

The Gift That Keeps On Giving Acts 2:1-21

In 1927, the Canadian based Victor Talking Machine Company needed a new marketing slogan. They were desperately trying to keep their phonograph department afloat. Phonographs had been invented decades earlier by Thomas Edison in the 1860s. The more modern day versions are what we call record players. With improved radio technology, phonographs were in danger of falling by the wayside. The Canadian company needed something catchy. What they came up with was, *the gift that keeps on giving*. It was perfect. Own one of our phonographs and you'll be able to listen to music whenever you want. No more waiting around for your favorite Louis Armstrong song to come over the airwaves. You can have him at home anytime you want. Give one of our machines to your friend and you've given them a gift that never stops giving back.

We're here today celebrating the Day of Pentecost. Along with Christmas and Easter, it's one of the three great festivals of the Christian church year. Each of those festivals focuses on what God gives to his people. So Christmas is about God the Father giving the gift of his Son. Easter is about God the Son giving the gift of salvation through his triumphant resurrection. And Pentecost is about God the Father and God the Son giving their believers a gift. A most precious, wonderful gift...the gift of God the Holy Spirit. You want to talk about a place to use that slogan properly? God the Holy Spirit is *the gift that keeps on giving*...the perfect gift. Today we remember what that gift means for God's people. We take comfort to know the Spirit always knows *just what to bring*. And by the promise of our most trustworthy God we can be confident that *he's here to stay*. A gift we can count on all the days of our lives.

So what was this day of Pentecost all about? What exactly happened, and for that matter, what changed? Well, think for a moment about the working of God in the Old Testament. During those days, God poured out his Holy Spirit in limitation. God's focus was not on expansion, but on preparation. The world had to be prepared for the coming of Jesus. God confined most of his work to the nation of Israel through whom the Savior would come. The Holy Spirit was ALWAYS at work creating trusting faith in the promises of a Messiah yet to come. But he was only poured out on special occasions. On kings and prophets when it suited God's purpose of preparing the world for his Son.

But God promised that one day that was all going to change. As we'll heard Peter preach, God promised this day hundreds of years earlier. And the change

would come about when God's focus shifted dramatically to expanding his Church...when everything God had done to win our salvation had been made known....when Christ's work had been completed. Then, when a full understanding of how God made us his own was possible for the first time in history...the Father and Son would pour out the Holy Spirit in full force on all believers to give them that understanding and enable them to spread the message of a completed salvation.

So before the Spirit came upon believers with his saving power and bestowed this or that gift, but since Pentecost he actually fills the church with his power and his gifts by way of his own blessed presence.

The small group of believers was ready for this day and waited anxiously for it to come. Just as Jesus promised in the Gospel, **Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit** The sound of a violent wind without actual wind and the presence of tongues that appeared like fire without burning anyone told these believers this is from God. God had come down to them again, this time filling them up...giving them bold confidence...washing away their timidity.

The timing could not have been more perfect. Jews from all over the globe were assembled in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, one of the three Jewish feasts that required Jews to return to Jerusalem. God wanted his Church to explode outward. So he picked the perfect time to pour out his Spirit. And *the Spirit knew just what to bring* those believers. He knew just what gift to give them for this occasion.

If God wanted his Church to expand could there have been a better situation than to have people from all over the globe returning to their home countries recounting the great wonders they had seen? The Spirit of understanding, truth, and enlightenment was the real miracle of this day, but he also gave his believers another gift to show his power and to fulfill his purpose.

“They...all...began to speak in other languages since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently.” The crowd drawn together by the mighty sound, first were baffled and then amazed at what they heard. **[W]e hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.** And that was the point, wasn't it? To declare the wonders of God. The wonders he brought about through Christ. The Holy Spirit confines himself to be hidden behind Christ, always pointing mankind to the Son as Savior. Where Christ is not preached, there the Holy Spirit is not. *He knew just what to bring* those

believers on this occasion. A gift that would allow them to effectively spread the message of the gospel.

Like he did for those believers on the first Pentecost, *the Holy Spirit knows just what to bring* us in our lives. He knows just how to give us the same confidence and exactly what we need to spread his Church.

