principle that the filling of the Holy Spirit is not just for abstract power, but for *purity*.

“The Church can be repaired by no other means, saving only by the giving of the Holy Spirit.” (Calvin)

While it would be wrong to expect a **rushing mighty wind** or **tongues, as of fire**, to be present today when the Holy Spirit is poured out, we can experience the true gift. We, just as they, can be **all filled with the Holy Spirit**. We should do what the disciples did before and during their filling with the Holy Spirit. The disciples were filled *in fulfillment of a promise*. They were filled as they *received in faith*. They were filled *in God's timing*. They were filled *as they were together in unity*. And they were all filled *in unusual ways*.