

**SERMON - PENTECOST SUNDAY – MAY 20, 2018, AT
7.00 A.M.**

ANGLICAN COMMUNITY - UNIVERSITY CHAPEL

What does Pentecost mean?

Text: Acts 2: 11B – 12 (GNB)yet all of us hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things that God has done!”¹² Amazed and confused, they kept asking each other, “What does this mean?”

INTRODUCTION

Many of you might no doubt have watched the nuptials between Prince Harry of England and Meghan Markle of the U.S.A. You might have observed the array of cultures, languages and ethnic groups present. Does it not remind you of Pentecost – the event which saw peoples of different races, cultures and languages coming together to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.

In the book of Acts, the ‘spirit empowers the apostles on Pentecost to speak in other languages and, in so doing, initiates the establishment and missional reach of the church to the wider world.

Early on the day of Pentecost, the transformation begins with wind and fire. Holy Spirit! Empowering God’s people to move from the safety and seclusion of an out-of-the-day prayer room into the scrutiny and vulnerability of the public square.

The question is asked and Peter stood up and explained what happened, the people began to realize that they were witnessing the dawning of an era of new life, new power and new mission.

i. **New Life**

a) (Unity). Although a situation in which many languages are being spoken in one place might appear chaotic, in this scene there was unity among the believers. Soon after Jesus' Ascension, his twelve disciples regrouped when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1: 23-26). Also, the dominant usage of the word "all" in this passage suggests unity (vv. 1, 4, 7, 12). For example, we were told that on the day of Pentecost the believers were "all together in one place" (v.1).

b) Diversity. The "many languages" that believers spoke at Pentecost represent not only linguistic diversity but also ethnic, cultural and geographic diversity. For the first time, specific names that cover vast regions of the world were mentioned (vv. 9-11). This indicates that the gospel was no longer contained merely in Palestine, but should be preached to the whole world.

ii. **New Power**

(a) New power came in the fulfillment of promises made in both the Old and New Testaments. In his speech, Peter quoted the Old Testament Prophet prophet Joel, that God

would pour out his Spirit upon all peoples in order to empower them and their children (v.17). As the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, the believers, both slave and free, would soon experience the power to prophesy and see visions, just as the prophet Joel proclaimed. In the New Testament, on the other hand, John the Baptist also predicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus would baptize the believers “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt. 3:11). Above all is the promise by Jesus himself, “You will receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8a).

- (b) The outpouring of the Holy Spirit enabled the believers to do mighty works of Jesus. When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in other languages “as the Spirit enabled them” (v. 4). This is significant because by this the Holy Spirit symbolically initiated power upon the believers for evangelistic purposes. This power would include driving out demons, healing, prophesying, and performing other miracles.

iii. New Mission

The disciples now had a new mission of carrying the gospel to the rest of the world. Before his Ascension, Jesus told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they had

received the gift of the Holy spirit (Acts 1:4) Then, as Jesus foretold, they would be his witness “in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). At Pentecost, the disciples, we are told, were “speaking about God’s deeds and power” in foreign languages (v. 11b). The list of foreign languages (vv. 9-11) symbolically prefigures the widely evangelistic activities in which the disciples were about to engage. Jerusalem, therefore, was the pivotal point where Christian faith began to spread outside Palestine. It was also where the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, which enabled them to carry out a new evangelistic mission to the world.

What really happened on the day of Pentecost was a biblical prophecy fulfilled and a crucial event that changed the course of the history of mankind. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked the beginning of an era that has enabled all Christians to experience a new life of unity as well as diversity, new power to do mighty works of Jesus, and new mission to bring the gospel to the whole world. The same Spirit continues to be present throughout history in order to empower and sustain all believers.

Coincidentally, today is Aldersgate Sunday in Methodism. It was on Pentecost Sunday, on Aldersgate Street in 1738 when Anglican priest John Wesley attended a group meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, where he received an experience of assurance of his

salvation. This was the pivotal event in Wesley's life that ultimately led to the development of the Methodist movement in Britain and America. Wesley famously said "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death".

His brother, Charles, himself a prolific hymn writer wrote the hymn "Where shall my wondering soul begin" commemorating both his and John's conversion "

John Wesley felt it his duty to evangelize the world and stated that "the world is my parish". In keeping with this theme, verse 4 of Charles' conversion hymn says:

"Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots, and publicans and thieves!
He spreads His arms to embrace you all;
Sinners alone His grace receives:
No need of Him the righteous have;
He came the lost to seek and save".

CONCLUSION

Our story began on Pentecost Day in Jerusalem. It began with the messiness and confusion that happens when wildly diverse people try to do anything together. It began with a commitment

to gather as God's people, even when we feel a bit ambivalent about the goings-on of the gathering. More significantly, our story began with the God of wind and flame.

Individually, we also testify: Jesus is the living Lord; we have seen him and been transformed by the experience. Go therefore and share your experience with others.

Let us pray:

Holy Spirit, empower me to testify to Jesus. I covenant with my eyes to look for God's goodness in people. I covenant with my hands to do good and with my tongue to do no harm. I covenant with my arms to reach lovingly toward those who have been cast aside and with my feet to walk in places where Jesus would walk. Holy Spirit, Holy God, today I make a covenant with you to look for opportunities to testify. Amen.