

# Pentecost & Confirmation Sunday

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 May 2023

Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[ 0 : 00 ] Today's scripture reading is from Acts 2, 1-21, and John 14, verses 15-21, and 25-27.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like a blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard their own language being spoken.

Utterly amazed, they asked, Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hear them in our native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia and Judea, Pontus in Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and parts of Libya near Cyrene?

[ 1 : 30 ] Visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs. We hear them declaring the wonders of gods in our own tongues.

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, What does this mean? Some, however, made fun of them and said they had too much wine.

Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you.

Listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesize. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams.

[ 2 : 29 ] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days. And they will prophesize. I will show wonders in heaven, above the signs on the earth, below blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. Before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord, and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

If you love me, keep my commands, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever. The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

But you know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me because I live.

You also will live. On that day, you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

- [ 3 : 38 ] The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I, too, will love them and show myself to them. All this I have spoken while still with you.
- But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I will leave you with.
- My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid. This is the word of the Lord.
- Thanks be to God. So, it's Pentecost. And for those of you who understand what that means, we are talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit fresh into the world in a new way.
- So, as we think about that, today, our topic is going to be wildfire. Wild fire. Let me ask you a question.
- [ 4 : 39 ] On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning I always play it perfectly safe, and 10 means I'll try anything at all.
- Okay? 1 being perfectly safe. 10 meaning I'll do anything at least once. How much of a risk taker do you consider yourself to be?
- Eight. 1, 8? Okay. See a 5 back there? Okay. Got some folks who are playing it safe in the middle, a 2 way back in the back.
- All right. We're usually all over the place with this. I put myself as probably about a 9 on that scale. You know, I do some dumb stuff. I'll confess that.
- Okay? I did even dumber stuff when I was younger. I mean, for example, I'm a big roller coaster guy. I love to get on those things, do as fast as possible, up and down, upside down, all different kinds of ways.
- [ 5 : 38 ] When I was little, my mom and I used to make pilgrimage to different parks to go ride them. So, I'm still in that place. Like, took the kids to Darien Lake every year when they were smaller, all that sort of thing.
- You know, love a good jet ski, all them, you know. Like I said, I've done some dumb stuff in my life. Okay? And I like to think I do dumb stuff well. Okay?
- Not entirely on the dumb side of the scale. But that of Darien in the rush is a little too much. You know, you got to say yes to some of it. Right? Now, having said all of that, there are people in my life who don't like the fact that I do that much dumb stuff.
- My doctor being one of them. You know, I got older and with some neck issues and blood pressure issues, he's like, you should not be doing that sort of thing. Certainly not as often as you do it.
- But, as I said, that desire to go fast, that desire to feel that feeling, it's kind of hard to say no to that. Now, thing is, no matter where you are on this scale, this desire to have a little fun, to go fast, whatever it is for you, now, the thing is, each of us do that.
- [ 6 : 50 ] It's just a question of what the actual activity becomes. Right? Because even if you called yourself a two on our scale, there's still those things you like to do that are your definition of living on the edge.
- Right? There are those things that still get that little spark in you going a little bit, and you look for that stuff. Now, having said that, let's not forget that our bodies and our brains are wired for safety.
- Like, our brain keeps us from going all the way in on some of that stupid... I mean, it's just instinctive. Your brain tells you this is not a good idea, and sometimes pulls you back from the edge before you've had a chance to think about it too much.

It's okay. We're supposed to do that. The challenge for us as we get into this conversation about the nature of the Holy Spirit is the degree to which we let that desire for comfort and that desire to play it safe keep us from experiencing all that God wants to give us.

Because we have to accept a certain truth about living with our God, and that our God is not comfortable. Our God is not safe.

[ 8 : 07 ] And our God will push us to places that we don't often want to go. And we have to be ready for that.

Now, if you are struggling trying to understand that a little bit, let's check the story that you just heard Richie read. And I just want to give Richie a certain amount of applause today. Because not only did he get to read a long scripture, that scripture has some of the hardest things to pronounce in it, and he took it like a champ.

