

**Finally!  
May 28, 2023  
Pastor Aaron Johnson**

It is Memorial Day weekend, and it's been an interesting Memorial Day weekend for me! We are going to start this morning in Acts, chapter 2, at verse 1. And while you are getting there, let me tell you a little bit about Memorial Day weekend, 2023. It started for me on Wednesday when I traveled to Walla Walla to watch my nephew, who's going to graduate high school this year, do a Pass in Review with his JROTC detachment. It was a moment of great pride for me. And then, of course, I spent the week preparing for this sermon. And then my wife and I traveled to Sandpoint, Idaho, to celebrate my other nephew's graduation. And it is a great time of hope. And yet, I'm a veteran with 27 years of service and so I have and know the names of several people who have paid the sacrifice for the freedoms and the liberties that we enjoy, the freedoms and the liberties that we enjoy at the beginning of summer. And so, before we get started this morning, I just want to encourage you to spend some time remembering those who passed before us, who served faithfully, whether they served in the military, whether they served in our church, whether they served in our community, whether they served in our families. But just take some time and remember them. But I would also encourage you not to dwell there, because they are an example for us; and they are the example that encourages us to continue to move forward in our own faithful service, whatever that might look like, so that on the day that we meet them in the hereafter, we can stand in their presence and say that we served well, too.

It is a great time of year. It's also Pentecost Sunday! So, are you guys ready to learn about Pentecost? I would invite you to stand with me as I read from God's Word. Again, starting in Acts, chapter 2, verse 1.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound, the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocked, saying, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;  
even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.  
And I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;  
the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.  
And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord  
shall be saved."

This is the word of the Lord and we are grateful for it. Please be seated.

It's a powerful portion of Scripture: tongues of fire, rushing wind, languages that ought not to be known. What does it mean? What does this mean?

After enlisting in the Army National Guard as an intelligence officer, I decided that I needed to go to college. And the Army offered money for guys like me, and so I signed up for the ROTC program. Two years later, through a strange twist of fate, I found myself on my way to Army Airborne School to learn how to jump out of airplanes. That school is at Fort Benning, Georgia, Home for Boys. For decades, young men have been going there to start their military careers. And when you travel to a military base for whatever school, you get to the airport that's closest to that base. And often there is a desk at that airport where you go and you say, "I am here to report for duty." And at the time, I was a cadet, so of course I didn't get my own car. Instead, I had to wait for a van. And even when that van arrived, it wasn't just for me. I had to wait for enough people to get on that van to justify actually taking it to the base. And I was there with a good friend of mine. We were going to Airborne School together. And there was a group of young soldiers, just kind of forming up, and then we got on that van. And one of those soldiers was a young man who was getting ready to go to Basic Training, and he was excited. He could not tell us about how his life was going to change. He had tried to start his own business and failed. He had tried to go to college and failed. And so he both recognized that this was an opportunity, and perhaps the last opportunity, for his young life to get started on the right foot. And so he was going on and on and on. And he was excited and optimistic. And then we stopped at his stop first, the Reception Battalion for Basic Training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and he got out of the van and he grabbed his stuff. And with a skip in his step he walked the distance, probably from here to the back of the Sanctuary, and the sliding doors opened. He went through them, and the sliding doors closed, and I could not stop laughing. I had walked through those doors. And I

knew that he was absolutely correct: his life had changed in a very significant way, and he was just on the verge of recognizing that it was changing in ways that he did not anticipate.

