

Acts 2:1-16 [NIV]

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel..."

We're in Acts once again, Chapter Two today, if you'd care to follow along. Acts, Chapter 2.

This idea of a "Turning Point": a major change brought about in our life by some catalytic event. We all know what that is; we've all experienced them to some degree.

Some are expected, like a marriage or having a baby or a job change, things like that. Others are *unexpected*, like a marriage or having a baby or a job change – or, the occasional global pandemic.

We all know how life can bring a catalytic event that takes us around a corner and in a new direction.

This whole COVID-19 thing has brought significant turning points to life. For most of us, for good or bad, it has changed the way we see time, health, friends, school, work, medicine and government. For good or bad, it has changed life priorities and rhythms, how we work, how we plan, how we think.

It really is remarkable how much one tiny microscopic virus has changed us and our world, and that fact alone should cause us to think about who is really in control here, since it's obvious we aren't – not nearly as much as we like to believe anyway.

If you get past the frustration and inconvenience and tragedy of it, the whole COVID-19 event really does evoke big spiritual issues, and the great news is that where people are willing to listen along those lines, God is moving and speaking today in ways that are drawing people to Himself.

In a world like ours, both beautiful and broken and full of catalytic events, we have the opportunity to work with God in our unsaved neighbors' lives as they ask

questions like, "How should we think about things like this? Whom can we really trust? Who will be our guide, so that the turning points in life will always take us toward the good and the right?"

The answer always is about Jesus – Jesus is the answer to life's catalytic events – which was the conclusion the apostle Peter reached long before he needed to, in this instance we read about in Acts 2.

You don't get a more catalytic, life-changing, world-changing, turning-point experience than you get in Acts, Chapter Two: God pouring out His Spirit upon His people.

Now, it's not like God's Spirit was never present in the world before. Scripture reports how He came upon people – judges, warriors, prophets and leaders – from time to time through the ages.

But this was different. Fourteen hundred years in the making, this was. Long-prophesied – long-expected.

But at its arrival, the very people who were supposed to be preparing the world for it and welcoming it were themselves so unprepared for it, they tried to explain it as drunkenness.

The presence of the Spirit began causing the Jewish people who were gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world to begin speaking to one another in each other's languages – amazingly all these people could suddenly understand each other, which then caused them to wonder, "What on earth is happening here?"

Well, thankfully Peter recognized this moment for what it was and, by the help of the Spirit, is able to explain it correctly. He preaches a sermon to them, a long one, about how this is all the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. It's all about this Jesus, and Acts 2:41 tells us that because of what Peter says, about 3,000 people became followers of Jesus that morning.

So, there were lots of turning points there on that day. But particularly, this whole transformation of Peter from an inarticulate, fearful, compulsive person to one who's enabled to do what he does here: surely this was the biggest turning point of Peter's life.

And he arrived there solely by listening to Jesus.

Peter hung out with Jesus for three years and he listened when Jesus said stuff like, "*I'm going to send someone to you. Wait for the gift that is coming. It's actually a good thing that I'm going away. You'll do greater things after I'm gone.*" (Jn. 14:12, 16:7; Acts 1:4)

Simply because Peter listened to Jesus, even if he didn't fully understand what Jesus was saying at the moment, he listened, he heard, and he kept Jesus' words in mind.

Peter lived with this posture of belief and openness and obedience.

And so, in this moment, even with all his faults and weaknesses, Peter was able to recognize and receive God's Holy Spirit for who He is, and in turn, Peter

became able to powerfully and accurately explain the great mystery of what was going on here.

And beyond that, by the power of God's Spirit in his life, Peter was able to heal diseases, to discern right and wrong, to interpret prophecies, to lead the church, to face persecution with confidence and courage, and to effectively point others—anyone who would listen—to Jesus.

Just as Jesus said that those who would follow Him would do even greater things than He did: Peter proves it.

But notice too that, along with this increase in power, there was also, in Peter, an increase in humility.

You see, there was another turning point in Peter's life, subsequent to Pentecost. We're told about it in Acts 10: how Peter is brought to the realization that he was being a hypocrite and even a racist in his view of the gentiles where Jesus was concerned.

The Holy Spirit confronted Peter from within, in conjunction with the Apostle Paul, who confronted him from without, about the fact that Gentiles (non-Jews) were just as valuable to God as Jews were.