So we want to just acknowledge that. But I want you to hear these opening verses from Acts. All right, so if you're with me, we're in Acts chapter 2. And we're going to just read the first four verses.

Okay? When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly the sound like a violent... Sorry, I messed that up.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

[ 9 : 16 ] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now, the writer of Acts, Luke, I want you to pay attention to how he describes this movement.

Do you hear how he described the sound? He says the sound like a violent wind. Depending on the translation you have, it might say something like a mighty wind or a rushing wind.

But violent wind? Okay? Okay? The reason why I bring your attention to that is because that is the exact opposite of safe.

That is the exact opposite of comfortable. And so when you think about how the Spirit enters into the world, how the Spirit moves in people, the first description we get is this sound, like a violent wind came blowing through town.

And remember this, is that this didn't just happen in the house. that it was loud enough that it drew a crowd from outside. Because what happens later on in the story is people come rushing to figure out, what was that?

[ 10 : 34 ] Okay? So that's how loud and powerful the Spirit comes into the world. What's the other thing we have as a description of how the Spirit moves? It says tongues of fire.

Fire is one of the most well-used ways of describing the Holy Spirit. It's in the United Methodist logo, that flame you see next to the cross that's meant to represent the Holy Spirit.

And you see that flame separate and it comes on each of us. And you hear descriptions in the church when you hear people talked about being like on fire for God. Right? Now, I don't know about you, but most people don't think of fire as safe.

Right? In fact, when you have fire, most of the time we do a whole lot to make sure that it stays under control. Because we know what will happen if the fire starts to have its own way.

Sit with that for a minute. What starts to happen when the fire has its own way? Okay?

[ 11 : 43 ] Because if you're one of those disciples who wants things to be safe, if you're one of those disciples who wants things to be easy and comfortable, and you don't want to go past a certain level of risk on your scale, then the idea of a God that is a rushing, violent wind, the idea of a God that is a fire, is not exactly the program most people want to sign up for.

Because if you want God to fit into a nice, safe space in your life, then maybe the Holy Spirit's not for you. Because the Holy Spirit, as you heard me already say, isn't safe.

Now, the thing about that is if you want to understand it even more, check the story. Because you've got this group of people who are in the house, who are waiting for this movement of God to come.

So the movement comes, and what does it make them do? This group of people who were not all that excited to go into the street and preach, are now rushing into the street and speaking these languages that they don't, have not known before this morning.

That they are confronting this huge crowd of strangers with the good news of Jesus in these languages. And they are moving forward with boldness.

[ 13 : 14 ] They are moving forward courageously and faithfully, and not worried about what the Romans or the temple is going to do because the Spirit of God has just filled them up to the point where they're not worried about people and those potential consequences anymore.

As I said, not comfortable, not safe. Right? And so that's what happens to the disciples on that morning.

And then Peter stands up, and he recites a vision from the prophet Joel. And I want you all to hear this again. In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

And they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below. Blood and fire and billows of smoke.

[ 14 : 27 ] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. And the coming, before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Blood and fire and billows of smoke. Sound like a two on the scale to you? Because that's how our God works, right?

Now, here's the thing, guys. Is this idea of a God that is this wild, a God that is this out of control, a God that is this beyond our expectations, is actually not bad news.

It's bad news for those of us who want to play it safe, but it's not bad news. The reason why it's not bad news is because in the world in which we live, where so much is chaos, where so much is upside down, where so much is wrong, it's going to take a wild and uncontrollable God to actually bring that stuff back into line.

that God's not afraid of us. We can be afraid of us, but God's not afraid of us. And we often forget that.

[ 15 : 53 ] The good news is that God actually loves us. Because if God didn't love us, imagine what that power might do. But the thing that we need to get, the thing that really needs to sink into each of our souls, is the fact that God does come from this place of love.

And when you remember that, coupled with what we just said about wild and untamable and far from comfort and safe in terms of who God is, is to remember that because God loves you, that when God moves in you, he's not there to blow you up.

He's not there to destroy you. He's there to help you have the life God knows you're capable of living. Think about the disciples again.

If we had followed the story all the way to its conclusion that day, that Peter stands up and delivers this sermon to this crowd that's gathered in the street. Now I want you to put something into perspective here.

