

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Jesus' Faithful Witnesses... **...bearing witness to Jesus' life-changing message** (Studies in the book of Acts)

The Holy Spirit's Toolbox (Acts 1:15--2:15)

Study #2

Introduction: Indispensable tools...

We've all heard, *"If all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail."*¹

The problem with that is that we all face problems other than nails, so we all need more than a hammer. That's true in life, generally, and it's true when it comes to our life with Jesus.

So, just like...
 ...a carpenter needs a hammer AND a saw AND a level.
 ...and auto mechanics need socket wrenches AND screwdrivers AND computerized diagnostic tools.
 ...disciples of Jesus need a variety of tools to become His loving, wise, and bold **"witnesses."**

Thankfully, when God gave the first disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, He gave them three essential tools that equipped them to be His witnesses. And He still gives these tools to us, today, to turn us into His global witness force.

¹ We don't know who first said this, but we might as well attribute it to Mark Twain, as he gets credit, at some point, for every clever quote.

Review

Last Sunday, we heard the resurrected Jesus tell His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they were **"baptized with the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 1:5)

That baptism would transform them into **"witnesses."**

Right after He made that promise, Jesus was lifted up to heaven, and the disciples gave themselves to prayer.

Luke tells us that they were devoting themselves to **"THE prayer"** (Acts 1:14) - a prayer for the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. Today, we'll see the answer to **"THE prayer."**

Before that breakthrough, though, the apostles had to take care of some internal business, since they were now one apostle short.

Taking care of business...replacing Judas (Acts 1:15-26)

[1:15] At this time Peter stood up among the brothers and sisters (a group of about 120 people were there together), and said, [16] "Brothers, 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."

That, taken with the account we have in the Gospels, let's us know that after Judas betrayed Jesus, Judas was filled with regret.

He was so torn up with regret that He killed himself, suffering the messy end we read here in Acts.²

² ***[1:18] ...falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.***

Now, with Judas gone, the remaining apostles moved to replace him.³

Jesus had selected twelve apostles. The remaining eleven were determined to get the number back to twelve.⁴ Simon Peter laid out two litmus tests for Judas' replacement.

Whoever was chosen...
...must have been with Jesus from the start of His three-year ministry.
...must have seen Jesus, post-resurrection.

Two disciples, Matthias and Joseph, met both criteria. So, they drew lots.⁵ The lot fell to Matthias (see Proverbs 16:33),⁶ so Matthias became an apostle in place of Judas.

Not long after this, we arrive at the Day of Pentecost, the week-long festival that the Jews observe seven weeks after Passover.⁷

Disciples - Baptized and Filled by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4)

Every Believer in One Place (2:1)

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

This "*they*" refers to the believers in Jesus.

There were at least 120 of them, and they were all in a house, seated and together, when it happened.

³ The verses Peter quotes from Psalms (69:25 and especially 109:8) guided him in his decision to fill Judas' position.

⁴ They didn't select a new apostle every time one of these twelve died. Judas' case was different, as he had disqualified himself by betrayal. I think that they wanted to keep twelve to stay in alignment with the twelve tribes of Israel.

⁵ 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.

⁶ *[Proverbs 16:33] The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord.*

The Sound of a Tornado (2:2)

[2] And suddenly a noise like a violent, rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house⁸ where they were sitting.

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

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 invisible, powerful, and unpredictable.

The Bible doesn't say 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 experienced a tornado, but people who have say that it sounds like a freight train. Imagine THAT.

This noise announced the arrival of the powerful, wildly unpredictable Spirit of God.

But the Spirit made His arrival visible as well as audible. With the sound of the wind roaring in their ears, the 120 disciples were visited with the appearance of fire.

Fire-Like Tongues on Each Disciple (2:3)

[3] And tongues that looked like fire appeared to them, distributing themselves, and a tongue rested on each one of them.⁹

⁷ The primary reason 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.

⁸ Some (like F.F. Bruce, a fine scholar) think that the "house" where they had gathered was the temple, since Luke's Gospel ends with the comment that the disciples were, *[Luke 24:53] continually in the temple, praising God*. I think it more likely, as do others, that the disciples were in a large house near the temple.

⁹ Scholars are divided as to whether the "*tongues like fire*" had anything to do with the "*speaking in other languages*" tongues that is soon to come. I don't think that they have anything to do with each other (So F.F. Bruce; contra Darrell Bock)

Notice. It wasn't actually fire that rested on their heads. It was ***"tongues that looked like fire."***

These were non-burning tongues LIKE 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 to stay away from the Garden of Eden after Adam's and Eve's sin. (Genesis 3)
- A burning bush spoke to Moses of God's presence. (Exodus 3)
- Sacrifices were consumed by fire. (Leviticus)
- A pillar of fire led the Jews through the wilderness for forty years. (Exodus 13)

So, fire can symbolize God's judgment, God's power, God's leadership, or God's presence.

