

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(May 14, 2017)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Disciples, On the GO!

(Studies of the book of Acts)

The Spirit's Toolbox

Study #2

Introduction: Indispensable tools...

You've probably all heard the saying, attributed to Mark Twain, *"If all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail."*¹

Unfortunately, there are problems other than nails, so we need tools besides hammers.

- If you're a carpenter you need a hammer and a saw and a level and a ruler.
- Auto mechanics need electronic diagnostic tools and socket wrenches, screwdrivers and pliers.
- Painters need different sized brushes, scrapers, caulk guns, and drop cloths.

Gardeners and tech wizards, accountants and teachers all need all kinds of tools to get their jobs done. Getting a particular job done right requires particular tools.

So. What tools will the Holy Spirit pull out of His toolbox to equip Jesus' followers to fulfill the Great Commission and to take the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the remotest part of the earth?

Stay tuned. Today, as we turn again to the book of Acts, we'll get a look at the tools He uses to equip them and us to be powerful, loving, faithful witnesses.

Review

Last Sunday, we listened as the resurrected Jesus told His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they were **"baptized with the Holy Spirit."**

He told them that after this baptism, the Holy Spirit would transform them - Peter and John and James and Andrew and the rest - into witnesses.

After this promise, Jesus was lifted up into heaven and the disciples promptly gave themselves to prayer. Luke tells us that they were devoting themselves to **"THE prayer"** - praying for the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. This morning, we get to watch the answer to their prayer.

Before we see that spectacular breakthrough, though, the apostles had to stop and fill out the ranks of their team.

Taking care of business...

During the days devoted to prayer, they took off time to select someone to take the place of Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle. Luke walks us through the process they followed that led to the choice.

[1:15] At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, [16] "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. [17] For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry."

¹ The attribution is meaningless. Every clever quote is attributed to Mark Twain. ☺

Taken with the account we have in the Gospels, it's clear that after he betrayed Jesus, Judas was filled with remorse.² He was so torn up with regret that He killed himself, suffering the messy end we read here in Acts.³

With Judas gone, the apostles who were left moved to replace him.⁴ Jesus chose twelve apostles. They were determined to maintain that number.⁵ And Simon Peter made clear what were the two litmus tests for Judas' replacement.

First, whoever was chosen needed to have been with Jesus during His three-year ministry. Second, whoever was chosen needed to have seen Jesus, post-resurrection.

Two good men, Matthias and Joseph, met both criteria. So, they drew lots⁶ (or, as The Message reads, "*they then drew straws*"), with a confidence that God would bless either of the choices.⁷

The lot fell to Matthias, and he brought back the number of apostles to an even dozen.⁸ Shortly after choosing Matthias, the events occurred that are recorded in Acts, chapter 2.

² It has been suggested by some that he had hopes of creating a comfortable nest egg for the time when Jesus set up the Kingdom in Jerusalem. While possible, this is obviously pure speculation. Nor is it likely that he bought the field with the money he was paid to betray Christ. I think it most likely that he purchased it with money he had pilfered from the apostolic treasury over three years of being the treasurer. (John 12:6)

³ **[1:18] ...falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.**

⁴ The verses Peter quotes from Psalms (69:25 and especially 109:8) guided him in his decision to fill Judas' position.

⁵ Although, clearly, they didn't select a new apostle every time one of the original twelve died. Judas' case was different, disqualified as he had been from the apostolate by defection.

⁶ The Jewish method of casting lots consisted of placing stones with names inscribed on them into a jar, and then shaking the jar until one stone came out.

⁷ **[Proverbs 16:33] The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord.**

⁸ Later church tradition tells of Matthias serving as a missionary to Ethiopia.

On the Jewish calendar, there is a festival held fifty days after the feast of Passover. It's called Pentecost.⁹ All of our attention focuses on the main day of the festival of Pentecost, which was roughly fifty days after Jesus' death on the cross.

Disciples - Baptized and Filled by the Holy Spirit! (vv. 1-4)

Every Christ-Follower in One Place (v. 1¹⁰)

[2:1] When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

This place where they had gathered is never identified. Luke goes on to call it a "house" where the disciples were "seated."