This crowd had to be of a pretty considerable size. Because what we know about it is that after Peter is done preaching, 3,000 people come to Jesus.

[ 17 : 15 ] And that's not counting the people who may have heard it all and didn't do that. 3,000 people come to faith.

See, that's what God is trying to do. That's how God is trying to work in our lives. Now, he's not asking everyone to stand up and preach sermons to thousands of people.

But here's what God is asking folks to do. It's to be God's people in the face of a world that's not going to like a lot of what God is about.

To be people who will speak God's truth in times when it's not comfortable. To be people who will do the loving thing and the disciple of Jesus thing when the world says, no, let's do this worldly thing.

That's not comfortable. That's not easy. And that's why it takes something like the power of a Holy Spirit.

[ 18 : 26 ] The power of Almighty God at work in your very soul and in your heart and in your mind to be able to confront those moments and actually go into them with courage and with faith.

See, friends, if we didn't have the Spirit of working us that way, then it would be real easy to just let the world have its way. But God's not about that.

God loves enough and God cares enough to actually move in the world in a way that will make a difference in it. Now, here's the thing I think we need to do if we're going to move past this peace.

Because there's a whole lot of folks who want to keep God in that nice, safe place in their life. Meaning like, okay, I can go to church on Sunday.

That is, I can live with. Okay? But that idea of maybe saying to that co-worker I have who's going through a hard time, you know what?

[ 19 : 31 ] I'm going to put you on the prayer list at my church. And in fact, I'd like to pray for you now. I'm not sure I'm ready for that. Or that idea of saying, well, I don't know if I'm really the right person to go serve these meals to homeless people downtown.

I don't know what I would say. And, you know, quite frankly, the whole idea kind of scares me. Or something like, well, I could join that group.

And, you know, I feel pretty strongly about some of the things that I believe. But they're going to start to poke the bear, if you will. They're going to start to show me some things that might take me out of my comfort zone.

And I'm not so sure I'm ready for that. It takes being willing to risk. It takes being willing to not feel safe all the time.

In order to take steps that God wants us to take. In order to be God's people in the world. This is not for the faint of heart.

[ 20 : 37 ] This is not for folk who want to stay comfortable. But let me leave you with this thought. The challenge for most of us is that our definition of safe is bad.

Because, as I said, we're hardwired to avoid threats. That something shows up that we get scared of and our brain shuts us down. We either run or we go into combat mode.

Or we freeze in place. You know, like a possum play dead. That's not how this works. But see, the thing about being safe from a godly standpoint.

Is you forget what safe is. And what I mean by that is. We've confused safe with comfortable. And a lot of us want to stay comfortable.

Meaning I don't have to do anything that stretches me. I don't have to do anything that pushes me. I don't have to do anything that makes me do something. And I just quite frankly don't want to do. But safe is different.

[ 21 : 41 ] Because safe means that whatever threat is coming, I don't have to fear it because I can handle it. The reason why I say our definition of safe is bad is because if you're really operating from the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you're really coming from a place where you know that God has said this is what I want you to do. If you're coming from a place where you know that God has called you and empowered you and says, you know what, instead of going over there, I want you to go over here today.

If you're going to be safe. If you really believe that God is at work in your life that way, then you are going to be safe. It won't mean that you will be comfortable. It won't mean that it will be easy.

It won't mean it will be predictable. But you will be safe in the sense that God is the one who called you to it. Which means God is going to get you through it.

I want you to hear that again. Very wise people when I was a kid used this phrase all the time and I didn't get it until I was older. My grandmother used to say this.

[ 22 : 47 ] The will of God will never take you where the power of God will not keep you. Hear that again. The will of God will never take you where the power of God will not keep you.

And so if God is the one who said, go there and say this. God's got you, friends. People may not like it.

People may push back on it. People may actually say, you're out of your flipping mind. Okay. But see, the thing is, is those of us who might want to be liked, those of us who might want to be popular, those of us who don't want folks to come at us with sort of hard disagreements are like, I can't do that because we want to be safe.

Yet. Yet. If God is the one protecting you.

