

Sermon – May 23, 2021  
“In those days I will pour out my Spirit”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Acts 2:1-21

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and enter the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Amen*

Good morning and welcome to Pentecost Sunday. This day marks the end of Eastertide, the season of Easter and our celebration that “Christ is Risen!” Now we come to the beginning of something new, something that was promised by Jesus before he ascended into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. On the church calendar, Jesus’ ascension happened ten days ago. During these ten days, the disciples were in the temple praising God and praying as they awaited the arrival of the power Jesus had promised. Through the ages, the Church has modeled what the disciples did and set aside these ten days as a time to praise God and pray in preparation for fresh anointings of the Holy Spirit. We also are those who are expectantly awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit fresh into our lives on this day of Pentecost. We are dressed with red and other bright colors as an outward reminder of the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine if we can that we have been with the disciples and Jesus’ followers in the temple each day for the last nine days. Today, the tenth day, the first day of the week, we have again gathered with the other followers of Jesus in the temple and have begun to settle in for another day of praise and prayer as we wait with the others for the coming of power from on high. As this morning has begun, questions may have come into our minds, such as “How many days will

we need to wait? What do we pray for today?” We might begin to wonder if today would be the day. And just as we have thought those thoughts, it happens. A sound like that of a mighty rushing wind is heard, tongues of what looks like fire appear on the heads of the others who follow Jesus, and from their looks at us, there is fire on our heads as well. And then it hits us, something changes in our spirit deep within our hearts as the Spirit from Jesus fills us and we begin to praise Jesus and God as never before. All of us join with the others around us and begin to speak about God’s deeds of power. Others in the temple hear the sound and come running to see what is happening, drawn not by our presence in this place, but by the call of the Holy Spirit. Some who come say those speaking are filled with new wine, but others are just amazed at what they are hearing, the mighty deeds of God’s power in their own languages, in their own native tongues. Then Peter stands up and speaks boldly to the crowd which has gathered, explaining to those drawn to this sound what they are witnessing, the pouring out of God’s Spirit upon all flesh as prophesied by Joel. Peter will go on to proclaim to those who will listen who Jesus Christ is and what they have done to him through their sins and what his death has done for them. More than 3000 Jews will believe in Jesus, be baptized, and seek to follow him as their risen Lord on this day. This is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost upon all flesh. The disciples whose hearts were already open to this gift from God are filled with power from on high and begin to testify to the mighty works of God, the greatest of which was Jesus’ death and resurrection that all might have salvation if they will believe. The imagery associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit is hearing the power of the mighty wind, seeing the burning of a refining fire, and hearing God speak to all people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. Can we imagine having people drawn to our service and come through the doors of our church, seeking to know who Jesus Christ is and how they can follow him? Can we imagine having 3000+ people suddenly come to Christ and want to be taught to follow Jesus? Are we ready for the challenges associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit?

What Peter experienced on Pentecost is what many churches seem to expect every Sunday. Many expect people to be drawn to church by the Holy Spirit, the pastor to preach a sermon that the Holy Spirit uses to open the hearts of those drawn into the church to the love of God through Jesus, and those drawn to then accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. These new converts are baptized and then grow into disciples of Jesus Christ. Peter’s sermon in response to the coming of the Holy Spirit is what I call the “First Awakening.” This is the first time that we

have witnessed the Spirit bring a large number of people under conviction and, as a result, they are led to Jesus Christ as their Savior. We might ask if this can happen today. There have been Great Awakenings throughout history, when the people of God cried out in prayer to God on behalf of the lost and there was a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit with the resulting welcoming of many people into the kingdom of God. This is revival! In this area of Virginia around the time of the Revolutionary War, there was a Great Awakening. Francis Asbury was the Methodist bishop who presided over American Methodism as this growth started and continued until there was a Methodist church in every county in America. So yes, another Great Awakening can happen if we the people of God will begin to cry out to God in prayer for the lost. Let us begin to pray for another Great Awakening that our own family members, children, friends, neighbors, and members of our community may come to know Jesus is Lord.

Remember, Jesus now sits at the right hand of God in the place of authority. Jesus, having ascended to heaven, is currently sitting at the right hand of God and is Lord of heaven and earth. And now at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh and the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit. This morning I want to help us understand an aspect of the arrival of the Holy Spirit we might have missed. Let me start by asking us a question, "Where are we sitting?" Now the obvious answer is we are seated in a pew here in this church or in a chair in our homes. Let me introduce to us another answer to that question, found in scripture, that is enabled by the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