Beyond that, we don't know anything about the physical location, except that it was in Jerusalem.¹¹ In that home, a spark ignited that got quite a fire going.

In the morning on the day of Pentecost, three distinct, very unusual things happened that the Holy Spirit used to equip the disciples for witness.

The Sound of a Tornado (v. 2)

[Acts 2:2] And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

⁹ One of the purposes of the feast was to commemorate the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. But, the primary rationale for observing Pentecost was to celebrate the end of the wheat harvest in Palestine in early June. It's also called "The Festival of Weeks" because it was observed a week of weeks after Passover.

¹⁰ There is a long history of seeing, in the rites of Pentecost, symbolism for the inauguration of the church. At Pentecost, the Jews were to make two loaves from the first fruits of the wheat crop. Presumably, the two loaves symbolize the two bodies from which the church was to be formed - Jews and Gentiles.

¹¹ It is possible that the "house" refers to the Temple. Luke's Gospel ends with the comment that the disciples were, **[Luke 24:53] continually in the Temple, praising God.** But it's not likely that they would have been "seated" in the temple. I agree with those who believe that the disciples were in a large house near the Temple.

In Greek, there is one word for wind, breath, and spirit. It is the word *pneuma*. (think “pneumatic tools” - air powered).

The wind is invisible, but it leaves behind very visible effects. A light breeze is refreshing. The breath of a loved one is sweet. A strong gust knocks things over. Wind is unpredictable.

There is no hint here that it got windy in the house. It was just noisy, like a windy day is noisy. And it wasn’t the noise of wind lightly rustling the leaves on a tree. It was the sound of a great, rushing wind.

I’ve never been through a tornado, but those who have say that it’s like being next to a freight train. So, imagine THAT.

This windy noise audibly announced the arrival of the Holy Spirit, a Spirit who is powerful, who is wildly unpredictable, and who leaves a wake in His path.

And the Spirit’s arrival was visible as well as audible. With the sound of the wind roaring in their ears, the one hundred and twenty disciples were visited with the appearance of fire.

Fire-Like Tongues on Each Disciple (v. 3)

[Acts 2:3] And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Notice again. It wasn’t actually fire that rested on their heads. It was “*tongues as of fire.*”

These were non-burning tongues as of fire moving from one disciple to the next. Think of flames spreading from one branch to another in a forest fire.

Fire shows up repeatedly in the Bible, often symbolizing some aspect of God and His ways.

- A flaming sword warned everyone away from the Garden of Eden after Adam’s and Eve’s sin.
- God spoke to Moses through a burning bush.

- Sacrifices were consumed by fire.
- A pillar of fire led the Jews through the wilderness for forty years.
- Fire fell from heaven, destroying rebels in the desert.¹²

So, fire can symbolize God’s judgment, His leadership, His presence. Fire pictures God’s purifying power and the passion He places in the hearts of His people. The Holy Spirit’s arrival by fire on Pentecost symbolizes all of that.

And then, while the sound of the rushing wind roared and flames “*as of fire*” danced from head to head, the Holy Spirit gave each of the first disciples the ability to do what every ESL student longs for, what I long for every time I visit Encuentro, and what I will surely long for in Chile.

They were given the ability to speak languages they had never studied.

Speaking in Languages Never Studied (v. 4)

[Acts 2:4] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

We know that all of the eleven original apostles - and probably Matthias - were Galileans.¹³ While we don’t know for sure, I suspect that most of the one hundred others were also from Galilee. The heart language of all of them would have been Aramaic. And they probably all also spoke Greek, the language of commerce of the day.

Now, these disciples are all speaking in languages they may have never even heard.

Thousands of years earlier, when humanity rebelled against God on the plains of Shinar by building the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), God confused their languages so that they couldn’t communicate.

¹² Numbers 16:35. In Deuteronomy 4:24, God Himself is referred to as “*a consuming fire.*”

¹³ Judas Iscariot had been the only resident of Judea.

This that we are seeing on Pentecost is an *anti*-Babel, reversing that curse. God the Holy Spirit is empowering Jesus' disciple to break down barriers to communication so that they are speaking in the heart languages of foreigners.

But, this is that surprising. God has always been a communicating God.

