

## **“What Does It Do?”**

### **Pentecost Sermon**

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Stone Mountain, Georgia  
May 31, 2009

Last week after our Ascension Sunday service, I went home to Ellijay. I say I went home because that is where my mom and dad live. It is said that home is where our hearts are. The Bible says where our treasure is there will be our heart. Well my parents are a treasure so that is where my heart is, and I went to see them.

During my visit I went down to the basement. I saw some of the machines my dad still owns and reminisced about the days when he had lots of machines. It was neat to have them. Each one had a different function and with the machines one could do almost anything, make almost anything.

My dad had stuff like a drill press, a table saw, jigsaw, sanders, all kinds of tools, and I knew how to work nearly every one of them. WE made birdhouses, rabbit boxes, cut boards for tree houses, and other things as well. We had a blast with his stuff.

But one day he brought home an odd looking contraption and he was so excited about it. I had never seen or heard of it before. He called it a lathe. Now just to look at it, it was not obvious what it might do. Seriously, it had two sides to it and they could be adjusted in our out. What does it do?

Turns out you only need a piece of wood and the tools which look a lot like screw drivers to make some really neat stuff like legs for tables and baseball bats. All you do is put the wood between the two sides and turn on the switch!

Like it or not, we come from a world where value is dependant on what something can produce. The same thinking spills over into how we look at people. Not long into any conversation with someone you just met, what is the question that gets asked? “What do you do?” Several of you have asked me about my social life. I know you are concerned, and what have I told you sort of tongue in cheek? We meet for lunch, they asked me what I do, I tell them minister, and the conversation is pretty much over! Now, if I could say philanthropist or entrepreneur, it might be different, but you see what I am saying.

The same thinking filters down into our faith. We affirm our belief in God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. We are baptized and hopefully enroll in some type of discipleship class so we can have some meaningful Bible Study to learn how to live in Christ. We study and learn the great truths of the Bible. We understand that when we come to Christ we are forgiven, healed, and made new, but what is the prevalent question? I mean, it all sounds so great, but there is still that question either stated or felt, “How does this faith work in my everyday life?” We talk about it, we celebrate it each week in worship, we affirm it through baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but how does it make a difference for me Monday through Saturday?

Now don’t you imagine that the 120 people we read about in Acts 2 might have similar feelings? Think about who these people were. One hundred and twenty followers of Jesus were gathered in somebody’s upstairs room during the days prior to Pentecost, praying and waiting on God to do something. Many of them had staked their lives on the

life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. They believed Him to be Messiah, but those hopes were crushed barely 50 days prior, when Jesus was crucified. But then, resurrection! And then 40 amazing days when the risen Jesus appeared to them on many occasions between Easter and His ascension into heaven. Those must have been incredible experiences. Then suddenly one day, Jesus said, "I'm going away and I want you to wait here until you receive the power of the Holy Spirit." And He left. Taken up in a cloud into heaven. The group *did* follow His instructions. They went back into the city and gathered in a borrowed, upstairs room. And they waited. For 10 days they waited and prayed and talked and waited some more.

Can you imagine what they must have been thinking and feeling? I imagine they thought of what Jesus had taught them, the miracles they had witnessed, the conflicts with the Pharisees. It was all pretty amazing, but don't you think they were wondering, "What now?" Put yourself in their place. "We're sitting here waiting for—something. Where is this going to leave me? I've risked a lot here. Will this faith really work? When it really matters will anything happen?" And with those questions pressing in on them, these disciples of Jesus, 120 of them, waited on the edge of a miracle.

Our scripture lesson for this morning is the account of that miracle, the miracle of Pentecost. As they were praying and waiting together, suddenly there was a violent wind, and tongues of fire, and they were speaking languages they had not learned. What an exhilarating and yet almost frightening moment it must have been, for all of these symbols were signs of the divine presence in their midst.

The wind, a sign of power.

The fire, a sign of purity.

Tongues, for the purpose of proclamation.

On this day called Pentecost, which they would never forget, they had been touched and filled with the very presence and spirit of Christ himself. That's what God wanted to do all along. God has always wanted our relationship to Him to be so much more than a set of rituals we go through or a list of which doctrines we believe. God has always wanted to be in us, to take up residence in our hearts and restore us to His original dream of who we would be.

It is written in the scriptures back in the Old Testament when the people of Israel were on their journey out of Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land. It was a long and difficult journey. The people were grumbling and complaining the whole time. Moses was the leader and he'd just about had it. No matter how God helped them and what God provided for them these ungrateful people were always craving for more. In Numbers 11, God provided manna for them to eat in the desert. But they didn't want manna; they wanted meat. So God said, "Okay, meat it is. In fact I'm going to give you so much meat that in a month's time it's going to come spewing out of your nostrils and you will hate it!" Isn't that a nice picture? And Moses was mad because God was going to give them what they wanted. He said, "God don't you know that for these people it will never be enough?" Moses was ready just to wash his hands of the whole bunch. But that's when he said something that goes to the very heart of what God really wants to do for His people. Moses said to Joshua, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29). What is he wishing for? That faith would go from head to heart. That religion would go from duty to passion. That spirituality would go from one part of life to the very breath of life.

It's what the prophet Jeremiah longed for when he preached the word of the Lord saying, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

It's what the prophet Joel predicted when he said, "And afterward, [God says,] I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Joel 2:28). Peter quotes that passage later in his Pentecost-day sermon, here in Acts 2.

