

You Are Sent, Vol. 1

Sermon #2 | Acts 2.1-11 – On Being Filled with The Spirit

Mercy, I am really excited to introduce to you our latest addition to the mercy staff team. Jake Greer is joining our team as our Executive Director of Ministries. This is a new role for Mercy Church. One that our elder team has been looking to fill for about a year now. Jake will oversee our growing staff team and provide the administrative support and expertise needed to help us steward our resources well. It's a big deal to me and to our elders that we shepherd the body of Mercy Church. I've been really burdened by that especially as we've grown. And that's why Jake is here. To use the gifts, skills, and experience he has to help the rest of our pastoral team effectively focus their energies on shepherding you, our church, in a way that faithfully honors the Lord.

Jake and his wife Meredith have been members of Mercy for about a year and a half. He's coming from a career in management in the private sector and as we talked and prayed and talked and prayed, it became clear God has been preparing him for this role for a long time. and our elders are unanimous in our endorsement and support of him. But this is a big move to join a church staff. So I hope you will do everything in your power to give Jake and Meredith and their family your support.

Last weekend was really a beautiful weekend for us as a church. We started a new series of sermons where we are walking through the book of Acts and we talked about how the church was never meant to just be confined to a building. It was meant to be this living movement of people that

practices the love of Christ towards one another, and offers the hope of Christ to the rest of the world.

And ya'll I was really impacted by our worship gathering because it really embodied a **movement mindset**. We had a baptism, we commissioned new members who are joining this movement, we sent out a team short term mission team to South Asia, and we heard from a member who is there on the field long term. It was a beautiful picture of the living movement we hope to be as a church.

And on top of all of that, I know for many of you it was your first time with us at Mercy. 33 people last weekend. If you that's you and you consider yourself new or even if you've been around but have been kind of a spectator just trying to figure out if this is the church for you, I want to invite you to join us for Starting Point today after our service. You'll hear more about it at the end of service but here's the gist: God created you, loves you, has a purpose for you...and we believe the best way to figure all that out is alongside some other Christians in a local church. And as long as you are here, you may as well figure out if Mercy is that church. So we set up this little reception called Starting Point that is a low-risk first step to see what Mercy is all about. Hope you'll join us.

My hope today is a little bit of a different one than normal because I'm preaching a passage that honestly is a little different than normal. I always pray that you come away from a Sunday with Mercy Church worshipping God. I don't want you to be impressed or unimpressed by the people on stage. You don't rate church like you rate a restaurant on Yelp. Well, if you do...I'm not here to collect your stars. My prayer isn't

that you just LIKE it, it's always that the people here fade into the background a little and the eyes of your heart are drawn up to see God and worship him rightly through what you see and hear. **This week I've been praying that you would begin to sense the presence of God today.** Through singing and preaching and communion, that wouldn't just learn about God but you would sense his love, his greatness, his power, and all the hope that comes with his presence.

I had the chance to go to a pretty war torn central Asian country a few years ago and we went a day's hike up into the foothills of the hindu kush mountain range. And then all of the sudden we bust out into the Bamian Valley. Mostly untouched, no humans around. 3 pristine blue lakes and GIANT mountains unlike anything I'd personally seen before. I've never been to the Grand Canyon or Sistine chapel (a guy can hope one day). But it was that moment where the second you see it you don't just see it. You feel it. Does that make sense? You feel AWE, wonder, you feel quiet. I felt similarly when I was invited to hear a sitting president give a speech years ago. Man the packed room, the secret service everywhere...the power of this individual was so immense you FELT his presence when he entered the room. Get what I'm saying?

Anyway, the reason I'm praying that you sense the presence of God today is because of the passage we are in. Acts 2 records the event known in church history as Pentecost. Last week we read Jesus' words where he said to his followers...go wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. He's coming in a few days. And you will be *filled* with this spirit. Once he comes you

will receive power for the mission I have for you: to be witnesses of the gospel message to the far ends of the earth. Well, it's been a few days. And today in this scene in Pentecost...the filling of the Holy Spirit into the church. So, today as we walk through this scene we are going to see the beginning of a pattern that is repeated and taught throughout scripture about what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

This is big because the Holy Spirit is God with us. So as we look at what it means to be filled with the Spirit my prayer is you will experience the joy and awe and wonder that comes from sensing the presence of God with you. Acts 2.1-11. And I'm just going to pause at a few points to show you what it means to be filled with the holy spirit. Both you individually and for us as a church.

1 When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place.

We are actually going to come back to verse 1 to end the day. It's so rich. What you do need to know is the festival of Pentecost required Jews from across the world to gather in Jerusalem.

2 Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying.

