

The Park Road Pulpit  
*Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church*  
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**Pentecost – In 50 Words or Less**  
**Acts 2.1-21**  
**May 23, 2010**  
**Amy Jacks Dean**



Oh don't you wish. Don't you just wish that I was going to cover Pentecost in this sermon in 50 words or less! I'm sorry to disappoint. I know from the moment you read the sermon title you thought this one was going to be short and sweet. Well I hate to let you down, but there are actually 1911 words in this sermon, so I guess the more accurate title would be Pentecost – In 1911 Words or Less, but I digress. This is probably my favorite Sunday of the year. Yes, I like Pentecost better than Christmas and better than Easter. Maybe it's because Hallmark hasn't picked up on it yet and made it a commercialized frenzy that does more to confuse people than to enrich their spiritual experience. When I led CDC Chapel this week and tried to explain the Day of Pentecost to the 4 and 5 year olds, when I mentioned Christmas and Easter they talked more about Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny than they did about Jesus. Though one little girl added, "But Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny aren't the most important things." At least someone has told her the truth. Well, good for her. Yes, there's no large man in a red suit, no candy canes, no chocolate bunnies for Pentecost. Just wind and fire. I do hope the secular world doesn't steal Pentecost from us – for it may be the most important day of our year and the last thing we need is the commercialization and secularization of Pentecost. This day belongs to The Church – and we'd better learn how to celebrate it.

The Day of Pentecost – “the particular day for which the community had been instructed to `wait.’ The word for `Pentecost’ (literally – `fiftieth day’) was used by Diaspora Jews for a day-long harvest festival more commonly known as the `Feast of Weeks’ and scheduled fifty

days following Passover . . . since Pentecost was one of three pilgrimage feasts when the entire household of Israel gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the goodness of God toward the nation, [that may explain how there were so many Jews of so many languages present].” (The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume X, Robert W. Wall, page 53)

“The story of Pentecost day in Jerusalem is, for the church, a kind of ‘classic,’ a story to which the faith community assigns authority and to which it returns again and again as a guide for its life. Here is revealed what the community is by recounting its origin in a powerful work of the Spirit. Sometimes this story has given the church hope; sometimes this story has judged the church and found it wanting . . . More than one interpretation can be offered for what happened in the upper room at Pentecost. No single formulation can do it justice. We are listening to the account of something strange, beyond the bounds of imagination, miraculous, inscrutable, an origin which, as far as Luke is concerned, was the only way one could ‘explain’ the existence of the church. No flat, prosaic explanation can do justice to the truth of how the church came into being and how the once timid disciples found their tongues to proclaim the truth of Christ . . . It is the dawn of the day of Pentecost and the followers of Jesus are gathered to wait and to pray. The new day begins with an eruption of sounds from heaven and of wind. Things are coming loose, breaking open. Can it be the same wind which on the very first morning of all mornings swept across dark waters, the wind of creation? The wind is once again bringing something to life . . . What was first heard is then seen – tongues like fire . . . These ‘tongues’ are obviously various languages of *every nation under heaven*.” (Interpretation, William H. Willimon, pages 29-30)

In your bulletin insert I included some of the posts from a blog that was featured this week for Pentecost sermon preparation. Bloggers were asked, “How is the Holy Spirit at work in

the world today . . . in 100 words or less.” It would have been more clever, in my opinion, to ask these bloggers to complete this assignment in 50 words or less – since it is Pentecost – the 50<sup>th</sup> day celebration. So I gave myself the assignment and what follows is the result of my homework for myself. I encourage you, when you go home today, to complete this assignment for yourself: How is the Holy Spirit at work in the world today . . . in 50 words or less. And how is the Holy Spirit at work in my church today . . . in 50 words or less. And how is the Holy Spirit at work in my family today . . . in 50 words or less. And how is the Holy Spirit at work at work or at school today . . . in 50 words or less. And, finally, how is the Holy Spirit at work in me today . . . in 50 words or less. So if my math is right, that means you have 250 words (or less) to write. It’s a doable assignment, but let me tell you it is no easy task. Here’s my best attempt:

**How is the Holy Spirit at work in the world today . . . in 50 words or less:** In the midst of chaos wherever there is a glimmer of hope; in the midst of destruction wherever there is peace; in the midst of bad news wherever there is Good News – there is the Holy Spirit alive and well. And all of this is possible, even in our world.(50 words exactly) It’s like a cool breeze blowing – the very wind of God at work in a world that often seems more broken than whole.