I remember reporting for Basic Training in the late 1990s. I had flown from Portland to St. Louis, to the regional airport for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. When I got off the bus, the screaming began immediately. It caught me off guard. I was yelled at because I couldn't move fast enough; I was yelled at because I was moving too fast. And this was just In-Processing. My whole job was to sit in a line and go through the process of getting my paperwork in order, and I couldn't get it done right. "Hurry up. Slow down. Why are you here? Why aren't you there? What do you mean you have already had your wisdom teeth pulled out? You're in the wrong line." Next, they took us outside where our luggage was waiting for us. We ran, as the drill sergeants yelled at us to secure our bags and fall in. I didn't even know what that meant. But fortunately, there was another drill sergeant yelling at us, yelling out our names and putting us in platoons, standing in the sun in rows with other names being called. I was literally standing in place and being yelled at for doing it wrong. Then they needed to make sure that we weren't bringing any contraband in our luggage, anything from drugs to the wrong color underwear. The drill sergeant went through a list of authorized items, holding each one up as an example, and we were to retrieve that item from our bags and place it into our newly issued OD green duffel bag. If we were too slow, we were forced to run all the way around the building. I was a runner back then, and so my first lap, I was the first one back. The entire formation had to do push-ups and sit-ups, because apparently we were supposed to stay together. My second lap, I hung back with the rest of the new recruits, and when we made it back to our stuff, we again had to do push-ups and sit-ups because, again, Private Johnson wasn't running to his fullest potential; he was lollygagging. At one point I was in the front-leaning rest position. And for those of you that don't know, that means I was doing push-ups. I had become aware that life for me had changed in an unexpected way. And a single tear rolled down my cheek as I contemplated: What does this mean? A swift kick to the ribs was followed by a harsh, "Private, are you crying?" And I knew what it meant: I couldn't go back, and I had to go forward. The new recruit, on his way to Basic Training that day, had no idea what was about to hit him. He was on the verge of that moment when he was going to ask: What does this mean? And life is full of these moments. You might find yourself in one right now, a moment when things change for good and bad, when we find ourselves forever changed. Sometimes we can anticipate them: high school graduations, college graduations, the beginning of new careers, marriage, kids, retirement. Sometimes we don't anticipate them: the loss of a parent, the loss of a child, the loss of a job, the loss of an income, the loss of a home, the surprise of divorce paperwork, kids (yes, I put that in both columns!) But even when we anticipate these moments, they somehow leave us changed forever in ways that we could not anticipate. And we are left with the question: What does this mean? What does this mean?

In our passage this morning, the disciples found themselves in that moment. The Holy Spirit was poured out on God's people. What did it mean then? And what does it mean now? For forty days, following His death and resurrection, Jesus had been appearing to the disciples. In that time He interpreted to them all the scriptures, beginning with Moses

and the prophets, teaching them that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer. He told them to not be afraid. He said that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him and that they, the disciples, were to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that He had commanded them. He said, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." He promised them that they would cast out demons, speak in new tongues, pick up serpents with their hands (yeah, Robert, that one's for you!), safely drink deadly poison. And when they laid their hands on the sick, the sick would be healed. He reminded them again of His death, burial, and resurrection, saying, "You are witnesses of all these things. And behold, I am sending you the promise of My Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Then they watched as Jesus was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

What does this mean? Something had changed. Something significant in the lives of the disciples had changed. Something significant to all of creation had changed. They stood at the door of that change. They were committed, and yet the door had not yet slid closed behind them. And when those doors slid closed, something happened that they did not anticipate. Suddenly, there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues, as of fire, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance. What does this mean? Some argued that these people were drunk. And I love Peter's beginning here. Do you know Peter is not known as a renowned theologian? In fact, Peter says, "Nope, it's only the third hour of the day." Only a blue-collar worker would know when it was the appropriate time of day to start drinking. (And you know who I'm talking about. If it's not you, your family has one of them.) Peter starts with the obvious. He starts where a blue-collar fisherman would start: "No one drinks at this hour." And I can relate to this Peter. It's the same Peter who had to ask Jesus to explain the parables. It's the same Peter who, when told that Christ would die, took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. "This shall never happen to you," he says to Jesus, and Jesus responded, "Get behind me, Satan." It's the same Peter who boasted he would forgive his brother as many as seven times. How magnanimous of you, Peter! And Jesus responded, "No, seventy times seven." It's the same Peter who balked at Jesus, saying, "You shall never wash my feet." The same Peter who promised, before Jesus' betrayal, "I will never fall away, even if I must die with you," only then to deny Him three times. The same Peter who fell asleep, when asked by Jesus to stand watch for Him at the garden. I can even relate to the Peter who drew his sword on the night that Jesus was arrested and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. Almost every misstep that Peter made in his walk with Jesus, I have made in my walk with Jesus

And I think sometimes we get wrapped up in the idea that Pentecost is about tongues of fire, and Pentecost is about rushing wind, and Pentecost is about speaking in tongues. And we forget that the power of Pentecost is what happens with Peter next. Peter goes theological. He quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel: "'In the last days it shall be,' God declares, 'that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.'" At the time of Christ, the