In the beginning, He spoke a word and the universe was. He was so eager to communicate with His people that He gave the Jews a written Law. You and I have sixty-six books of God's communication. John described Jesus as **[John 1:14] the WORD become flesh.**

And here, on the Day of Pentecost, on the day when the church was birthed, the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus' disciples to communicate, cross-culturally.

Welcome to the age of the Spirit...

From the very beginning, the Holy Spirit had always been active in the world.

In Genesis 1, prior to creation, we read, **[3]...the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.**

In the Old Testament, the Spirit was always active, leading God's people, empowering kings, and inspiring prophets.

But, beginning on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to God's people in ways He never had been before. At Pentecost, the Spirit displayed His power in new and fresh ways.

This three-fold audio-visual arrival of the Holy Spirit WAS the baptism of the Holy Spirit Jesus had promised since the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). IT IS what He had re-promised before His ascension (Acts 1:5).

And this baptism of the Spirit was not just for the enjoyment of the disciples who were in that house. He poured Himself into their lives to bring blessing to the world.

Luke now identifies the world that was there in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

Onlookers - Intrigued by What They Hear and See (vv. 5-13)

Devout Jews in Jerusalem (v. 5)

[2:5] Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.

This is a reference to the Jews who lived permanently in Jerusalem AND to those who were in Jerusalem just to celebrate the Jewish festival.

Centuries earlier, after the city had been sacked by Babylon (586 BC), Jerusalem was mostly emptied out, as the population was taken away into captivity for seventy years.

After the captivity, many Jews returned to Jerusalem from the many nations to which they had been scattered. And many more simply stayed put, in Babylon, or elsewhere.

But even those who lived abroad, at least on occasion, would try to make it back to Jerusalem to celebrate the major Jewish festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Many, many Jews came back for the feasts. Scholars tell us that the population in and around Jerusalem swelled from its normal fifty thousand to hundreds of thousands during the festivals.

And - this is important - many of those who went to Jerusalem during Passover simply stayed the intervening fifty days to observe Pentecost, too. (Meaning that a lot of the Jews present for Pentecost had been there when Jesus was crucified at Passover and during the interim when the city was awash with news of His resurrection.)¹⁴

¹⁴ Let's be sure to note God's concern for the world as evidenced by having the church begin on the day when representatives from every nation were present to hear the message of the Gospel.

This multitude that was in Jerusalem and that was milling around became aware that something was happening in the house where the disciples were.

They first heard the sound of the violent rushing wind and went running to see what was up.

When they arrived, the disciples were no longer sitting. They were no longer inside the house. They were outside and the crowds saw *“tongues as of fire”* resting on the disciples’ heads. Then, they heard the disciples speaking THEIR languages.

Listen to the way Luke draws attention to how this affected the crowds.

Devout - and Bewildered - Jews in Jerusalem! (vv. 6-11)

[6] And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were BEWILDERED because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. [7] They were AMAZED and ASTONISHED...

Now, hear the crowds’ words.

[2:7]...“Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? [9] Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, [11] Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”¹⁵

This list of nations describes people who lived in northern Africa, Asia and Asia Minor, and Europe.

¹⁵ The disciples were not preaching the Gospel, *per se*, but were praising and worshipping God. It is likely, though, that they were singing the praises of Jesus.

The people groups named represent much of what was known of the western world.¹⁶

Different disciples were speaking different languages so that each person present could hear the message of Jesus in his or her own heart language.¹⁷

There were a couple of very different responses from the crowds to the tongues-speaking disciples.

Some Marvel; Some Scoff (vv. 12-13)

Some were genuinely perplexed. They were confused, but curious.

[Acts 2:12] And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

These didn’t know what was happening, but they were willing to reserve judgment until they had all the data they needed to evaluate.

Others were skeptical and cynical.

[Acts 2:13] But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”

There is no monolithic response from the crowd. And that’s just what we would have expected.

¹⁶ Parthia, Media, Elam and Mesopotamia represented the dispersion from the 7th and 8th centuries BC under the Assyrians. “Judea” probably implied all the land once controlled by David and Solomon at the height of the monarchy, including the land toward Egypt and Syria to the north. The presence of Romans may explain the obscure origins of the church in Rome. (Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, but we are not sure who founded the church there.)

