

**“Come, Holy Spirit, Come”  
The Day of Pentecost  
Acts 2:1-21  
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**God’s Spirit gives life**

The sound of rushing wind and crackling flame. Have you been camping, and tried to start a fire without an accelerant? You light the tinder with your match, but to get the tinder to light the small twigs, what do you do? You blow on it. You get down on your hands and knees, put your face next to the tinder and twigs, and blow on it. The sound of your breath and crackling flame. How much more sound do we hear as a wind blows over a field of tall grass? The sound of rushing wind and crackling flame.

So it is on the birthday of the church. A strong wind, a gale force from who knows where, fills the whole building, and like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spreads through their ranks. A rushing mighty wind from heaven, a blowing violent wind, and they are all filled with the Holy Spirit. All are taken by surprise and blown off their feet. Can you hear the wind? Can you see the tongues of fire on the heads of the assembled? God’s Spirit unleashed!

And God’s Spirit changes our behavior. It blows through the church, blows us off our feet and sets us aflame. Aflame to teach the Bible to children and adults. Aflame to visit and call and write the sick and those who need our consolation. Aflame to take care of the poor and hungry and oppressed outside the walls of our church, like we do the third Wednesdays of each month at the Downtown Presbyterian soup kitchen. Aflame to invite our unchurched neighbors to fellowship and worship with us. God’s Spirit changes our behavior.

But not everyone catches the Spirit.

**God’s Spirit causes the world to sneer**

A man comes to a church. A stranger. He is used to giving feedback to the preacher. You know, words like “Help him, Lord,” and “That’s right,” “Uh huh,” and, “Tell them, brother.” He is used to waving his hands and clapping. We can do all this at our church. So anyway, he begins doing these things in the church he is visiting. But no one has done these things before. So the elder runs up to him, and says, “What are you doing?” To which the man says, “Praising God.” The elder says, “That’s not how we do it here.” The man replies, “But I’ve caught the Spirit.” To which the elder says with finality, “Well you didn’t catch it here!”

The new Christians speak in many languages, loudly, and all at the same time. The elders in the synagogue sneer and mock the new Christians, making fun of them, saying, "They are drunk on cheap wine!" But they are not are they? Peter says they are not.

The Spirit blows through our church. But some of us don't catch it. We are asked to teach. We are asked to call, write, and visit the sick and those who need our consolation. We are asked to take care of the poor, hungry, and oppressed outside the walls of our church. We are asked to invite our unchurched neighbors to fellowship and to worship with us. We may not have gifts in all of these areas. But we all have gifts in at least one of them. And it is God's Spirit which opens our hearts and gives us the passion to contribute our gifts. When we resist contributing our gifts to the church, we have not caught the Spirit. And some of us try to sneer at those who have.

But God's Spirit is still blowing.

### **God's Spirit is irresistible**

Can you hear it? It is irresistible. When we open our door, the Spirit will blow into our house and knock us off our feet. God's Spirit blows wildfire across a grassy plain. It is uncontrollable. Because of the wind, one spark sets the entire plain on fire. Some of us try to sneer, saying we are too busy or are not interested. But God's gift of the Spirit is irresistible. You can hear it right outside your door.

A tornado blew through downtown Nashville in 1998 I think it was. It was unexpected until a funnel cloud was seen. It touched down and changed the landscape, blowing through buildings. It made a lot of noise. We were all frightened. But at the same time we wanted to see it. When we saw it outside the window of our fifth story office, we all left the office and headed toward the basement. But we could not escape the sound. And my office staff wanted to open the basement door to the outside so they could see what was going on. I had to insist they not do this, for fear of one of them being pulled into the funnel cloud. Or being injured by swirling debris. Because the sound of the tornado was irresistible.

How much more irresistible is God's Spirit? It blows into our house and knocks us off our feet. It enflames us like wildfire. It is uncontrollable. And I hear it right outside our door.

### **God's Spirit is a gift, unsolicited, unexpected**

Prayer is speaking to God. Our ability to speak to God, helped by the Holy Spirit, is an emotional event. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is unsolicited, unexpected, and undeserved. It just wells up inside us and out it comes. Singing to God is the same thing. Because singing is praying twice.

Imagine you are in Guatemala with Stella and me for your first time, in the sanctuary in the small village of Tamariz in the Mayan Peten. It is time to pray. You do not know what to expect. You do not know if what you are about to hear is a communal prayer, with everyone saying the same thing. Or the pastor praying on behalf of the entire congregation. Or a time of silent prayer. What you hear is none of these. What you hear is everyone praying their own different private prayer at the same time. You do not speak Spanish or Kekchi, but you hear prayer from the person to the left of you articulated in Kekchi, and from behind you articulated in Spanish. This is not something you expect. You know you are not in Brentwood anymore. Everyone praying a different prayer out loud at the same time in their own language. So you add English to the potpourri, to the cacophony of prayer. Now at least three languages are being prayed out loud at the same time. At first it sounds like the babble that broke up the engineers at the tower of Babel. But as you listen and participate, you understand the emotions. You cannot understand the words, but you understand the emotions. Because prayer is the universal emotional language. The *lingua franca* of emotions. Not Greek, as in Jesus' time. Not Spanish, as in Central America. And not English as in the Western world. The universal language is the emotional outpouring of love expressed in prayer to God. In sighs too deep for words.

A little girl, dressed in her Sunday best, was running as fast as she could to get to Sunday School. As she ran, she prayed.

"Dear Lord, please don't let me be late. Dear Lord, please don't let me be late." At this moment she tripped and fell, getting her clothes dirty.

She got up, brushed herself off and started running again, praying, "Dear Lord, please don't let me be late . . . but DON'T SHOVE me anymore!"

We pray for those who need to hear the Word of God. For those who are sick. For those who need consolation. For those who are poor and have nothing to eat. We pray for God to fill our sanctuary. And then during prayer, during our conversation with God, it hits us like a blast of wind. We are aflame! And our prayer changes us! We are transformed by God's Holy Spirit! We are inspired. We are inspired by the Spirit of God to be the temple of God's Spirit. And our speech is transformed into God's speech, and we are no longer afraid to teach the Bible and no longer afraid to invite others to worship and fellowship. Our hands and feet become Jesus' hands and feet, and we visit the sick and those who need consoling. We feed the poor. We are inspired. We are not shoved. We are transformed. We become the temple of God's Spirit within and between us.

Jesus was born. He taught us how to love each other and God. And then he died. Jesus died and went to heaven to sit at God our creator's right hand. Jesus no longer has a body here on earth. His body is in heaven. Jesus has no body on

earth. Nobody, except us. The church is now the body of Jesus. The temple of God's Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

The babble of words, the *lingua franca* of prayer, and the temple of God's encouraging, inspiring, transforming, and motivating Spirit. A wildfire on a grassy field. You caught it here!

The God who gives you birth, and who reconciles you with Jesus, now encourages, sustains, and provides you the opportunity to teach, to minister to those who are sick and grieving and hungry, and asks you to invite an unchurched friend to fellowship and worship with us next Sunday.

It is our privilege to open wide our doors and become the temple of God's Spirit.

Glory be to God. Hallelujah. And all God's people say .... (Amen)