The word for Spirit in the Greek is Paraclete. Now I don't do well with languages, but there are some Greek words that stuck with me and Paraclete is one of them. I am awful with languages. In fact, I admire folks that can learn languages. I truly feel it is a gift and I am so glad there are those who do that well. I am just not one of those!

In Greek society a paraclete was a kind of "advocate" who spoke on behalf of another person before a court of law. The paraclete did not have to be legally trained and may just be a character witness, or assistant to the person on trial, but that provides for us a picture. The word paraclete can carry several meanings.

Comforter, Strengthened, Helper - he who aids and encourages.

Counselor - he who teaches us the things of God.

Advocate - he who pleads our cause before God.

The Holy Spirit is all of these things. The point is, God through the Holy Spirit wants to take up residence in me, live in me, fill me, and empower me—to do what? *To live the life of Jesus in this world.* That is what Pentecost is all about. God never wanted or designed that our relationship with Him would be one of distance or casual acquaintance. He desires intimacy with us, restoring us to a life of freedom, peace, and joy.

But that's not all God wants to do and that's not all this story is about. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit is intensely personal but it is not private. Acts 2, and indeed the whole book, makes it clear that the purpose of the Spirit was to empower the Church for witness.

Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (1:8). The very first thing these Spirit-filled believers did was to hit the city with proclamation. Suddenly in verse 5 of chapter 2, the scene shifts from the upper room to the streets of the city where people from all kinds of different countries were hearing the good news in their own language. The Holy Spirit does come to comfort, and teach, and bring peace. But the very first gift given by the Holy Spirit is the gift of witness. The Holy Spirit gives us the courage and the power to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to our world. The whole story of Pentecost is not a story of how the Spirit comes to ease the life of the believer; it's a story of evangelism.

The church needs to live in the power of proclamation. That is our mission. And if we are not allowing the Holy Spirit to empower us for witness, then nothing else we do as a church will matter anyway. If we fail in our mission as a church, it will not be because of a lack of ministries. We have ministries. It won't be a lack of leadership. We have some of the best leadership I know of. It won't be a lack of finances. It won't be a marketing problem or an image problem. If we fail, it will be a failure to allow the Holy Spirit to move us and empower us as proclaimers of the gospel to our world.

You see the people who sit on the outside looking in are asking the same kind of questions we ask.

From out there it looks nice. It looks impressive. We seem to have a lot of fun together. We do! Our lives seem to be different. They are! From the outside it looks fairly interesting, but what does it do? In other words, what real difference does it make if we are all these things? The only way they will ever know the answer to that question is if *somebody* turns on **the switch**. We must allow the Holy Spirit to do in our lives what He did for these believers in Acts 2.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. There are many examples I could give you, but maybe you can see what I'm getting at with this. Thursday was supposed to be easy. We had to go to the Health Department and get my son his immunizations for college. It is a long and sordid story, so I will cut to the chase.

When we FINALLY found the Health Department of Gwinnett we discovered that the infamous Hepatitis B shot that my daughter did NOT have to have 3 years ago to begin college was backordered. It seems there is a shortage! The nurse person did not know when more would arrive and suggested that I call next week. She didn't think anyone else would have it since they didn't and didn't want to help me find out if there was another place I could go. She would not even complete the forms from the school which clearly stated had to be completed by a health care person!

The pay person I compensated for the two shots we did receive was finally convinced (by me) she could (in fact) give me the names and numbers of other health care facilities who might have the shot we needed. You see we are on a deadline as my son tends to wait until the last minute to get things done, but she too doubted anyone else could possibly have the shot since they did not. After all, they ARE the county seat!

We went to Buford where we waited for 2½ hours to get one shot. The place was swamped with people, but the lady who gave the shot was just as patient and helpful as she could be. She never hurried us and she completed all the forms, gave us an updated copy of his shot record, and even made a notation for the college that the Hepatitis B shot was in process, and she did it all with a smile!!! Now on Monday, June 29 when we go for the second installment of the shot, do you think I'm going to go back to Gwinnett County? NO! I will be driving back to Buford.

That lady spoke my language. She provided for me the customer service I could relate to. She was welcoming, and that is what people are looking for today. We have a wonderful opportunity today. We have a community, a world if you will who is looking for what we have. We only need prepare as the 120 did prior to Pentecost.

The Spirit of God is present and available to fill our heart and empower our lives to make a difference. But it doesn't happen by accident. It happens through the intention of waiting before God with an open and hungry heart. I ask you this morning, have you ever experienced a Pentecost moment in your life? Have you ever invited and asked the divine presence of Christ to fill you—body, mind, soul, and spirit? Is your faith working? Is there power in your life to live like Jesus every day? Perhaps it's time for you to experience a contemporary Pentecost. It doesn't matter how impressive the machinery looks—in your life or in our church—unless you turn on the machine, unless the power is applied, it doesn't really mean much.

Pentecost is still happening. It happens in the lives of ordinary people who give up trying to control everything themselves and who surrender that control to the Lord Jesus. Have you done that? Are you willing to do that now?

We are going to sing an invitation hymn, number 241. I invite you to come this morning if you want to ask for Christ's presence in your life. I will be down at the front to pray with you. Perhaps you have been looking from the outside and you want to come in and participate with some of the greatest group of believers I know, we want you to come. Whatever decision you would make today, would you do it now as we sing together? Let us stand.