**How is the Holy Spirit at work in my church today . . . in 50 words or less:** This one was so easy. A couple of weeks ago one of our youth posted this as her facebook status: my favorite thing in the whole world is my church, and things that have anything to do with my church! love you PRBC! (I did it in 43 words – she only took 23) When I read that post, I practically saw the flames of fire leap from my computer screen right into my heart!

**How is the Holy Spirit at work in my family today . . . in 50 words or less:** Sixteen of my family gathered on our patio around one table eating a feast of Bennett’s favorite foods,

celebrating his decision to follow in the Way of Jesus while my 2 year old great-nieces sang Jesus Loves Me and drank their bath water and proclaimed, “Tasty!” (46 words) And yes, a gentle breeze blew across our patio last night fanning the flames of the lit candles on the table.

**How is the Holy Spirit at work in my work today . . .in 50 words or less:** You know one of my greatest joys – our campus alive and well and used. Crisis Assistance giving money to pay rent and utilities. Loaves and Fishes distributing food to the hungry. 100 children being cared for at the CDC. Mecklenburg Ministries bringing different faiths together. All right here. (48 words) Some days when I walk around our campus I am almost blown over by the gust of God’s wind that is stirring this sacred patch of ground.

**How is the Holy Spirit at work in me today . . . in 50 words or less:** When I look at my sons. When I weep with those who weep. When I plant flowers. When I knit and pray and pray and knit. When I laugh – out loud – all by myself – or better yet in the company of others who love to laugh. When I know love. (50 words exactly) And I have known all of that in past 2 weeks, and it is as if my heart has been on fire.

So if you totaled it all up I used 237 of my 250 word limit. Do you know how long that took me to do? About an hour and a half of concentrated effort. It was hard work. I challenge you to try it for yourself. You see, I think that’s basically what those gathered there that Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem so long ago were doing. It was 50 days past Passover. They had gathered in Jerusalem as was their custom. And they were waiting. Watching. Looking. Pondering. Searching for words that would give meaning to their experience of the sacred in their midst. And because they were paying attention, they noticed the wind that has been blowing since the beginning of time. And because they were paying attention, they recognized in each other the

very flame that burns within all of our souls. And they called it Wind and Fire – the very Spirit of God. And because of what happened that day –not because of what God did – for God is always blowing through and setting bushes on fire – but because the people were ready they recognized the Holy Spirit at work and they allowed themselves to be swallowed up and stirred up and completely consumed. And because of those people that day, we sit here this day. And I firmly believe that the wind of God is rushing through here every bit as fiercely as it did that day, if only we could let go of our worries about the wind-blown look. And I firmly believe that this table is but a small representation of the flames of fire that are licking their way into our hearts just waiting for us to speak truth to power and just waiting for us to speak Shalom to chaos and just waiting for us to speak forgiveness and just waiting for us to speak Love – for if these words were our native tongue, it would sound like a foreign language to our broken world.

*“They were all together in one place. God’s Spirit is poured out upon a community of believers. The Holy Spirit is not a ‘personal’ gift from God that each believer privatizes - ‘you can have your Spirit if I can have mine.’”* (The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume X, Robert W. Wall, page 57) “To those in the church today who regard the Spirit as an exotic phenomenon of mainly interior and purely personal significance, the story of the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost offers a rebuke. Luke goes to great pains to insist that this outpouring of the Spirit is anything but interior. Everything is by wind and fire, the loud talk, buzzing confusion, public debate. The Spirit is the power which enables the church to ‘go public’ with its good news, to attract a crowd, and . . . to have something to say worth hearing.” (Interpretation, William H. Willimon, page 33)

It dawned on me this morning, though, that Bennett didn’t need 100 words or 50 words or even 1 word. He simply walked through the water. And maybe it’s just because I’m his Mama, but I felt the wind and I saw the fire because I was paying attention. May it be so for us all today.