As I have reflected on this, I am most drawn to say that these ***"tongues that looked like fire"*** were what indicated God's presence in the lives of these believers.

And fire was the image the Spirit chose to indicate His presence because of the two well-known functions of fire. Fire brings heat and fire brings light.

The Spirit's presence in the lives of these first believers in Jesus was marked by heat (zeal for God and passion to love people) and light (shining God's truth, as revealed in the life, works, and words of Jesus).

One of these ***"tongues that looked like fire"*** rested on each of the disciples present. No one was excluded. Each one received the Spirit's baptism.

And then, while the sound of the rushing wind roared and flames ***"like 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.

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

Speaking in Languages Never Studied (2:4)

[4] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out.

All of the eleven original apostles - and probably Matthias - were Galileans.¹⁰ While we don't know for sure, I suspect that most of the one hundred others were also from Galilee.

Their heart language would have been Aramaic. But they probably all spoke Greek, a language most everybody knew in that era.

But, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, these disciples were all speaking in languages they may have never even heard, must less studied.¹¹

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 and would have to scatter, multiply, and fill the earth.

What we're seeing here at Pentecost is a reversal of Babel.

The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus' disciples to break down communication barriers so that they could speak in the heart languages of foreigners.

language. No, the Spirit was at work in the believers, enabling them to communicate clearly with their audience by bridging the language gap.

¹⁰ Judas Iscariot had been the only resident of Judea.

¹¹ Some have suggested that Pentecost represented a miracle of hearing, in that each listener heard the words of the Aramaic-speaking disciples in his or her heart

And it isn't surprising that God would do this at the beginning of a brand new era of His relationship with humanity, the Jesus era. 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. 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, Jesus' disciples communicated to each person present in his or her heart language, courtesy of the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to the age of the Spirit...

The Spirit of God had always been active in the world.

In Genesis, before God created, we read, ***[Genesis 1:2]...the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.***

In the Old Testament, the Spirit led God's people, empowered kings, and inspired prophets.

But, beginning on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on 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 Jesus had promised at the beginning of His ministry.¹² It was exactly what He had re-promised right before His ascension. (Acts 1:5)

The Spirit baptized these believers in Jesus for the benefit of the hearers. He poured Himself into their lives to bring blessing to the world.

And Luke identifies for us who was present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.¹³

Onlookers - Intrigued by What They Heard and Saw (Acts 2:5-13)

Devout Jews in Jerusalem (2:5)

[2:5] Now there were Jews residing 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 Babylonians had destroyed the city and the temple (586 BC), most of the population was taken away into captivity for seventy years.

At the end of the exile, a good many of the families of those captive Jews returned to live in the Holy Land again.

But those who decided to continue to live far away still tried to make it back to Jerusalem to celebrate the three major Jewish festivals every year.¹⁴

And many of those who went to Jerusalem for Passover stayed there through Pentecost.

That means that on this year many of the Jews who were present for Pentecost had been there when Jesus was crucified at Passover AND during the fifty days hearing the reports of Jesus' resurrection.

¹² Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).

¹³ 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 many nations were present to hear the message of the Gospel.

¹⁴ Many Jews came for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Scholars tell us that the Jerusalem population swelled from its normal fifty thousand to hundreds of thousands during the festivals.

This multitude of “**devout men**” 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 loud noise 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 like fire**” resting on the disciples’ heads. Then, they heard the disciples speaking their languages.

Not surprisingly, the crowd that gathered was bewildered.

Devout - and Bewildered - Jews in Jerusalem! (2:6-11)

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

Luke tells us what the crowd was saying.

[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, Medes, and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, [11] Cretans and Arabs - we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty deeds of God.”¹⁵

This list includes people who lived in northern Africa, East Asia, Asia Minor, and Europe. That’s a huge part of the ancient world.¹⁶

Different ones of the 120 disciples were speaking different languages so that each person present could hear the message of Jesus in his or her own heart language.

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

Some were confused, but curious.

A Wide Divide of Responses (2:12-13)

[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 reserving judgment until they had all the data they needed to evaluate.

Others were just skeptical and cynical.

[13] But others were jeering and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”

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

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 couldn’t be.

So, there was noise like a freight train, flame-like tongues spreading like wildfire person-to-person, and disciples speaking in dozens of languages.

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.

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.)

Onlookers were bewildered, perplexed, amazed and astonished. It was chaotic. The need of the hour was order.

Somebody's got to bring order out of the chaos. Who's it going to be?

The followers of Jesus know exactly what is going on. Even though they wouldn't have anticipated exactly this, it was clearly what Jesus told them was going to happen - the baptism of the Holy Spirit - and that was what they had been praying about over the last week.

One of the apostles was going to have to take charge. So which one of them will it be? 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, bring order out of the chaos, and boldly proclaim Christ on the Day of Pentecost was Simon Peter.