For those with your Bibles, turn to Revelation 3:20, and if you don't have your Bible this morning, use one of the pew Bibles. Verse 20 is a familiar verse to many of us. This is Jesus speaking. Hear these words, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." Here we find in the scripture that if we will open the door of our hearts in response to his knocking, Jesus will come in and will eat with us. He will sit down at our table and eat with us. He will be present with us. In the breaking of bread, we, like the travelers to Emmaus, will recognize Jesus and he will be present with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a verse that many understand as our hearts being stirred by the Holy Spirit. We respond to that stirring by believing in Jesus, and, following the beginning of belief, through the Holy Spirit, having fellowship with Jesus or becoming a disciple, one who follows Jesus. This verse is a powerful statement of Jesus' gift of salvation being available to us if we will respond appropriately to his call with an opening of our

heart. We may not be as familiar with the next verse where Jesus speaks these words, “To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Verse 20 invites Jesus to come in the Spirit to be present with us. In verse 21, Jesus invites us to sit with him in heaven at the right hand of God. Did you catch that? Jesus invites us to sit with him in heaven at the place where he is seated with the Father. We have been invited not only to have Jesus present with us through the Spirit, but, through the Spirit, we are invited, enabled, and empowered to sit with Jesus on the Father’s throne. In the mystery of the Holy Spirit, we who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior not only have Jesus’ Spirit within us, we also are seated with Jesus in heaven, at the place of power. Let me ask us again, “Where are we sitting this morning?” We are physically in the pews of our church or in a comfortable chair in our homes. These are temporary seats. They are seats that will pass away. Yet we also have an eternal seat with Jesus in heaven at the right hand of God. Through our relationship with Jesus, we also have authority over all things! This is a great mystery. This means we are not waiting for Jesus to come back in power, but that we are currently seated with him at the right hand of the Father, and if that is where we are, we too can exercise the authority that Jesus has as Lord. I cannot explain the “how” of how we are, through the power of the Holy Spirit, able to be with Jesus in heaven. It is a mystery. I can point out that this is what we find in Revelation 3:21 and I take the word of God as truth. The point is that if we understand we have a forever place with Jesus at God’s right hand, we should have no fear to be with Jesus in his mission on earth, and our presence in heaven with Jesus should guide our understanding of ourselves and our interactions here on earth as we follow Jesus.

Let me give you an example that was shared with me by Dr. Stephen A. Seamands, Professor Emeritus of Christian Doctrine at Asbury Theological Seminary, in a class I recently attended that helped me begin to grasp what it means to be seated with Jesus in heaven. Imagine that somewhere in our family there was a wealthy relative who was unknown or forgotten to us and our family, and that person had died and left us an inheritance of \$100 million. Now we don’t know about this inheritance and live all of our life as we have, yet on our deathbed, news arrives of this inheritance. Can we imagine what our life might have been like if we had known about this gift all of our life, had claimed it, and had used this wealth? Would anything be different? All of our life, this gift has been available to us and yet we have never claimed it and had its benefit. How would we feel if we received this news so late in our lives? Our invitation

to sit with Jesus is like this if we do not realize what it means to have such an invitation and to use it in our lives. We have the authority of Jesus Christ and should live like people who have this gift. Imagine if we were all to live as those who are sitting with Jesus on God's throne in heaven every day of our lives. How would we act? How would we live differently? What fear would we have of things on the earth? What boldness would we have to live as Christ commanded us, to be those who love one another with radical, extravagant love? This is where followers of Jesus sit, now and for all eternity. Have we claimed this inheritance? Have we claimed this gift and begun to live as a people with the authority of God? How will we live our lives differently starting today, now that we know where we are seated now and for eternity?

Jesus led the disciples out to Bethany and ascended to heaven before their eyes. Jesus went there so that he could be everywhere in the hearts of believers who are working to bring about the kingdom of God in his authority. The ascension followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh releases Jesus to be everywhere on the earth where his followers are at work with him. We are to work as people who may not understand the mystery of how such a thing is possible, but we are to work as those who, because we are seated with Jesus in heaven at the Father's right hand, are carrying the Gospel, the love of Jesus, to all people, as those who are now seated in heavenly places. The church is the body of Christ in the world, the body that obeys and reigns with Jesus in heaven and on earth. How do we live this out? How do we claim this inheritance? We are to be those who are fearlessly loving others as Christ loves us. We are to be ordinary saints right here right now. We are to exercise this great inheritance through acts of love and by fearlessly sharing the Good News through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ten days ago, Jesus led his followers out of Jerusalem and ascended into heaven. The presence of God left Israel and returned to heaven. On Pentecost, heaven opened and poured out the Holy Spirit on all flesh, and at that moment, the presence of God returned to earth not in one place, but in all of the places where hearts are open and people respond to Jesus' request to come into their temple, their hearts. God's presence returned to earth into the hearts of Jesus' followers in the temple in Jerusalem that was passing away. Those with Jesus' presence in their hearts went forth from that temporary temple to all people. They went forth as those who are seated in heaven forever with Jesus. Now, those who are seated at the right hand of God with Jesus also walk the earth with Jesus and become part of his mission to all people. Jesus went from here (earth) to there (heaven) so that he could be everywhere in the hearts of believers. Jesus who was

once limited in his resurrected body to be present in one place at a time is now present in the hearts of believers everywhere they go. Let us seek to claim our inheritance, to grow our connection to Jesus, and to live as those who are eternally seated at the right hand of God with Jesus and are carrying him to all people as we join Jesus where he is at work in his mission.

*Pray with me: Jesus, we have opened the door of our lives to you and have invited you in. Help us to live as those who have been given a great inheritance not at the end of life, but right here right now. Lord, let us live here in this place with the power and authority of one who is seated with you in heaven. Jesus, open our eyes to see where you are at work in this place and then give us the courage to join you in those places. Amen.*