

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: "From fearful disciples to bold witnesses"
 Scripture: Acts 2:1-21
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 May 23, 2026
 Opener: Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
 Choruses: Living Hope, Speak O Lord
 After sermon: O breath of life, come sweeping through us 384,
 Closer: O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing 374

Think about the last casual conversation you had.
 Maybe it was while standing in line at the pharmacy,
 walking your dog through the neighbourhood,
 or waiting for the bus.

Canadians are actually pretty good at small talk.
 We can talk about the weather for twenty minutes.
 We can talk about hockey—
 even when the Leafs break our hearts again.
 Somehow complete strangers
 will tell you about their knee surgery in the grocery store.

So what did you talk about?

PAUSE

There is one topic many Canadians instinctively avoid.

My guess is that your conversation
 probably didn't include what you learned at church,
 what struck you in Scripture that morning,
 or how God has been at work in your life.

Why is that?
 Because our culture quietly teaches us that faith is private.
 Personal. Fine for church. Fine for home.
 But not something to bring into ordinary public conversation.

Sometimes people worry:
 "If I speak openly about my faith,
 will people think I'm strange? Will I lose credibility?
 Will relationships become awkward?"
 And so we keep our faith quiet
 Sharing it with people we know we can trust.

The first disciples understood that fear deeply.
 For them, following Jesus
 was not merely socially awkward—
 it could be dangerous.

They had watched Jesus arrested and executed.
 Even after the resurrection, many of Jesus' appearances
 happen while the disciples are gathered nervously indoors.

And yet, only weeks later, something remarkable has changed.
 The fearful disciples are no longer hiding behind locked doors.
 Now they are standing in the streets speaking publicly about Jesus.

What changed?
 Pentecost happened.

Today's lesson—the story of Pentecost—
 shows us how fearful disciples became bold witnesses.

PAUSE

To understand why Pentecost mattered so much,
 we need to remember what the disciples were like beforehand.

During Jesus' ministry, the disciples relied on his physical presence.
 When religious leaders challenged them, Jesus was there.
 When unclean spirits manifested, Jesus was there.
 When crowds of sick and broken people gathered, Jesus was there.

And so maybe it was no surprise
 That when he was arrested they scattered
 And when he was crucified they hid
 Behind locked doors.
 They had always had him near.

After the resurrection Jesus showed up among them,
 Proving to them that he had conquered death.
 Before he returned to the Father
 he gave them this command:

“Do not leave Jerusalem,
 but wait for the gift my Father promised,
 which you have heard me speak about.
 For John baptized with water,
 in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

[And] you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
 and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
 and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” [Acts 1:4-5, 8]

It is hard to imagine this frightened group
 becoming witnesses to the ends of the earth
 once Jesus is no longer among them.
 But this is where the arrival of the Holy Spirit is so important.

Throughout Israel's history,
 God's Spirit empowered particular people for particular tasks.
 Joseph received wisdom.
 Moses received leadership.
 Samson received strength.
 David received kingly anointing.
 The prophets received God's word.
 The Spirit was active throughout Scripture—
 but often selectively and temporarily.
 As one commentator puts it,
 the Spirit was “the exotic possession of a prophetic few.” [Willimon Acts 35]

Now Jesus' disciples are told to wait
 For the coming of this Spirit.
 And this is what was read to us today:
 The story of Pentecost.

Pentecost was one of the great pilgrimage festivals
 when Jews from across the world
 gathered in Jerusalem.

It came fifty days after Passover
 and was associated both with harvest
 and with God's giving the law to Moses at Sinai.

On this day we are told that the disciples
 are together in one place
 When a 'violent wind' fills the home
 And that suddenly what seemed to be tongues of fire
 comes to rest on each of them
 And they start speaking of God's wonders
 In languages they do not know.

Wind and fire are not random details.
 Throughout Scripture
 they are signs of God's powerful presence.
 Just as God descended upon Sinai in fire and storm,
 now God comes near again—
 this time not to a mountain,
 but to ordinary people.

At Sinai, God descended upon a mountain.
 At Pentecost, God descends upon people.

Under the power of this Spirit
 The disciples pour out into the streets below
 Among the bursting festival crowds.

Those who had come from across the Empire

Recognised that the disciples
are speaking languages from their own far-away lands.
They also recognised the speakers as Galileans—
people who should not have known these distant languages.
The pilgrims are astonished at what they are witnessing.
Others dismiss the whole thing as drunken nonsense.

The crowd was confused.
Curious and skeptical.

And then Peter stands up.
The same Peter who once denied Jesus in fear
now speaks publicly before the crowd.

Peter stands and raises his voice above the crowd.

Peter speaks those who have stopped to watch the commotion,
Explaining that this is the fulfillment of what
the prophets had promised.

Joel had foretold a day when God's Spirit
would no longer belong only to prophets, kings, or special leaders.
God would pour out his Spirit broadly upon his people.

Sons and daughters.
Young and old.
Men and women.
Servants too.

This signaled that the "last days" had begun—
the period leading toward God's final renewal of all things. [see Wright *Acts for Everyone* 32, 33]

The crowd Peter addresses
is a crowd of religious pilgrims.

He explains the wind/flames/languages
as prophetic fulfillment.
In what we didn't read he tells the crowd
that God's Messiah has come in Jesus,
and that although Israel rejected him and killed him,
God vindicated him by raising him from the dead.

The people listen closely
and are 'cut to the heart' by Peter's message.
When they ask him what to do,
He calls them to believe in Jesus and be baptised in his name.
We are told that 3000 join Jesus' followers that day.

What may seem most impressive about today's story
Are those signs that get the crowds attention,
The wind, the flames, the foreign languages.

And yet maybe more impressive is
The transformation that occurs in the lives
Of Jesus' disciples.

Those who had once huddled behind closed doors
are now out in the streets taking their faith public.
Peter—the disciple who once denied Jesus to a servant girl—
is now proclaiming him before thousands.

Equally amazing is the impact.
People respond to the disciples' witness.
They don't just smile and nod and say
'well that's certainly interesting'.
They believe what Peter tells them about Jesus.
They recognise that they need to change their lives
To get aligned with what God is doing.

The story of the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost
Isn't simply a history lesson.

It is the story of how God continues to transform his people.
Jesus does not simply command us to witness.
He gives his Spirit to empower ordinary people for that calling.

We don't need to become impressive people
To become effective witnesses.
We need to become Spirit-filled people.

Pentecost is about God coming close
To people who are waiting for Him.
PAUSE

So how about you?
Is God an abstract idea,
Or maybe a topic that you are studying,
Or is God someone you encounter on a regular basis?
Christianity is not simply believing ideas about God.
It is learning to live in relationship with the God who comes near.

People don't tell others about God who remains just an idea,
But we get excited about a God who meets us, leads us,
And fills us with new strength.

It is this God who comes near
that empowers us to share the same invitation made on the first Pentecost:
"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Lets pray.