So, you see, it was not a once-and-done deal between Peter and God's Spirit. Peter's training in holiness goes on. The turning points in Peter's life keep coming.

For the rest of his life God dealt with Peter's weaknesses and blind spots. But because Peter lived with this posture of belief, openness, and obedience to Jesus, he was able to receive the Holy Spirit into his life. And then he kept on receiving the ways the Spirit changed him and purified him—made him into the person God designed him to be.

Lots of little turning points, all made possible by Pentecost: the arrival of the God's Holy Spirit on earth. Embracing Him—that was the ultimate turning point in Peter's life, he would never again be the same.

And the great thing is, that very same turning point is possible for any of us.

God's Spirit is in our world. He's here among us today, and as we will take Peter's posture of belief, openness and obedience, He will enter into us, and He will work in us and through us and do amazing things, things we never thought we could or would do, things that bring glory to Jesus.

And He will change us. He will point out those places in us that are not like Christ, and, as we will keep turning toward Jesus, He will make us the persons He created us to be in the first place.

We may not take exactly the same trajectory as Peter, because we're not Peter. God had unique things for Peter to do.

But God also has unique things for you to do and for me to do—things that we'll only be capable of if we'll agree to be shaped and directed and empowered by His Spirit.

You notice that Peter began his sermon by answering the question his audience was asking: "What's going on here, and how do we respond to it?"

Filled with the Spirit, Peter knew how to answer that, and wound up leading thousands of people to Jesus.

The thing is, that very same question is being asked in our world today. "What's going on here? What's happening in our world with the immorality, the injustice, the violence, the economy, the climate, the upheavals of nature? What's happening in our world with the virus and all the anger and angst and ungodly responses?"

People all over are asking those questions, and you see, by the help and power of the Spirit, we can respond.

What's happening is the result of the consequences of thousands of years of sinful choices.

What's happening is that God's mercy is long, but not infinite.

What's happening is that God is inviting us to choose: His way and life, or the way of the world and death.

What's happening is that God has offered us His Son, Jesus, to be our Savior and Lord, and He's offered us His Spirit as our empowerer and guide.

God's inviting us to Himself.

Peter closed his sermon there in Acts 2:38 with that same invitation—he says to the crowd, "***Come and repent and be baptized—in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***"

To Peter, the answer to the question of the day is in living the life of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And that's still the answer to the questions of our day.

It's how to make sense of what's happening in our world.

It's how to live a life of peace and purpose.

Three thousand people chose to accept Peter's answer that day.

God is waiting to see how we'll choose today.

If you haven't already, will you turn from your sin and receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord?

And, if you haven't already, will you, today, receive God's Holy Spirit as your empowerer and guide through life?

These are the turning points that God wants to bring to as many people as possible right here today.

Would you bow your heads with me?

This is the prayer for salvation – if you want Jesus in your life as your Savior and your Lord, then pray this with me in your heart: "Lord Jesus, I know I have sinned against you. Even still, I believe that you died to pay for my sin—you died in my place, and so here and now, I place my trust in you. I want to follow You. Forgive me and save me and help me turn from my sin and live a life wholly devoted to You."

If you pray this and mean this with your heart, then your sins are forgiven.

And then if you've received Jesus, but you want to be led and empowered by God's Holy Spirit, from your heart, pray along with me, "Jesus, I have tried to follow you and do as you say, but I realize I've done that only in my own strength. Would you, here and now, please fill me with Your Holy Spirit? Take away from me anything inside me that's unlike you. Guide me and strengthen me

so that I might live the life you made me to live – a life that brings glory to God. A life of purpose and peace.”

We’re going to seal these commitments today by this act of obedience – by celebrating the Lord’s Supper as Jesus told us to do, until He comes again.

Service of Holy Communion

Closing Songs: *Heavenly Spirit, Gentle Spirit*
God, Our Father, We Adore Thee

Benediction:

May the Lord Jesus truly be the Lord of every soul here today, and may the Holy Spirit of God be the guide for, and power behind, all of us, that we might live lives of peace and purpose and that we might be Christ’s faithful presence in our world – and so we might have the very answers of God to give for the confusion of the days. And, may we then bring Jesus glory upon glory upon glory.

-Amen