

“What does this mean?”
The Day of Pentecost
John 14:15-21, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Acts 2:1-13
May 31, 2009

Acts 2:1-13. Jesus had promised them this would happen. Before He returned to His Father in heaven, Jesus had told His followers to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you,” Jesus had said. “And *you* will be My witnesses.” What do witnesses do? Witnesses testify. And so they did. In languages they had never learned and didn’t speak. What did they testify about? They spoke of the wonders of God – the miraculous things God had done, the mighty works of God. And they spoke in the languages of the world around them so that the people could understand what they were saying. “What does this mean?” people wondered. Well, some folks thought they had just gotten into the Pentecost wine a little early. But most of them, Luke tells us, were “amazed and perplexed,” and wanted to know: *What does this mean? From this moment on*, the church was never the same again. *Three thousand* people were converted that day after Peter stood up to speak.

“What does this mean? Let me explain it to you,” Peter said. And he proceeded to tell the crowd who Jesus was, and what they had done in putting Him to death on the cross, and what God had done in raising Him from the dead. He explained that this had all been predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures. He explained that what they were seeing was the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. And those who heard his message were ‘cut to the heart’ Luke writes. *“What shall we do?”* they asked. Acts 2:38-41. Can you imagine it? *Three thousand* people acknowledging that they were far from God, turning to Him, receiving forgiveness, being baptized, receiving the Holy Spirit. It was a great revival. It was the birthday of the church. And from this moment on, the church was never the same again.

We’ve added to our number today. Not 3,000, but four. Four who I believe have been drawn here by the Holy Spirit. Four whom I believe God has placed here to accomplish *His* purposes through this congregation. It’s always encouraging to us when new folks want to join with us, friends who embrace our vision to be a church that loves God, connects people, and changes lives, and in doing so reflects Christ to the world. God is doing something new among us in and through these new folks He adds to our community.

But let me tell you what is on my heart today: I look around at our church and I am concerned. To be honest, I am somewhat discouraged. After many, many years of having no young families, no babies, no little kids in our fellowship, now we have so many we need more folks to care for them in the nursery. Yet we can’t get people to commit to working in the nursery a few times a year. *What does this mean? What shall we do?*

Our worship attendance is pretty good for a church our size, but it’s not growing like it was a few years ago. *What does this mean? What shall we do?* Sometimes I look around and I feel like Ezekiel. Dry bones everywhere. I’ve spoken with some of you. Many of you are tired. Life is hard right now, and maybe has been for some time. Some of you check that little “I have a crisis

in my life” box on the Connection Card every week. Some of you are working very hard in ministries that you love, but you see little or no fruit from your labors. Some of you feel as if God is silent, or maybe even has abandoned you. You’re spiritually dry, maybe not quite dead yet, but very, very dry. *What does this mean? What shall we do?*

Please do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to be critical. My purpose today is not to scold you. I’m not complaining. We have a great church. We have many people who love God and are growing, serving, sharing, declaring the wonders of what God has done in their lives. We’ve seen lives change as people come to know and follow Jesus. It is a joy every day for me to be your pastor. Every day. Leading this church is the greatest privilege I’ve ever been given. But I have to tell you the truth: I’m concerned. We’re not growing. We’re stagnant. I believe God wants more *for us* and more *from us*. I believe a church is either growing or it’s dying. I don’t mean just growing numerically, though I do think numbers are important. I mean, after all, there’s a whole book of the Bible called Numbers.

Here’s why I think numbers are important: Numbers represent people. Numbers represent lives, people who need to know Jesus and discover the life-changing power of a relationship with Him. We count the number of people who come to worship, the number of people who have committed to membership, the number of people who attend Bible study and Sunday School, the number of people who are in LIFE Groups. We count people because people matter. People matter to God. So they must also matter to us. I believe God desires that we grow: both deeper and wider. Deeper in discipleship, more committed to following Jesus. Deeper in our commitment to giving of ourselves in every way: our time, our abilities, our money. Deeper in our willingness to sacrifice so that others can know what we know: that God loves them and that Jesus died for them and that they can have a fantastic life full of hope and peace and joy.

And we need to grow wider. Wider in our outreach to people. The church is the only society in the world that exists *primarily* for those who are not members of it. We do not exist for ourselves. We exist for those who aren’t even here yet. We exist now in a culture that believes the church is irrelevant to their lives. They are *very* interested in spiritual things, but they do not see any need for the church. The days of people just waking up on Sunday morning and deciding to go to church are gone. “That ship has sailed,” as my mother-in-law would say. We need to be declaring the wonders of God, telling them what God has done for us, as well as for them, but we need to do it in *their* language, in words and ways that *they* will understand. *What does this mean? What shall we do?*

