

**Introduction:**

- A. Do you think our church here matters? Are we leaving a significant footprint? Will what we do here together matter in a 100 years? I think about that often. Of course, I assume we matter to *you* or you wouldn't be here. And that's good. But are we—together, all of us as a church—are we what God intends for us to be and do?
- B. Pentecost Sunday is a good time to think about that. It is a day for the church to remember our roots, remember what matters most for churches. Turn to Acts 2. In this unique, one-time-only story of the Day of Pentecost we see the timeless essentials of what matters in a church. This passage helps us see whether our church matters.
- C. This story happens 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus—less than two months. Pentecost was the traditional Jewish festivals to celebrate the ingathering of the spring harvest. It was the first national holiday since the Passover and the city was filled again with Jewish pilgrims from near and far. I'm certain that the buzz in the streets was all about Jesus of Nazareth. It had been less than two months since Jesus' "triumphal entry" when people thought he was the long-awaited Messiah, and then came his gory, shocking crucifixion—a stunning train-wreck of an ending to the story. Maybe they would have put it out of their minds, but there had been the surreal darkness at 3 p.m. that afternoon, the earthquake, the stories of graves that had opened and dead saints come back to life. And the story of how the great curtain in the temple had inexplicably torn from top to bottom.

Then came the stories of Jesus' resurrection. For more than a month there were new accounts from all kinds of people said they had seen him, and they certainly acted like they had seen him. They were positively joyful. Exuberant, even. But all the witnesses were known to be his followers. The authorities had said his disciples stole the body, but *why?* And *how*, what with the guards and all? Everyone had heard the stories, but no one knew what it all meant. They had no idea what to make of it. So I am sure the streets were buzzing with talk about Jesus on that Pentecost morning.

Then, *BAM!* [Acts 2:1-14...] What Peter said then explained not only what happened that morning, but what the stories of Jesus death and resurrection meant. And in his sermon, and what followed, we see four things that are still important if our church is to matter.

**I. IF OUR CHURCH IS TO MATTER WE MUST BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (2:1-21)**

Don't misunderstand me! What happened there will not happen here, nor anywhere else, I suspect. That event was a unique announcement from God, like when the angels came to the shepherds at Jesus birth. Or actually, more like when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism and the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son!" Jesus' own ministry began with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him, and now his ministry through his body, the church, would also begin with the coming of the Holy Spirit. But here are the things that must always be true.

- A. The Holy Spirit came that day with three manifestations: the sound of a mighty wind, the appearance of tongues of fire over the believers, and supernatural capacity of those unschooled Galileans to speak the wonders of God in the languages of all those pilgrims from all those different places.

What do you think those things symbolized? There are different views, but it seems pretty obvious to me that the sound of **the wind symbolized God's breath**. You know how in Hebrew and Greek 'breath,' 'wind,' and 'spirit' can all be the same word. I think of this sound of violent wind akin to that moment when God breathed into Adam the breath of life. Now he breathes life into his people—the very breath/Spirit/power of God that raised Jesus from the dead. The **flames of fire are signals of holiness and purity**. Remember the fiery coal put on Isaiah's tongue, or where God says that he is a "consuming fire"? And the **tongues**, which at least in this case were known languages of many different peoples, signal that the good news of God's salvation is available to all people everywhere, and it can be heard from the lips of those who have experienced God's new life and holiness.

- B. Peter began his explanation sermon by quoting the prophet Joel. Notice it begins with the phrase, *“in the last days.”* The last days, or the Day of the Lord, would begin when the Messiah appeared. Every Jew knew that. So Peter is saying, *“Based on the evidence promised in this Scripture, what you are seeing this morning is the beginning of the Messiah’s Day that you have waited for so long. And that is because the Messiah is Jesus.”* Notice from Joel that the primary evidence of the outpouring of God’s Spirit is that his people will see and say the wonders of God. God will reveal a vision of his wonders—the mystery of the gospel—to people and in turn they will proclaim it; they will prophesy. Not just a lone, voice-in-the-wilderness prophet here and there, but all God’s people.
- C. The point for us is this: we as Christ’s church must be filled with the Holy Spirit—personally and together. Sometimes I feel as though I breathe the life, the breath, of God like a man with asthma—gasping for that power and vitality in fits and starts. How about you? And those flames of holiness—too often I am satisfied to substitute niceness, a kind of generally-being-good, that flickers like a dying fire rather than a heart that burns with love for God and passion for righteousness. What if God did give us the ability to speak of his wonders in another language? Some of us seldom use the language we have and we’re surrounded by people who know nothing of God’s wonders in Christ Jesus.
- The believers on Pentecost experienced the out-pouring of God’s Spirit because they prayed for it and waited for it. They did not know what to expect, only that Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit would come. **If our church is to matter, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit**

Now in his sermon Peter changes the subject, and he puts the pieces together for the people wondering about all that they had heard and seen some 50 days earlier when Jesus died and rose again. Here is what we need to know for our church:

