

Text: Acts 2: 1-14

Theme: The Promise Fulfilled

Sermon delivered by Dele Agbelusi on Pentecost Sunday during Service of the Word on 4/06/2017 at 10.30am

Several years ago, a submarine was being tested and had to remain submerged for many hours. When it returned to the harbour, the captain was asked, "How did the terrible storm last night affect you?" The officer looked at him in surprise and exclaimed, "Storm? We didn't even know there was one!" The sub had been so far beneath the surface that it had reached the area known to sailors as "the cushion of the sea." Although the ocean may be whipped into huge waves by high winds, the waters below are never stirred.

This, I believe, is a perfect picture of the peace that comes from Christ's Spirit. The waves of worry, of fear, of heartbreak, cannot trouble those resting in Christ. Sheltered by His grace and encouraged by His Spirit, the believer is given the perfect tranquillity that only Christ can provide. That is God's peace and that is what the Holy Spirit gives to those who seek the Lord earnestly.

Many of us long to see the modern church infused with the same joy, the same love, the same energizing power that characterized the church on the day of that first Pentecost. There they were, this motley band of earnest believers still shaken by the events of the past fifty days, saddened by the departure of their leader to "sit at the right hand of the Father" and uncertain as to their fate now that he was no longer with them. He had told them to wait, "...Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about." Acts 1:4, and in Acts 1:8 said "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

This promise that the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8) and that they would be clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49) was a promise given to sustain the completion of world evangelization, and all the ministry that supports it. The context of both texts makes that plain. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth." It's a shame that the term "Pentecostal power" has for many people become more associated with speaking in tongues than with the harvest of world evangelization.

To the Jew, Pentecost was also the time when he was under obligation to remember the giving of the law at Sinai. Pentecost, then, was the anniversary of the law. The law was given expressly to Israel, but the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was to indwell each believer in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. He came to unite them into one body.

And just as the giving of the law was a preparatory service for Israel, to mark them out for service as people of the only God, so also the coming of the Holy Spirit was a preparation for service for all believers, getting them ready to carry forth Christ's Gospel. It's clear: Luke wants us to see the connection – the same Spirit that filled Jesus and empowered him to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth was given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost that they might continue Jesus' mission of reconciling the world to God.

If we recall God's commandment to Noah and his family after the flood, they were told to be fruitful and multiply, to spread out and fill the earth (**Gen 9:7**). They were unified and had one language. And in their unity, they tried to build a tower to the heavens. And notice their motivation in **Genesis 11:4** – they wanted to make a name for themselves.

But the Lord comes down and sees their city and their tower, and said, '...Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.' (11:6). So, the Lord scattered them, and confused their languages.

Now if we skip forward to Acts 2, we read how there were people from every nation under heaven. Every nation. Every one of the nations caused by the scattering at Babel were present here on the day of Pentecost. And when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in different languages, and the people could hear their own language spoken.

One of the things that God did at Pentecost was to reverse what he did at Babel. The people were unified, and their language barrier was broken. And **instead of the people trying to make a name for themselves, God made a way for the people to make a name for God.**

Let us go back to our texts Acts 2:1-14.

Acts 2:1

The Waiting

The disciples, about 120 of them, waited and they prayed until the day of Pentecost arrived. The next day after Christ left them, they would have thought, after their prayer meeting it was going to be today. But it was not. Then they prayed and perhaps thought it would be the next day, but it was not. Perhaps seven days after, perfect number, but the Spirit did not come. God sets His own time and will not delay His promises but everything will work to His perfect timing. **Waiting is Not Time Wasted.** If we run ahead of God, then our efforts will be wasted. Prayer is taking to God, claiming his promises and trusting in his timing.

Then, without warning, lightning struck. Not literally, of course, but figuratively. "Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." When it happened, they knew the Lord has fulfilled what he promised.

In both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the word for spirit (as in Holy Spirit) is the same word for breath or wind. When Adam was created, he wasn't alive until God breathed life into Him. (Gen 2:7 KJV) And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

"Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave utterance."

That could happen here! I am not certain how we would handle it, if it did. Nevertheless, the same Spirit is available to us today if we really desire it.