Suddenly...The Holy Spirit is not bound to anyone's timing. He's sovereign and He is free and you cannot conjure him up. You can be open to him and desire him as all believers should. He promises to lead and guide us and dwell in us. but God's Holy Spirit moves on his terms.

I want to make sure you understand this was not a cool breeze that fluttered the hair of the disciples like a shampoo commercial. No this was a SOUND. And the SOUND was like that of a tornado. Have you ever been close enough to a tornado to hear it? We had one in high school. We all ran into the hallway and did our duck and cover routine. And it ripped one of the A/C units off the roof and threw it in the far corner of the parking lot. And when it was on us you had to SHOUT to hear one another. The FORCE of just its SOUND made you feel so small and helpless. That's the sound we are talking about. GOD has shown up. They are all experiencing this together. This isn't an internal psychological experience. It's something that is coming from outside of them. Coming from heaven.

To be filled with the Spirit you must surrender to and receive God's presence in your life. It's to see God for who he is and be humbled by it. That's the surrender part. That there is NO way you compare to God. But, unlike a tornado...God's presence is actually life giving instead of life taking. His power is TERRIFYING...but also good. This is the uniqueness of Christianity. How we don't compromise an inch on the exaltation of the HOLY MIGHTINESS OF GOD. And then we have the audacity to say we need **that presence** with us. And so we surrender to him and receive him. To become a Christian, you admit you need this outside presence to come in and fill your life. here's why this is so big:

And when you think about it for just a moment it directly conflicts with the cultural message of our day. You hear celebrity after celebrity tell you that YES there are problems

out there around you, but you have everything you need inside of you to conquer those problems. You just have to tap into that power you possess. And you can make yourself better and the world better. Christianity says the exact opposite. The problem with you...is you. And the deeper you look into yourself, the darker and uglier you will see your sin to be.

Christianity says you need something from OUTSIDE of yourself to save you from YOURSELF. And to give you power to change into who God created you to be. The savior is Jesus and the power to change is given to you in the the Holy Spirit. Which means you need to allow God in. Culture says you know what is best for you. Live your truth. Christianity says no, God knows what's best for you so you are going to have to live his truth.

Culture says you need to find your inner strength. Christianity says you need to admit your inner weakness. Because when you are weak, then you are ready to receive God's power. Which is why Paul says your weakness is your greatest strength. Because you are ready to receive God's strength. So the question for this first point of what it means to be filled with the Spirit...**Have you surrendered to and received the presence of God?**

Last thing I'll say on this: **Your Prayer Life will reveal your answer to this question.** Because that is where you acknowledge your need for outside help. I've never seen a vibrant spirit-filled person with a dead prayer life. And the same is true for a vibrant spirit-filled church. To that end we

are beginning a season of fasting and prayer as a part of this series. One Wednesday a month we will be fasting all day and then meeting up at our Providence Rd campus to pray together for about an hour. To confess to God and seek his power.

3 They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them.

This is a remarkable moment for this group. Because when God's presence shows up throughout the Old Testament...it almost always shows up in fire.

- When God first appeared to Moses...he appeared in a burning bush
- When God then led Israel out of Egypt, he led them as a pillar of FIRE
- When God came down onto Mt. Sinai to give them the law, he came in a fire
- When God came to fill the temple that Solomon made he came in fire

Guys Fire is hot. Like fatally hot. You can't touch it or it will consume you. They knew Sudden fire that appears out of nowhere like this indicated the presence of God. They knew it should consume them. And yet here they are looking at one another and seeing the fire of God on one another's heads. And they aren't dying. Can you IMAGINE the mix of emotions and thoughts in this moment? Where the knowledge of God's presence transforms into the experience of God's presence.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4.7-18

The disciples are now the burning bush. The presence of God is on them but isn't consuming them. Instead of killing them, they experience his presence and come alive!!

The Holy Spirit is dwelling in Believers and that is a source of GREAT, GREAT POWER. A Power the new testament letters constantly refer to.

- Paul tells the Corinthians who are feeling afflicted and beat down: that though their bodies are jars of clay, they possess in those JARS an incredible treasure of great value. **Far more powerful than what is happening TO us is WHO is residing IN US.**¹
- When he is warning them against sexual sin...his reasoning is...Don't you know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is In you? You can't treat your body so casually because of the holiness of the one who is IN you. Who was given to you at great cost.²

The job of the Spirit is to come into your life and tell you about his love for you, his delight in you, and his claim on you that you are his child. John 16 Jesus says the Spirit will take the things you know in your head make them real in your heart.

The Holy Spirit strengthens your belief that God's presence is greater than _____.