We need revival. We need to experience Pentecost: A fresh filling of the Holy Spirit – both as individuals and as a church. We need the breath of God breathed into the dry bones of our weary lives. We need new passion for God, and a revived love for the people of our community and their needs. We need revival. A fresh filling of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Who or what is the Holy Spirit? Well, first of all, the Holy Spirit is a person, not an ‘it.’ “He is with you and will be in you,” Jesus said. The Holy Spirit is God’s way of being present. The Holy Spirit is God *in us*. The Holy Spirit is God in person. Jesus was God in person when He walked the earth. God with us. But forty days after the resurrection, Jesus returned to heaven. And ten days after that – the fiftieth day, the day of Pentecost – Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to His

followers as they were gathered for prayer. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit, with God Himself. The Holy Spirit is God in person *and* God *in* persons. He is God's personal presence. He is God's *empowering* presence. Listen: If you are a Christ-follower, the Holy Spirit lives in you. Do you get that??! God Himself lives in you.

So, you may ask, if we have the Spirit – if God Himself lives in us – why do we experience so little power, so few miracles, so little commitment, so little passion for ministry and mission? Why do we give so grudgingly, serve so half-heartedly, love so selectively, worship so indifferently? *What does this mean? What shall we do?*

We need to be filled or re-filled with the Holy Spirit. You see, it's not a once-and-done thing. God does His part – God pours out the Holy Spirit on His people. But, here's the problem: We leak. This is why Paul tells the Ephesian church to “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” The tense of the Greek verb is more explicitly translated this way: “Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.” Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event but something that can and must occur over and over again in a Christ-follower's life. We see many examples of repeated filling with the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. And this filling is something that God does, not something we can accomplish on our own. But there are some steps we can take so that God can and will fill us anew with His Spirit. There are some attitudes we must adopt so that God can breathe new life into the dry bones of our lives.

And the first is this: We must yield our lives fully to God. Yield. This is not something we like to do. We don't like to yield. We like to be yielded *to*. But if we are to be filled, we need to make room for God to fill us. If you really want to be filled up with God, you need to be empty of everything else. When we are filled up with ourselves – our purposes, our comfort, our wants, our feelings – there is not much room for God.

Second, we must learn to depend fully on God for the power to live as Jesus wants us to live. We tend to depend on ourselves, on our determination, our strength. I think I can, I think I can, I think I can. Oh, we're big on self-reliance. That was never how we were intended to live. God wants us to depend fully on *Him*, and His strength, His power.

Third, and maybe most importantly, we need to obey the Lord's commands in our lives. “If you love me, you will obey what I command,” Jesus says. And look what He says next: “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. Receiving the Spirit, being filled up with the Spirit of God, is based upon loving Jesus and loving Jesus means obeying Jesus.

Yield. Trust. Obey. Three little words. Three *big* words. If you feel dry spiritually, if you feel like God is absent, if you feel empty spiritually, ask yourself these questions: What have I refused to yield to God? What part of my life have I refused to allow God to direct?

How have I refused to fully depend on God? In what areas of my life do I depend only on myself, my money, my power, or on the wisdom and guidance of others, the world, the culture?

How do I disobey God? What clear commands of the Scripture do I just choose to ignore, or obey only partially?

Oh, my dear, dear friends, I believe with all my heart that we need a fresh filling of God's Holy Spirit today. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us how to be the people God has created us to be. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to obey God, to live as He commands us. The Holy Spirit will give you the willingness to yield your life to Him and depend on Him for everything.

We also need to ask these questions of ourselves *as a church* if we are to serve Him as He commands, so that we may be filled with the power to do the Kingdom work to which He calls us. We need to ask: How have we failed to yield to God's direction for us as a church? How have we depended on ourselves, our money, what makes sense to us, and not fully relied on God? How have we failed to obey God as a church?

If you are here for the first time today, know this: I do not believe you are here by accident or by coincidence. I believe that God brought you here today by the power of His Holy Spirit, because you needed to hear this message. You, too, need a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit to be all that God created you to be and do all that God has planned for you to do.

Just as it was for those first Christ-followers, let this day of Pentecost be a day of beginnings, a day of new beginnings for us. As the team comes, I invite you – I encourage you – to come before the Lord and ask Him to fill you. Ask Him to empty you of your pride, your self-centeredness, your self-reliance, your disobedience, anger, bitterness, and ambition for anything other than what God desires for you. Ask Him to fill you afresh with Himself: His love, His hope, His peace, His joy, and especially His power. Ask Him to fill you with a fresh commitment to God and the work of God in the world.

Ask Him to fill us as a church with a renewed commitment to do *whatever* He calls us to do, to follow Him *wherever* He directs us to go. I pray that this will be a time of commitment or re-commitment to God for you, personally, and for us corporately, as the people of God. You may come and kneel, alone or with others... When all who wish to come have come, we'll pray that this may not be merely a rally, but truly a revival.

After those first believers were filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the church was never the same again. May it be said of us that after *this* Pentecost, *this church* was never the same again.