If God is the one who said, this is what I have in store. If God is the one who has actually placed a fire in your heart, a fire in your belly, that is actually giving you the peace that comes from being beyond anything the world could possibly deliver.

[ 24 : 17 ] And the only way you get to understand that peace is by the presence of the Holy Spirit in your very soul. If that's what's happening in your life, then friends, remember that the will of God will never take you where the power of God will not keep you.

And so, yes, there may be some friends who might not want you to go to coffee with them anymore. Yes. You may have put yourself out there to help someone who was in trouble and they rejected you.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Some folks who at your office may look at you funny because you gave that guy on the corner some money. But what do you think Jesus feels about that moment?

There's a line in scripture that makes us think, well, who am I trying to make happy? God or people? And if that's who we claim to be, we need to remember that.

You know, remember when Nicodemus came to see Jesus and he was full of those questions because he knew something was happening in his heart. And he's like, I don't know what to do with this. Right?

[ 25 : 37 ] But something's clearly going on with you and I think I want to figure this out. And Jesus talks to him about being born again. And this is what Jesus says to him.

Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit. Sound familiar, guys? No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit.

Flesh gives birth to flesh. But the spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases.

That violent wind we were talking about? The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear it sound. But you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.

So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit. See, we want our lives to have that routine. We want it to be predictable. We want it to be safe.

[ 26 : 42 ] I get that. It's normal. It's understandable. But that's just not how our God operates. And if you want that feeling, then if you're fighting this idea of God that's saying, I've got this great big goal in front of you that you could get to, but you've got to trust me.

Or you're sitting there wondering. It's like, man, I am not feeling this thing that I hear people talking about in church every week. Why are these people walking around so happy in the face of all this crazy?

Why is it that people seem to be so calm and assured when in fact their world seems to be burning down with medical diagnosis and financial problems and all these other sorts of things?

Yet they're able to walk through it with this calm and this peace that doesn't make sense to me. It's because your God is in this little bitty box that you think you can control.

And instead of letting God wild and free burn through your life, you're trying to keep God in this place that you manage. But it doesn't work like that.

[ 27 : 57 ] And if you try and keep God under wraps, don't be surprised that you're not seeing the results. Friends, you've got to let God out of the box.

You've got to let God be wild and free in your life. And you've got to be willing to follow where he leads. Because that's how we experience all that God has to offer.

That's how we get to know these things that God has promised. Not by being afraid to let God be God. But so often that's where we sit.

Yeah, it will feel like one of them roller coasters from time to time. But it's worth it. It is absolutely worth it.

So friends, let God run hot and free and wild in your life. And watch what God will do. Amen? And amen.

[ 28 : 59 ] Almighty and gracious God, we give you thanks for the power of the Spirit at work in each of us. We thank you for the ways in which you have poured yourself into us anew. And the ways in which we will go into this world on fire for you today.

Trusting that however you lead, no matter how unpredictable it is and how unforeseen it is and how scary it is, that you've got us. That your will is good and is perfect.

And even if we don't understand it, even if we don't always see it, and even if we are sometimes afraid of it, let us simply say yes. So that you may send us out into the world on fire for you.

And that those who do not know, those who do not yet understand, will come to see you as reflected in each of us. Amen.

Amen. Indeed, we were made to thrive, not just survive. And when you consider the ways in which the Holy Spirit of work is at work in your life, it will send you to places where you will do more than just survive.

[ 30 : 04 ] If you trust and believe and lean all the way into all that God wants to do in your life. You can look at your bulletin to see some of the ways in which you might live out your faith this week among our church family.

One of the big ones is that we have our Tough Questions, Tough Stuff Bible Study on Tuesday coming this week. And we will continue the conversations that we had started in terms of what's happening in the UMC, as well as some of the other things that are in front of us.

So all that being said, that is Tuesday at 7 p.m. All are welcome to join us. There are also some other things going on, opportunities to donate resources as well as donate time.

So please take advantage of that as the Spirit moves you. Now let's receive our benediction. In the name of God, our Creator and King. And in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior.

And in the name of the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and our Sustainer. May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children. Amen.