Now let me immediately say something: There are going to be times in your life where you have to BELIEVE your way through painful times. Your experience with God might be cold or difficult. Maybe all you feel is anger or sadness. The scriptures make plenty of room for that. My wife is going

² 1 Corinthians 6.18-20

through that as she grieves the loss of her dad. Many of you know the pain of loss. And she's choosing to believe that God's faithfulness is greater than her circumstances. And God's presence with her will sustain her. That isn't easy right now. But we believe the holy spirit is GOD with her. And that presence is greater than her pain.

4 Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.

Ok this is awesome. I love this sacred moment in Scripture and in Church History. God the Holy Spirit has arrived.

Since I'm saying filled with the Spirit a lot today. Let me try and clarify right now. There are two meanings in scripture: one is at the moment of conversion where the holy spirit comes into your life and you are filled, sealed, with his presence. This is what Jesus refers to when he says you are baptized in the Spirit. You are immersed into his presence.

That happens the instant you place your faith in Christ. In fact, when we baptize you with water another aspect of that symbolism is we are representing how you've been baptized into the Holy Spirit who now is with you. Forever guiding you the rest of your life.

But the second meaning of filling of the spirit...there are these moments where the Spirit who you already are filled with...comes on you in a unique way to illuminate Christ to you and sometimes to others. Christians will say the Spirit manifests himself to you. And that's a good thing we welcome just like this early church did. We aren't talking about an out of body experience. We are talking about the Spirit giving a

fresh filling in the heart in such a way that knowledge of God translates into experience of God.

Thomas Goodwin – 17th century puritan pastor. Father & son walking on the street. Father sweeps the son up in his arms and hugs him and kisses him. Goodwin says does the son become MORE of a son when that happens? No. But in his father's arms he was experiencing his sonship. When the Holy Spirit comes down on you, you experience your father's arms. How does that happen? How do you know its happening? It's When the gospel carries more weight than your present struggles. the gospel and all its promises and say "if this is all true...He loves me, he holds me, he secures me forever, he walks with me, he promises eternal life, he is all powerful...why would I worry about _____?" That's the spirit speaking to you!

Ok what about this word Tongues? What does this mean here? Good news: Luke is actually about to tell us in the next verses.

5 Now there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, devout people from every nation under heaven. 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 They were astounded and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 How is it that each of us can hear them in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and

converts), 11 Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own tongues.”

So you see what is happening? This is a miracle! These tongues were actually other human languages. This is a different thing than 1 Corinthians tongues where Paul is talking about a spiritual language that is given by the Spirit as a part of that fresh filling in experiencing God. This is different. There were people there from all over the world remember? And you had listeners saying “I understand that! You are telling me about the gospel in my own language” even though you don’t know my language. It is a miracle.

What were they saying? They were talking about the “Magnificent acts of God.” Megalia - It’s a word that means the miraculous acts of God in salvation. In the OT this was great works of salvation for Israel. Here, it is the gospel. The Spirit empowers you to speak joyfully about the gospel.

Now here is what I think is incredible about this: This is the first worship service of the first day of the first church. Now one of the realities most churches face when it launches is that it will have only one language it worships in. When Mercy Church launched, we launched in English. No surprise there. But that reality of being an English speaking church automatically made ministry to non-English speakers a much more difficult possibility. Here’s what I love...on the first day of

his church, God refused to choose one language or culture to minister in!

The first time the gospel was preached it was preached in ALL LANGUAGES SIMULTANEOUSLY!!! Do you realize HOW significant this is?

“If the apostles had only spoken in Greek or Aramaic or Hebrew the signal would have been set that the gospel was primarily for one people group. BUT instead the Lord on Pentecost shows the world through a deliberate miracle that no language and no culture has privilege over the other in the kingdom of God. Isn’t that beautiful? the gospel is for every tongue, tribe, people, and nation! The first worship service is multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-racial in the extreme!”³

A Church filled with the Spirit proclaims a gospel for all people

2 REALLY cool observations. First biblical and then cultural. The biblical observation is that what is happening here is a complete reversal of the tower of Babel. Genesis 11 – People are trying to build “build a name for themselves”

4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth.” -- Genesis 11:4

³ Keller, Tim. Taken from a small group curriculum written in 1996-1997 called *Evangelism: Studies in the Book Of Acts*. This particular quote comes from page 4 of session 2.

Because they were trying to build their own name, God cursed them, miraculously confused their language all at once so they all spoke different languages. Then scattered them.

