

August 29, 2010

Rethinking Church: Preaching and Living in the Spirit



Acts 2

*W*hen the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

2. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, filling the entire house where they were sitting.

3. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

4. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

6. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

7. Amazed and astonished, they asked, *Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?*

8. And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

9. *Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,*

10. *Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,*

11. *Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.*

12. All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, *What does this mean?*

13. But others sneered and said, *They are filled with new wine.*

14. But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, *Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.*

15. *Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.*

16. *No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:*

17. *'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*

18. *Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.*

19. *And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.*

20. *The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.*

21. *Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

22. *You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—*

23. *this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.*

24. *But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.*

25. *For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;*

26. *therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope.*

27. *For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption.*

28. *You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'*

29. *Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.*

30. *Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.*

31. *Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'*

32. *This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.*

33. *Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.*

34. *For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,*

35. *until I make your enemies your footstool.'*

36. *Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.*

37. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, *Brothers, what should we do?*

38. Peter said to them, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

39. *For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.*

40. And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, *Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.*

41. So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Acts Sermon Series Study Guide: Rethinking Church – Preaching and Living in the Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen. ~ The Nicene Creed

Peter's sermon looks back over Holy Scripture and reframes the issues facing the community of faith based on the centrality of the resurrection. William Barclay, with clarity and conviction, connects the writings of the prophets and the Psalmist (which Peter uses as the texts for his sermon explaining the meaning of Pentecost); with the day of Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit to the gathered people), Sunday (the weekly remembrance of the resurrection), and Easter Sunday (the yearly remembrance of that first resurrection morning). Barclay explains: *We must remember this - without the Resurrection there would have been no Christian Church at all... After the cross they were bewildered, broken people, with their dreams gone and their lives shattered. It was the Resurrection which changed all that and turned hopeless people into people pulsating with confidence, and cowards into heroes. It is one of the tragedies of the Church that so often the preaching of the Resurrection is confined to Easter time. Every Sunday is the Lord's Day; every Lord's Day should be kept as Resurrection day... A Christian is a person who never forgets that he lives and walks with a Risen Lord.* What is your reaction to Barclay's insights? How would you tie this together and communicate it to someone as a witness to the resurrection? _____

Look back over Acts 2 and the issues raised by this sermon, and see if you can discern the progression through these 4 categories of transition:

R - rethink, reframe: rethink, reframe our understanding of God's call in structure, of God's gift of the church, of God's calling us into a gathered community, of the purpose of God's election - from a call to privilege to an empowerment to mission and witness to the mercy and grace of God for all people.

R - resurrection: death seems to have the last word, defeat often seems a certainty. In the decisive phrase, *But God...*, we learn that God has not finished. From the nothingness of the chaos He creates life. From death he brings forth, in resurrection, new life. Peter in this sermons emphasizes that the resurrection of Christ changes everything. All things become new in resurrection living.

R - repent: Rethinking, reframing doesn't automatically change anything without a response on our part. The promise of resurrection, of life, doesn't automatically change attitudes, perspectives, life styles. Repentance is necessary - a recognition of the need for change, and change begins with me, with you, with us.

R - renewal of life: The people of Easter are invited, through the indwelling power of God in the Holy Spirit, through the presence of the Risen Lord, to live as a changed, hope-filled people - a people of the Easter. Peter's first sermon after the Pentecost experience invited the people of God to live in the power of a resurrection life. They did – and nothing could stand in their way.

Look at each of these aspects in your life, in the life of the Church. How does each of these apply? Where are you being called to rethink your views of church and your place within it? Where in your life is the power of resurrection so vivid and alive that others notice? Where is it absent? Where in your life, where in the Church, is there a need for repentance? Where do you need to grow? What is your response to each of these steps to new life? _____

Joan Chittister writes: *Always remember that there's a difference between light and heat. Most disagreements, unfortunately, descend to heat, to argumentative differences, when only light - only clarity, insight, and openness to the other - can really resolve the issue.* Where in the life of the Church does it feel more like heat than light? Where in the life of the Church and in your own life do you see evidence of the shining through of the light in a dark and broken world? _____

Jesus commanded his disciples to wait on the coming of power of the Holy Spirit and then to go forth and be witnesses to all the world. Witnesses to what? Peter's sermon obviously begins to answer that questions, as he says that we are called to go forth and be witnesses to the power of the resurrection in our lives. How will you witness to the power of the Risen Lord in your life this week? How will others know that power not just from your words but more importantly through your actions, your humility, through your faithfulness to His commands? Listen for where God calls you this week to witness for the Kingdom. _____

Pray this prayer each day this week in your daily meditation:

Come Holy Spirit. Empower me to see the power of your resurrection in my life, in my witness, in my treatment of others. Come Holy Spirit, cut me to heart that I may release those things that stand in your way and renew me in a new and right spirit. Come Holy Spirit, come and guide me in paths of servanthood, mercy and love. Amen.