¹⁷ Some have understood Pentecost to be a miracle of hearing. But that is not the way we should understand it. No supernatural activity was required to understand the languages. It was a miracle of SPEAKING.)

Some were drawn to the strange happenings and wanted to find out more about it. Some were repulsed by it. Some were hopeful that this was God at work. Some were positive that it wasn't.

So, there is noise like a freight train, flames spreading like wildfire, and a hundred plus disciples speaking in tongues. Onlookers see chaos and are bewildered, perplexed, amazed and astonished.

What is needed is order! And how is order going to be brought about? Somebody's got to bring order, but who's it going to be?

The followers of Jesus know exactly what is going on. It's what they've been praying about for the last week. While they didn't know that everything that was happening would occur, this is obviously the baptism of the Holy Spirit Jesus said was coming.

So, one of the apostles of Jesus needs to take charge. Which one? Well, I'll tell you who it's NOT going to be.

Based on his behavior prior to the death of Jesus, the apostle LEAST likely to step forward and boldly proclaim Christ on the Day of Pentecost is Simon Peter.

During the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, it was always Peter who spoke up - even when he didn't know what to say.¹⁸

But the last time Peter had been asked to identify himself as a Jesus-follower, he very publicly denied three times even knowing the Lord. Peter, the Rock, failed miserably on the night of Jesus' trials.

We don't know which disciple will step up to the mic, but we know it won't be Peter...and it was Peter who spoke. After a stunning failure to speak up, He speaks up.

And we remember that after his failure, Peter had been restored by Jesus.¹⁹

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus brought Peter to repentance. He gave Peter a special commission, **[John 21:17] "Tend My sheep."**

And not only that, but Peter has now been baptized by the Holy Spirit. He is now Jesus' witness and is ready to bear witness.

I take special comfort in watching as Peter - the most chaotic of the apostles - brings order out of the chaos of Pentecost. I rejoice that God used Simon Peter, a man who failed.

This scene shows something that we see over and over again in the Bible. God redeems messes; He restores us when we are messes. He patches up the wounded. He puts the broken back together, and He sends them, restored, back into the battle.

Peter's behavior on the night of Jesus' trials was tragic, but it wasn't the end. His failure wasn't fatal. God put him back in harness and used him again.

And for every Simon Peter here today, to every Jesus follower who has who has failed, here is God's word to you: Step up to the mic and speak. Step up to the need of the hour and serve. Get back in the thick of things.

God wants you on the pointy end of the spear, mixing it up with the forces of evil and loving people in Jesus' Name. He wants you - His witness - to bear witness to Jesus.

On the Day of Pentecost, the unlikely Simon Peter became the "go to" guy. He was the one the others looked to when it was "crunch time," the one who was willing to take the last shot as the clock wound down.

Just look at Peter. He's standing with the other eleven apostles, and with a hundred more Jesus-followers behind him.

He took in the scene, and with the confidence he lacked before a servant girl on a chilly night fifty days earlier, delivered a courageous message to a crowd of thousands.

¹⁸ See Mark 9:5-6 and Peter at the Transfiguration.

¹⁹ See John 21.

Simon Peter's Life-Changing Message (vv. 14ff...)

[2:14] But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. [15] "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day..."

There is a light-heartedness to Peter's denial of being drunk. *"You think we're drunk? Yeah, right - at nine in the morning. Well, not as you suppose are we drunk..."*²⁰

The way he answers the charge of public intoxication is interesting, because he almost allows the thought.

"You're right. We're not quite ourselves this morning. We are being controlled by a foreign substance. But, that substance isn't fresh wine. We are under the control of the Holy Spirit of God!"

And that was just the opening shot. Peter cleared his throat and kept speaking. And next Sunday, my message will seek to explain Peter's message, and we'll see the impressive outcome of His message.

But here at the end, today, I want us to note the tools that the Holy Spirit used on the Day of Pentecost. He brought tools out of His toolbox that would equip the disciples for Jesus' mission. The effect of those tools WAS and IS transformational.

First, note the Spirit's wind.