There is a story about a very dignified pastor who was visiting a lady in a nursing home who was confined to a wheel chair. As he stood to leave the lady asked him to have a word of prayer. He gently took her hand and prayed that God would be with her to bring her comfort, strength and healing. When he finished praying her face began to glow. She said softly, "Pastor, would you help me to my feet?" Not knowing what else to do, he helped her up. At first, she took a few uncertain steps. Then she began to jump up and down, then to dance and shout and cry with happiness until the whole nursing home was aroused. After she was quieted the solemn pastor hurried out to his car, closed the door, grabbed hold of the steering wheel and prayed a little prayer, "Lord don't you ever do that to me again!"

We expect so little from God. Lightning could strike this church. We could hear a sound like a mighty wind. Tongues of fire could rest on each of us. This church would become a vital and

dynamic instrument of God's power and purpose in this city. It could happen. Indeed, it is God's will that it happens. Our lack of faith is the only hindrance.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The filling of the Holy Spirit is not just for abstract power, but for purity. We can all be filled with the Holy Spirit if we have the desire to be the best that can be for God without holding back, if we see ourselves as needing God to fill our empty cups and make us into His faithful and vibrant disciples who experience His presence always.

The Holy Spirit Dwells in the Believer, but it is absolutely necessary to experience His fullness and power. It is not possible for us to promote the glory of God, or to bless the souls of men, unless the Holy Spirit shall be in us and with us.

Those who were assembled on that memorable day of Pentecost were all men of prayer and faith; but even these precious gifts are only available when the celestial fire sets them ablaze. They were all men of experience—most of them had been preachers of the Word, and workers of miracles; they had endured trials and troubles in company with their Lord, and had been with Him in His temptation. Yet, even experienced Christians, without the Spirit of God empowering them are weak as water!

"It was not a lack of education; they had been for three years in the college of Christ, with perfect wisdom as their tutor, matchless eloquence as their instructor, and immaculate perfection as their example; yet, they must not venture to open their mouths to testify of the mystery of Jesus until the anointing Spirit has come with blessed unction from above! Surely, my brothers, if it was so with them, much more must it be the case with us." (C.H. Spurgeon)

Observe the difference between Peter with the Spirit, and Peter without the Spirit! There he is, cursing and swearing like a sailor; he never knew Christ, he says. There he is, sinking in the sea; he does not believe that he can walk upon the waters, and he cries, "Lord, save, or I perish." Peter, the braggart, the rash man, and yet, the coward!

Look at him now—the Spirit of God has come upon him; how different is Peter! Fearless of all the jeers and taunts which the vulgar crew might cast at him, he stands up to preach! He speaks mightily, and not as the scribes. He goes up to the temple and commands a lame man to leap, and the miracle is worked! He is brought before the rulers and commanded to hold his peace, and he answers like a hero, "Whether it is right to obey man rather than God, you judge." Peter is found traveling over every country, preaching the Word in every tongue, and at last, he who was once a coward cheerfully stretches out his aged arms to be nailed to a cross, but head downwards, because he would not want to die the way his saviour did.

What about Martin Luther? He is only fit to have been a killer of bulls, or a feller of oaks in the forest; but fill Luther with the Holy Spirit and what is he? He takes the bull of Rome by the horns, slays wild beasts of error in the great arena of the gospel, and is more than a conqueror through the might which dwells in him!

Who knows what you as a young man or woman may be? I know today you are like others—but filled with the Spirit, you are victor in God's hands in all your ways. Only let us be filled with the Spirit, and we know not what we can be! We shall "Laugh at impossibility and say, 'It shall be done.'" We shall attempt what we never dreamed of before, and accomplish that which we always thought to be far beyond our grasp!

It has been said by certain modern theologians, that we make this doctrine of dependence upon the Holy Spirit far too prominent, and that our constant teaching of this truth of God has a tendency to numb all human effort, and foster indifference and sloth. Surely it is not so, my brothers and sisters! Let it be seen that those of us who confess that without their Lord they can do nothing, are able with His aid to do everything!

Mike Lowry, likes to say, "Christianity is always personal, but never individual." And it's true: While each of us has his/her own destiny to fulfil, God calls us to live together, work together and worship together in community to the glory of His name. As we do, the spark of faith within us is rekindled and spread to warm and enlighten others.

Just as God poured out his Spirit on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, God comes to us in wind and flames. Yet, from time to time, the fire grows cold. When it does, we need to break the cycle and get out of the rut we're in; go back to the basics of Bible study, prayer and service; and stay connected and work together. Let us pray.