NOW the Spirit of God has come again. But this time he has gathered all of his people back together AND is allowing them, through another miracle, to experience UNITY through HEARING ONE MESSAGE even though they speak different languages. And the purpose is to exalt one name... not their name...it's the name of Jesus! Jesus redeems what sin destroyed. And now people who once couldn't understand each other can understand each other again. Because the curse of Babel was reversed on the cross. So our role here as a church...our role is to LIVE OUT the reversal of the curse of sin that has set up barriers between our cultures. How curses can be healed through the lordship of Christ.

Now there is also a HUGE cultural implication too: Tim Keller on this passage... quoted from Lamin Sanneh, an African professor at Yale Divinity:

Sanneh said that Muslims (& he used to be one) will quickly tell you that Qur'an cannot be translated. English? That is just the English explanation of the Qur'an. Muslims will tell you The actual words of God are Arabic.

- As far as Muslims are concerned, God speaks Arabic. If you want to hear God's word, you need to learn Arabic. And when Islam comes in, it slowly suppresses and replaces the culture with its own Arabic culture.
- But Christianity isn't this way. It's radically different. The first time the gospel was preached it was preached in all

languages at once... showing that no culture is the right one. It enters every culture and when you get the bible in your language, that is GOD's word.

- And thus, when the gospel goes into a place, it doesn't erase the culture, it redeems it. It doesn't suppress it, but lifts it up and exalts it.
- Sanneh said that no other religion really does that. Other religions tend to erase the culture. But Christianity doesn't do that. It does take you out of your culture a little. Just enough to see the false hopes your culture is built on and how the gospel redeems it. But if you are Chinese and you become a Christian...you are a Chinese Christian, African Christian, etc. It allows for incredible diversity!

And, he said, as a professor at Yale, I see it's not just other religions that do that; secularism does it too.

"For all of their talk of diversity, the diversity they want is only in superficial things like dress and food. "look at your clothes, wow we are diverse." But as far as worldview, you're expected to think and approach the world like them. Harvard and Yale are really only interested in producing only different-colored European liberals...

FOR EXAMPLE, he said, the average African sees a very spiritual side to the world. But when the African goes to Harvard, but is told that the world has no spirits and miracles. Harvard guts their African-ness.

Christianity helps Africans become renewed Africans (he said), not remade Europeans... Africans see the world as a spiritually

alive world. Christianity accepts the reality of the spirit world, but removes the tendency in African cultures toward superstition and violence because it shows Christ as the victor over all evil spirits—through love and service, not violence and manipulation. Christianity renews you as an African but also leaves you as an African. Secularism will take away your core culture.”⁴

What does this mean? It must mean that we need to be sure not to think that my version of Christianity in my culture is the *real* Christianity. That 40 minute sermons that walk through the text...this is real Christianity. In Pentecost God refused to let the gospel go out in one culture.

One of the implications is that we here at Mercy Church have to continue to work hard to be as culturally diverse as we can be. Because that’s what the Spirit of God wants. And the churches in the world that lift up the Holy Spirit and seek the moving of the Holy Spirit...are the most culturally diverse institutions in the world.

I want to close going back to verse 1. **1 When the day of Pentecost had arrived...**

Why does God send the Holy Spirit down on Pentecost? This is incredibly rich symbolism. This day was 50 days after Passover. When God gathered the people to Mount Sinai. In both cases there was wind and fire. There was the overwhelming presence of God. It came down and frightened

God’s people. And there was a message given from God to people.

But on Mount Sinai that message was a message of law. And the people feared it. They couldn’t even touch the mountain. They had to send Moses to go up into the fiery presence of God on their behalf. And beg God for forgiveness. That became Moses’ role. Standing in the gap between sinful people and the presence of God. They couldn’t bear to even hear his voice.

But when the Spirit comes at Pentecost...it comes after Jesus has proclaimed and carried out the message of grace. The veil of the temple that separated people from the purifying fire of God was torn. Top to bottom. And because the blood of Jesus washes our sin away, we can actually be in the presence of God.

The filling of the Spirit leads you to celebrate the greater mediator - Jesus Christ.

And now Pentecost...Jews from all over the world...are being brought back into the presence of God. Pentecost was also known as the feast of Harvest. Where they celebrated God’s faithfulness by giving their first fruits to him. And the result of Pentecost we’ll see next week: Peter preaches a sermon and 3,000 give their lives to Christ. This is God’s POWER poured out for the Purpose of bringing people to himself.

⁴ My paraphrase of Keller.

A People Filled with the spirit are ready to surrender and receive God's presence. They are brought to AWE and wonder by God's presence. They preach a message for all people. That celebrates king Jesus. Is this you?

Maybe you are waiting still. You don't feel the Spirit with you. Remember the son walking with his dad. You are filled, secure in his love. And keep asking the Spirit to give you that fresh filling of his spirit as you walk in peaceful assurance of what Christ has done for you. Let's pray.