**The Abundance of Pentecost May 23 2021. Acts 2:1-17**

There is currently a tourism advertisement on television which features Australia’s fascination with creating “big things” as tourist attractions, you know the Big sheep, the big pineapple, the big prawn ect. In an age that continues to be strongly influenced by the enlightenment movement, and the exalting of rationalism, I wonder how our communities would respond to the concept of “the big God”. Of course we could not have a statue, but the concept obviously permeates Scripture.

The Story of Pentecost is often referred to as the birth of the church.

The Spirit of God has been active in the world prior to Pentecost but the Spirit’s activity has been in particular times and places to specific people for specific purposes. After Pentecost God’s Spirit is available to be active in and through anyone, in any place, all the time, in any circumstance. The Holy Spirit is now available as a permanent daily companion.

This paves the way for Paul to pray for the Ephesian believers that they may be “filled with all the fullness of God”.[[1]](#footnote-1) Human beings filled with all the fullness of God, this is grand language, big language. Is this an arrogant request? It is a request consistent with Jesus prayer for his followers in his farewell discourse.[[2]](#footnote-2) As amazing as it certainly is, it is at the core of the reality that the followers of Jesus entered into after Pentecost. Pentecost inaugurates a new era, an era of personally interacting with the God of abundance. Therefore this gift of the Holy Spirit is portrayed in vast images here and throughout Scripture.

**Images of Abundance**

The first image is of a pervasive noisy encounter. They perceive a noise, “like a mighty, violent rushing wind which filled the house”. This is no gentle breeze, it is untameable, yet though the disciples were described as being amazed, bewildered, astonished and perplexed, they were not frightened by this experience. They did not withdraw or run away, it was powerful but it was also good. This was unchartered territory for the apostles but Jesus had told them to wait for this gift of the Holy Spirit so they waited. In the midst of bewilderment they trusted God. The apostles sat with these strange noises, trusting God.

Secondly they saw an extraordinary image, “tongues of fire” which came and rested on each one of them. Fire is often used as an image relating to purifying and cleansing, however it was also used in Greco Roman times to relate to the physiological experience of prophetic inspiration. This concept resonates with the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus stating *“Were not our hearts burning within us[*[*k*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26014k)*] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”[[3]](#footnote-3)* It also reminded me of Wesley’s words in describing his experience at Aldersgate Street when “his heart was strangely warmed” and he felt assured that he loved God and was accepted by God.

In more recent revivals participants speak of their hearts being set on fire. This conveys both a process of purification and the sense of their passion for God being ignited. The image also brought in the concept of tongues, “tongues of fire, which rested on them all”, hinting from the outset that this experience will be linked with language. Another mystifying experience, another challenge to trust that God was at work regardless of their ability to logically explain these phenomena.

**An experience of abundance**

Then the people experienced being filled with God’s Spirit. Filled, not just blessed or touched by God’s Spirit but filled. From this point onwards, this expression occurs frequently throughout the book of Acts. It is another expression of abundance, they are filled, there is room for no more. John Peterson describes this experience of being filled with Spirit in his translation of Romans 5:5, when he says “we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The process of being filled with God’s Spirit is normally followed by a description of the outcome of being filled, the purpose behind the experience. The outcome is a greater passion and ability to confidently share about Jesus with others. They also recognise how God has blessed them and are prompted to practical, loving generosity towards others.[[5]](#footnote-5) (remember they shared their possessions)

**An Abundance of Scope**

In the context of the grand story of Scripture, the story of Pentecost is a critical story which points to the abundance of scope for the good news of the gospel. The outcome of the disciples being filled with the Spirit was the message of the good news being heard by all those present in their native languages. These language groups surrounded Jerusalem. Pentecost happened during the Jewish feast of Weeks one of three Jewish festivals which required that all Jewish men should attend in person, hence Jews and Proselytes from the diaspora were present in Jerusalem at this time. It was an ideal time to have immediate contact with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Galileans as a group were seen as lacking in linguistic talent, so this adds to the miraculous understanding of this encounter.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The miracle of languages which we see as the outcome of the gift of God’s Spirit at Pentecost points to the centrality of proclamation in the life of the church. The Spirit enables the proclamation. We are not talking here about ecstatic or unintelligible language, here all those present, ALL those present, were expressing the wonders of God in intelligible ways which elicited a response in the recipients.

The mission of the church always involves speech, it involves telling the story of Jesus, telling the story of how God in Christ has interacted with us, why that is important, how that has and does effect our daily lives. Sometimes the church has neglected this vital aspect of its mission. Sometimes the concept that our actions should do the talking has gained popularity. However this may cause some admiration for some people and their actions, but without explanation of the driving force behind how we act and why, people will not encounter Jesus.

At Pentecost we are reminded again that the process of sharing Jesus with others is a process of co-operation with God’s Spirit. Jesus told his followers “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me”.[[7]](#footnote-7) When we embrace this concept it changes our understanding of the work of the church. The church is called to be active in our communities, to communicate by word and deed the amazing good news of Jesus, and what Jesus offers to each of us. However, when we embrace that God is responsible for drawing people to God’s self, that in the words of Dwight Moody, “There is no better evangelist in the world than the Holy Spirit”[[8]](#footnote-8). It frees the church to do its part and to leave the results with God. It frees the church to see that our mission is not to work for God, but to co-operate with God in what God is doing in our world. It frees the church from worrying about its future, to just doing what God prompts and enables them to do, and leaving the future in the hands of the Lord of the Church.

So are we ready for God’s Spirit, the Spirit which is like wind and fire to disturb us, to challenge our perception, to enable us to embrace a bigger understanding of God, to set our hearts on fire?

When we are open and responsive to God our perception of the presence of God’s Spirit with us day by day grows.

When we are open and responsive to God our passion for telling the story of Jesus, telling the story of how God in Christ has interacted with us, why that is important, how that has and does effect our daily lives also grows.

Pentecost Sunday reminds us that this is God’s church, we have the opportunity to co-operate with God in what God is doing in our world. Co-operating with God may not be easy, it may be very challenging and require great perseverance, but the results are in the hands of God.

1. Eph 3:18 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 24:32 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Romans 5:5 The Message [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Acts 2:44-45 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck (Ed) et al, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John 6:44 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dwight L. Moody [↑](#footnote-ref-8)