During the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, Peter usually had something to say - even when silence would have been golden, even when he didn't know what to say.¹⁷

But the last time Peter had been asked to publicly identify as a Jesus-follower, he very publicly denied three times that he even knew Jesus. 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. Not long after he had suffered a stunning failure to speak up, he spoke up.

How was it that Peter was so bold here? What happened? To know what happened, we have to remember an event between Peter's failure and Pentecost.

There was a day when Jesus put a very broken Simon Peter back together again.¹⁸

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the resurrected Jesus brought Peter to repentance. And at Peter's repentance, Jesus gave Peter a special commission, **[John 21:17] "Tend My sheep."** And then **[John 21:22] "You follow Me!"**

So that happened, and not only that. Peter has been baptized with the Holy Spirit. He is a witness ready to bear witness for Jesus.

I take special comfort in watching Peter - the most chaotic of the apostles - bring order out of the chaos on the Day of Pentecost. I am encouraged to see God use Simon Peter, a man who failed.

This - using a flawed person - is something we see God do throughout history. We find "Simon Peter" stories all over the Bible.

God redeems messy situations and He restores us when we are messes. He puts the broken back together, and He sends us, 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 the great work of living for Jesus and of serving Jesus.

And for every Simon Peter here today, to every Jesus follower who has failed, here is God's word to you: God the Holy Spirit is with you. He has equipped you with everything you need to step up to the need of the hour and serve. So, speak, lead, love, give.

God wants you on the pointy end of the spear, loving the least and the last and the lost in Jesus' Name. He wants you - His witness - to bear witness to Jesus.

On the Day of Pentecost, the unlikeliest among the apostles became the "go to" guy.

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

¹⁷ See Mark 9:5-6 and Peter at the Transfiguration.

¹⁸ See John 21.

He took in the scene, and with the confidence he had lacked in front of a servant girl on a chilly night fifty days earlier, he spoke to a crowd of thousands.

The Rock - Simon Peter's Powerful Witness (Acts 2:14ff...)

[2:14] But Peter, taking his stand with the other eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, know this and pay attention to my words. [15] "For these people are not drunk, as you assume, since 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?"*

But he understood the charge and spoke to it: *"But you do have a point. We're not quite ourselves this morning. But not as you suppose are we drunk. Yes, we are being controlled by a foreign substance. But it isn't fresh wine. We are under the control of the Holy Spirit!"*

That was Peter's opening shot, and he just kept on speaking.

Next Sunday, we'll listen to the message Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and will see the amazing outcome of that message.

But here at the end, we'll note the tools that the Holy Spirit used on the Day of Pentecost to equip the world's first believers in Jesus to be His witnesses.

They are the same tools that are available to us when we who believe in Jesus walk in step with the Spirit.¹⁹

First, note the Spirit's wind.

Conclusion:

- **WIND - the Spirit's leads powerfully and unpredictably**

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.

That was 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 still 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, while we're talking about 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 and He blew where He wanted to blow.

But that wasn't *exactly* Jesus' point to Nicodemus. Jesus said, ***"...so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."***

Christians are baptized by the unpredictable Spirit of God. As a Christian follows the leading of the Spirit, he or she will sometimes chart a path you would never see coming.

Part of your birthright as a believer is that you will sometimes confound people by the decisions you make, by the way you live.

¹⁹ See Galatians 5:25.

For instance, I've watched as a Christian forgives someone who wronged them. That Christian chooses to love the offender. The act of forgiveness is so counter-intuitive and counter-cultural that we're shocked when we see it.

Still, the Holy Spirit will blow His wind to move a husband or a wife to forgive the other, parents and children to forgive, a friend to forgive a friend.

The Spirit will even blow a persecuted Christian to forgive her or his persecutor.

Forgiveness is unexpected - and powerful. And where there is the wind of forgiveness - grace - the wake left behind is often the wake of reconciliation and restoration and transformation.

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

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 - the Spirit's presence manifested as heat (passion for God and for people) and light (truth about Jesus)**

Those fiery-looking tongues resting on the disciples' heads were proof of the Spirit's presence. His presence led them into lives of passion for God and for people and into lives that shined Jesus' light.

The disciples watched Jesus walk the life of passion and light.

Jesus went to a party at the home of Matthew. He's surrounded by tax-gatherers and notorious sinners. Watch Him interact with love and kindness.

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 "**living water**" He offers, free of charge, to the one who simply believes in Him for eternal life.

Where the Spirit's power reigns, there is an inextinguishable *passion* for God and His ways, a burning *compassion* for those who are far from Jesus, and an eagerness to shine Jesus' light onto a dark world.

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

- **WORD - the Spirit's gift of compelling communication**

The Spirit enabled Jesus' first disciples to speak *in* the heart languages of those who were present. 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 each of us to take a bold step off the cliff of safety to bring the beauty of Jesus to the chaos all around us.

What if we all took what we are 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.

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.