## II. IF OUR CHURCH IS TO MATTER WE MUST BE CLEAR ABOUT JESUS (2:22-36)

There is so much here, not the least of which is the fascinating way Paul uses passages from the psalms. But what I want to focus on this morning is the way he emphasizes God’s role in Jesus’ life. There are four distinct actions God has taken:

- A. **V.22... God accredited Jesus through his miracles.** Nonchristians are often comfortable commending Jesus’ teaching, but they discount his miracles. But it was his miracles that gave him his extraordinary credibility. Peter’s point here is that *God* did those miracles through Jesus, **thus Jesus had God’s stamp of approval.** And most of the people knew it. Remember when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night in **John 3**? *He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”* Remember when the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked if he was the Messiah? He told them to look at the miracles he had done and the way God had changed people’s lives. As Peter preached, and people remembered Jesus’ miracles, I’m sure many in the great crowd nodded.
- B. **V.23... God allowed wicked people—including those listening to Peter that day—to crucify Jesus, for God’s purposes.** A lot of people had been ready to recognize Jesus as their Messiah before he was crucified. That’s was proven by the triumphal entry. But the crucifixion nullified everything—destroyed Jesus’ credibility. How could anyone who died that shameful and cursed death on a tree be connected to God? So Peter says, *This was God’s plan all along and even in your sin, you played right into God’s hand.* And there were a lot of people in Jerusalem who knew there was something profoundly significant about Jesus’ death, like the Roman centurion who said after Jesus died, *“Surely, this man was the Son of God.”*
- C. **V.24... God raised Jesus from the dead.** *“Yes,”* Peter is saying, *“what you heard is true. Jesus really did rise from the dead and God did that, too!”* The language he uses, *“freeing him from the agony—the pangs—of death”* is birth language. Any why can he say, *“it was impossible for death to hold him”*? Because God made a promise to David in Ps. 16, which Peter quotes here in vv.25-28 that God’s

Messiah would go to the grave, but not be abandoned there. He would die, but not decay. *“It’s in your own Scriptures,”* Peter is saying!

- D. **V.33-35... God exalted Jesus to the place of his own glory.** This reference from Ps. 110:1 was quoted by Jesus, and is also quoted in 1 Cor 15 and Heb. 1. David foresaw that God (Yahweh, the first “Lord” in the verse) would say to David’s Lord (Adonai)—God speaking to God’s Messiah—that he would be Lord over all. Yahweh would make the Messiah’s enemies his footstool. Paul wrote, *“Every knee will bow and every tongue proclaim that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”*
- E. **V.33b... The outpouring of the Holy Spirit they had seen came because Jesus the Messiah sent him.** This is the day Joel promises. And this brings Peter back to their question, *“What does this mean?”* **Jesus made this happen, through the Holy Spirit whom God has given him as Messiah.** A sense of hopeless alarm began to spread through the crowd as Peter said this.
- F. *“Therefore,”* Peter concludes in **v.36**, *“let all Israel be assured of this”* [i.e., all this evidence should convince every Jew]: *“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* Lord over all his enemies, and the Christ—the Messiah—he had promised to send as their deliverer. And it hit them with the force of a sledge hammer: **they were guilty of crucifying the very man God sent as Lord and Messiah. They were in deep, deep trouble!**

**SUMMARY:** Any church that matters must be as clear about Jesus as Peter was that day. That God Almighty was behind everything that Jesus did—his miracles, his death, his resurrection and his exaltation. These things really happened and they prove that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. And anyone who ignores him is in terrible and mortal danger. There are lots of ways we can talk about these things, but these bottom line truths of the Christian faith must be something every Christian here understands and can explain to someone else. This is our gospel and our mandate. This is what matters!

Well, when Peter put all these pieces together, look what happened in **v.37-41...**

### **III. IF OUR CHURCH IS TO MATTER WE MUST URGE PEOPLE TO BE SAVED (2:37-41)**

- A. **People without Jesus really are in desperate trouble.** They are as guilty and condemned as the people in that crowd before Peter. Chief among their sin is that they have rejected Jesus Christ. Peter doesn’t talk about all the other sins people are guilty of; just this—they rejected Christ! Like Peter, we warn people of how deadly that sin is and plead with them to be saved.
- B. **Salvation always begins with repentance.** Admitting and turning from our sin. People say, *“I believe in God,”* but that counts for little.
- C. **Then, along with repentance, we tell people they must put their faith in Jesus to save them.** They must identify with Jesus; that is the point of baptism. The public act of baptism is how you say that you belong to Jesus, that you trust *“in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.”* The Bible knows nothing of Christians who are not baptized.
- D. **We receive two gifts from Jesus in response: forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.** Soul-deep cleansing and the very life and breath of God, our inward guarantee of a resurrected body and eternal life in heaven.

**SUMMARY:** That’s what any church that matters—what any Christian—tells lost people, in every way we can. If we want to matter to God and to the world around us.

### **Conclusion:**

The church filled with the Spirit of God and focused on the message of Jesus will stand out, will matter, will leave a mark. Like the church described in vv.42-47, we will love God’s word, we will love one another sacrificially and live our lives together, and we will love to praise God. And people will notice.

Let us pray for ourselves and our church right now.