Conclusion:

- **WIND is invisible, unpredictable power.**

The first sign of the Spirit's presence was the sound of a mighty, rushing wind.

Wind has a very visible effect, but you can't see the wind. You don't know where it comes from and you don't know where it is going - which was exactly Jesus' point when He spoke with the Jewish rabbi, Nicodemus.

Nicodemus had come to Jesus at night with questions about life and God. Jesus answered the questions, but Nicodemus was confused. He didn't know what to make of Jesus' talk about being born again and of the work of the Spirit.

Jesus pointed out, ***[John 3: 8] "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going..."***

And, in speaking of the Spirit, we get that. The movement of the Spirit of God is mysterious and unpredictable. Nobody ordered the Spirit to show up at Pentecost. He arrived in His own sovereign way and at the time of His choosing.

But that wasn't *exactly* Jesus' point. He went on to say, ***"...so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."***

Christians are baptized by the unpredictable Spirit of God. As they follow the leading of the Spirit, they will sometimes chart a path you would never see coming.

Part of your birthright as a believer is that you will confound people by the decisions you make and by the direction of your life.

There's lots of ways that happens. Here's just one way I've seen the Spirit blow people to unexpected places.

Over and over again, I've watched as Christians forgive someone who wronged them. They love the offender. Forgiveness is baffling, even unreasonable.

But the Spirit will blow husbands and wives to forgiveness, and parents and children to forgiveness, friends to forgive friends, and persecuted Christians to forgive tormentors.

²⁰ So Ray Stedman's translation in his commentary.

The thing about wind is that while you can't always see where it's coming from, a hard wind will leave a wake - and you can see where it's been. And the wake left by forgiveness is love and redemption and brokenness and restoration.

Or, the Spirit's wind may lead you to unexpected service or to extraordinary generosity.

You never know where the life of the one born of the Spirit will go. Life is an adventure for the one born of the Spirit. We will see that time after time during our study of Acts - and you'll see that time after time as you walk with Jesus.

Then, there was fire.

- **FIRE is pure passion.**

Those tongues as-of-fire resting on the heads of the disciples was proof of the Spirit's presence. And where the Spirit is, today, where He is followed, and where we submit to Him, there is the fire of passionate obedience. Life transformation. Holiness.

The first disciples watched Jesus walk the razor's edge of purity and love, holiness and compassion.

Today, there is a desperate need for people in whom the Spirit's fire burns to show the beauty of holiness by the way we live, while unconditionally loving everyone around us.

Watch Jesus at the party in Matthew's house. He's surrounded by tax-gatherers and sinners. Listen as He tells these people who are far from God about how God rejoices over lost coins and sheep and people who get found.

Watch Him with the Samaritan woman. Listen to Him tell her about the possibility of finding a living water that satisfies.

That's you. That's me, interacting with the people we know.

Where the Spirit's power reigns, there is an inextinguishable *passion* for God and His ways AND a burning *compassion* for those who are on the way to Jesus.

And, of course, on the Day of Pentecost, there was speaking.

- **WORD is bold communication.**

The Spirit enabled Jesus' first disciples to speak *in* the heart languages of those who were present. (It wasn't the only language they knew or they would have been lost when Peter stepped up to speak.) The Spirit then empowered Peter to speak *to* the hearts of thousands.

I believe that the Spirit of God wants to use you and me, today, to speak to the hearts of people, too, as we tell them the story of Jesus. He wants you to take a bold step off the cliff of safety into the chaos of proclamation.

I know of two people who this past week, stepped out of their comfort zones, and spoke about Jesus to some people they loved. I'll bet there are lots of you who did this. I just know about these two.

What if it was all of us? What if we all took what we know about Jesus, or what we are currently learning about Jesus, and shared it with someone this week?

Just think of the good the Holy Spirit would do in the lives of people we love if we spoke. Imagine the blessing they would receive by learning about our Lord.

So, how about this for a vision of what this week might look like?

Let's all keep our eyes peeled for open doors that would give us the opportunity to lovingly open our mouths to speak to open hearts about Jesus.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God used the tools of **WIND**, **FIRE**, and **WORD**. He is still using **WIND**, **FIRE**, and **WORD** today.