Second Age was expected to arrive by means of some form of divine intervention, as God would break into human history in a unique way. It was believed, because of Joel's prophecy, that in the last days God would introduce a new phase in His dealing with humankind, and bring about a radical change in the manner in which He works in this world. Men and women would prophesy, not just the prophets. Young and old would see visions and have dreams. Even their servants would receive God's Spirit and prophesy. There would be wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below. What Pentecost means is that God Himself would reside with and in His people, through the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." This was one of my favorite passages, not because of the tongues of fire, not because of the rushing wind, but because of what happens in the life of Peter. That Peter is masquerading as a great theologian is proof that God's Spirit is now at work in and through him, so that it would come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord should be saved. Peter and the disciples, on the day of Pentecost, became the first fruits and first examples that this new age had begun: the age between the pouring out of God's Spirit and the judgment that will come at His second return. And we find ourselves existing in that age today. Christianity is rooted in four great events: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. Christmas marks the personal entrance of God through His Son into human life. Good Friday marks the work of revelation, reconciliation, and redemption effected in the self-giving of Jesus in obedience to His Father. Easter marks the victory of God through Jesus Christ over the power of sin and death. And Pentecost marks the empowerment of human life in Christ with the same redeeming energy which was at work in Christ Jesus. And Peter is the proof. We marvel at the mighty rushing wind, and the thought of flaming tongues of fire, and the idea that they could speak languages that they did not know. But I think we miss the reality that the Spirit has been poured into the disciples in such a way that they would be able to continue the work of Christ. What does Pentecost mean?

We just celebrated my nephew's high school graduation, and he is a neat kid, an avid shooter. I remember for Christmas he got a plastic shotgun, and when you popped it open, it pops the two shells out and then a little stream of smoke rolls out. And they couldn't get that stream of smoke to roll out, and so his dad worked on it, and worked on it, and worked on it, and finally he got it. And my nephew popped that open, and he must have been this tall. The little plastic shells popped out, and the stream of smoke rolled up, and he said, "Ah, just like a mortar, Dad." And I remember coming back from a hunting trip. Thanksgiving was always hunting, bird hunting, for me and my family, my brothers, my in-laws. And we were passing that on to another generation. And I don't think Ryan was even old enough to carry a shotgun, but he had trudged with us all day long. And at the end of the day, he said to his grandpa, "Papa Stevo, can I help you clean the birds?" And my dad was a biologist and a high school science teacher, and so, when you cleaned the birds with my dad, it was a full-on biology lesson. And I could see my dad start to get excited, and my dad said, "Yeah, Ryan, let's go do that, as soon as I'm finished with the dishes." And Ryan just turned and in excitement he said, "Great! My Sunday School said that Jesus lives in our hearts, and I would like to find Him!"

What does Pentecost mean? It has become almost cliche when we say that Jesus lives within our hearts, but that is what Pentecost means. It means that our lives have been changed forever, in ways that we can't anticipate. The Spirit of the one, true, and holy God has taken up residence in the tabernacle that is you and your life, and He is empowering you right now, regardless of whether you can feel His presence. The Spirit of the one, true, and holy God is at work in this world, calling and convicting the very hearts of those He loves in the midst of their sins. The Spirit of the one, true, and holy God is uniting those two things together. As your pastor, I get to see the Spirit at work amongst you. I am involved in lives over here, and I am involved in lives over here. And it is astonishing, from my perspective, to watch as the Spirit moves in a unified way over here and over here. And it is astonishing to watch as the Spirit moves in your lives in such a way that you are interacting with the people that aren't in this building, in the communities and the lives around you, and to know that the Spirit is working in their lives, and that the Spirit unites those things together so that all who call on the name of the Lord might be saved. It is happening. And Pentecost marks the beginning of that. The way in which God deals with and interacts with His Creation and those He loves changed on the day of Pentecost. It means that you have been empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that it should come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. What would our lives look like if we operated from the assumption that that was true? Let's pray.

Lord, we are not enough. We can't be in all places at one time. And sometimes we even struggle being at the one place that You've called us to be at that time. And Lord, as we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, I just pray that You would impress on our hearts, in a new way, the reality that You have taken up residence in the midst of our lives and our hearts. And Lord, I pray that You would pour Your Spirit into the hearts and lives of anybody hearing my voice right now, in new and wonderful ways, ways that would attract our attention like tongues of fire and rushing winds, ways that are so obvious that it is You that is at work despite our failings. And Lord, I pray that Your Spirit would guide this Body, that we would be able to take Your word to those people who desperately need You, in such a way that they would call on You and be saved. We just pray this on Pentecost Sunday, remembering what Your Spirit did for the disciples on that day. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.