

“Is There A Pentecost for Us?”

Acts 2:1 – 21

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How can we make a Pentecost? If Pentecost is pure emotion, nothing but enthusiasm, then Pentecost is something less than we thought. Anyone can pull in a big crowd with enough emotion. A Pentecost of all enthusiasm can give license to every kind of religious experience. There’s an old saying, “When the cat is out of the bag.”

Let’s start with a bit of close-to-home history. A part of western New York, known as the “Burned-over district, defines what happens when enthusiasm breaks out. In the early 19th century, religious revivals and the formation of new religious movements of the Second Great Awakening took place, to such a great extent that spiritual fervor seemed to set the area on fire. The “Burned over” district produced an amazing array of religious movements along with the Second Great Awakening with Charles Finney.

The Mormons. Joseph Smith, Jr. said he was led by the angel Moroni to his source for the Book of Mormon, the Golden Plates, near Palmyra, New York. That’s a 3-hour drive on I-90 from here.

There’s the Millerites. William Miller of Low Hampton, New York predicted the literal second coming of Jesus would be on October 12, 1844. From this movement came the Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York, conducted the first table-rapping séances in the area around 1848, leading to the American movement of Spiritualism.

And we can’t leave out the Shakers. They established their communal farm in an area first known as Niskayuna, then Watervliet, and now the town of Colonie.

The Oneida Society was a large utopian group that established a successful community in central New York, founded in 1848; it disbanded in 1881. It was known for its unique interpretation of group marriage under every woman was the wife of every man and every man was the husband of every woman. This is 90 minutes from here on I-90 West.

This is a colorful religious history. I am tempted to say, "And you think Southerners are crazy."

Is there a Pentecost for small churches? Is there a Pentecost rooted in biblical theology that is more than enthusiasm?

Jesus tells the first disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you." There's a special theological word for "receiving power" – anointing. The Holy Spirit anoints us, and that anointing carries us beyond the limits of our personality, abilities, and talents. When anointed, we are more than we were before. We are spirit-filled.

Anointing scares mainliners like us. We don't talk like that. In our minds, only religious fanatics talk like that. We wouldn't be caught dead in a group like that. But we are among the crowd of "fanatics" at a New York Giants football game, and if you really want to see crazy, try the New Orleans Superdome when the Saints come marching in. There's a fan-atic dressed as the Pope.

Anointing is the placing of a small quantity of oil on the forehead to symbolize a prayer for God's help in healing. I am still a believer in the words of the Epistle of James: "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord."

The larger meaning of anointing is when God sets someone apart for a particular ministry or to rule over a nation or to preach to a nation. Evidence of anointing: Illumination, courage, wisdom, discernment, faith, guidance, memory, vocation, emotions, intellect, and physical performance are the indicators of anointing. What a list! What dimensions of the anointing do you want in your life? And there's a biblical list of evidence: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Now, that's Pentecost.

The question is one of desire. Do we want it? As a child I loved vanilla ice cream made in a hand-cranked machine. After every bowl, I would say, "Mama I want another bowl." I want us all to have the same desire for the Holy Spirit. "Lord, I want another filling."

After today, I would like for you to have conversations with one another about the anointing and the dimensions of anointing in your lives. I would like for you to pray for one another. I would like for you to have the anointing of the Holy Spirit when you do ministry to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and house the homeless. I want you to have the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the work of our church. We need an anointing service for all of you. I will bring the oil. I can get a bigger supply of holy oil than all the oil of the five wise virgins and I will anoint everyone who desires to be anointed, who needs to know they are doing Holy Spirit work in this community. I don't think people receive enough appreciation for what they do in the name of Jesus, and I believe that an anointing service could fight the fires of Pentecost in this service. Maybe we need a confidence boost in our worth and value as a church.

My claim: There is a Pentecost for small churches. The early church at Antioch was a small church, but Acts tells us this church was "full of the Spirit." "They sought the mind of the Spirit, they laid hands upon those being sent forth for specific ministries, and they excelled in offering encouragement and sharing resources with those who were in need." And it was in Antioch that the disciples were "for the first time called Christians." And Antioch was the first interim pastorate of Paul – he stayed there for a year. And I really need for you to see this one particular result of being filled with the Spirit: "The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea." Let's not ever get so spiritual that we are of no earthly good.

In the Bible there are episodes where God's Spirit would break out and events would occur that were of the nature of Pentecost.

In our biblical memories we know about Moses and the burning bush. Smell the smoke. See the flames. Rescuing people from oppression – A Pentecost prelude.

And there's Elijah. poster prophet for Pentecost. Elijah hearing God in the wind. Elijah bringing fire from heaven. Elijah represents Pentecost straining to be born in our world, responding to the idolatries of the people – a Pentecost prelude.

There's Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones. God commanded the prophet to preach to the dry bones. Preach to the dead. Preach to what has died and needs to live again in the churches. We need a Pentecost because we inhabit a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37). We are presiding over a dying institution.

"Something has died in our country. If it is not recovered, resuscitated, and revitalized, it will bring to an end all that our religious traditions have been built upon," claims Forbes. There has been a death of our ability to experience the sacred; the death of our capacity to have vivid and living and lasting experiences of the power of God. The death of courtesy and good manners. "Why has America become so mean-spirited?" Some years ago, there was a book called *The Ugly American*. It was about how we acted so rudely when we visited other countries. Now, the book could be written about how we act the same way toward one another. We have gone from saying, "I disagree with you," to "You are stupid" in a flash. A character in a short story says, "It ain't right for God's people to act like this." Only a Pentecost can recover for us the spiritual truth of Psalm 133: "How very good and pleasant it is when people live together in unity!"

Now note the connection of unity with anointing. "It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes." There will be no unity in America until there is an anointing by the Holy Spirit because something has died in America and only a Pentecost can save us now.

"All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers." Then the day of Pentecost came. The Holy Spirit, anointing, prayer, and power from on high. We need a burning desire for God's wind to blow across this land and heal our badly divided people. We need a fire from heaven to destroy the idols that are threatening the very existence of our nation. We need churches bringing the Pentecostal power in real, fleshly, human ways. We need a Pentecost right here and right now. Only a Pentecost can save us now.