But as powerful as the Holy Spirit is, he's not irresistible. In fact, all we bring to the equation is resistance. Do we ever act like those scoffers who mocked one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that day? They thought they had found a simple, logical (even though it wasn't) explanation for all of this. The men are drunk and are just babbling. Our pride can get in the way of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. Maybe weren't not dismissing the Holy Spirit out of hand as some did on Pentecost, but in our pride we might not give him much credit either.

Thinking of ourselves too highly soon turns our thanks for his gifts into arrogance over our abilities and contempt for those less gifted. Our doubts can also get in the way of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. Satan wants nothing more than for us to look at our lives and run down the checklist of what's missing. "I'm not well spoken, I have no confidence, I'm not good with people". As they stack up, soon our doubt is all we think about and we push the Spirit away with the gifts he does bring.

It's precisely against these faults...our pride and our doubts...that the Holy Spirit works his power. His greatest gift came to most you through simple water connected to the Word in baptism. That was our personal Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit himself came to us. To live with us. And to create in us that childlike faith which turns our hearts to Jesus for all things. There he directed us to see in Jesus the way to eternal peace with God. The faith which he gave us and which he strengthens in us is what repents of and casts off our sinful pride and every boastful thought day after day. When pride grabs a hold of you, allow the Spirit to direct your attention through the Word back to the cross of our salvation. There you will find a Savior who knows no limit to his love...had no pride over his divine position, but gave it up to deliver us as holy before God. There you will see how much infinitely more we need him than he needs us. But he chooses to use us still. Where can pride be in that?

And he who works in us the ability to trust in God daily also equips us with the exact gifts he knows we need. He enables us to help in spreading his Gospel. Our doubts can get the best of us when we focus on all the gifts we don't have. But trust that the Spirit *knows just what to bring* us. Focus not on what you don't have, but on what you do have. **The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.** If your gift is love, then show the love of your Savior to others. If

your gift is patience, then be the Christian who doesn't get discouraged when others refuse the love of God and sees an opportunity to continue working on them. If your gift is faithfulness, then be the most faithful father, mother, worker or friend in everything you do so that others might praise your deeds and see the love of Christ in you. The list could go on and on. Ask yourself this morning, what gift HAS the Spirit given me and how can I use that to glorify God and expand his Church. Continue to earnestly seek out the spiritual gifts the Spirit has given you. *He knows just what to bring us*, don't be afraid to look.

Peter wanted to explain all this to the people. He wanted to let them in on understanding this wonderful day. God promised this day 900 years earlier through the prophet Joel. "**I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.**" Prophesying, dreaming dreams, seeing visions, it all sounds pretty extraordinary. But when you think about it, those were all ways God made his will known to certain people in the Old Testament. And that's exactly what the Spirit does for his and through his believers in the Church. Working through the Word, he reveals God's will for all men to be saved through Jesus or as the prophet Joel put it, **[e]everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

But not everything in that prophecy has come to fulfillment yet. Blood and fire and the sun turning to darkness...sounds a lot like Jesus' description of the end of the world. Those things haven't happened yet and these are God's tremendous words of comfort to us that from that day forward he would unleash his Spirit and to be with us until the end of time. What a joy to know that the Spirit with all his gifts won't be leaving anytime soon.

It can be difficult to see him sometimes. Plenty of bickering and in fighting can take place in a congregation. Sin is still prevalent even in the Church. That is why Pentecost is such a comfort...the day God went into action on our behalf to give us the Holy Spirit until the end of time. His presence among us turns us back to the Scriptures to look to our Savior, to be at peace with one another as we use his gifts in harmony and unity to serve our Lord.

The Holy Spirit IS the gift that keeps on giving. He's certainly more useful than a phonograph. On this day of Pentecost let us rejoice that the Holy Spirit has come. Our God who *knows just what to bring us and who won't be leaving anytime soon*. May it be our constant prayer that he dwells richly inside each and every one of God's people to strengthen our faith and equip us for service. Amen.