

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
June 4, 2017

On Each One of Them

Acts 2:1-4

2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

2:2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

2:3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

1. The Holy Spirit Leads to the Word

Pentecost is called “Shavuot” among Jewish people. This is one of the three biggest feasts. Others are Passover and Feast of Booths (or Sukkot). This feast is celebrated on the next day after the seven weeks, or fifty days after Passover. The feast is named “Pentecost,” that means “fifty days” in Greek language. Since the harvest of wheat begins in this season, people bring the first fruit to the temple and give thanks to God for the harvest. During the feast described in Acts chapter 2, Jerusalem was filled with the groups of the pilgrims from all over the world.

There were a group of one hundred twenty people who gathered together at one place and were devoting themselves to prayers. One hundred twenty is a significant number, but there were many big

pilgrim groups here and there in Jerusalem during the feast. People did not pay attention to this group. However, this group attracted a great deal of public attention at nine o'clock on the day of Pentecost. The group was the disciples of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit descended upon them. Three thousand people heard the gospel, believed in Jesus Christ, and were baptized. Like the first fruit of wheat was offered to God, the three thousand saved people also were offered to God as the first fruit of the Kingdom of God.

Acts reports that the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples with "wind" and "fire." This happening has already been predicted by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11. He said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." In the biblical languages the same word means both "wind" and "the Spirit." Therefore "wind" points the Holy Spirit and his works. When God created man, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. Like the Spirit of God made the man alive, the Holy Spirit breathes the breath of life into the church and makes the church alive. If a church has no breath of life of the Holy Spirit, the church is just a human organization without life.

Next, "fire" represents "sanctification." Gold or silver is refined by fire and becomes purer. The church which was redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ is more precious than gold and silver. The Holy Spirit continues to sanctify the church in order that the church becomes holier. Mothers never end their works by giving birth to their babies. They continue to raise their children and to work hard until their

children become adult and independent. Like our mothers, the Holy Spirit never cease his works for sanctifying the church. We want to see breath and fire of the Holy Spirit in our church.

Acts reports that the Holy Spirit manifested as the shape of a tongue and remained on the disciples. The word, “tongue,” means “language” in Greek as well as in English. Verse 3 and 4 says, “And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The tongue shape manifestation of the Holy Spirit showed that the disciples began to speak in other languages. There were at least fifteen language groups in the audiences, and each group could hear the Word of God in their own language. When we hear our own language in a foreign country, we pay attention to the speaker. The Holy Spirit gave the gift of speaking foreign languages fluently in order that the disciples would attract people’s attention to the Word of God. This is a “sign” that the Word of God would be heard by all people of the world.

In the States twenty-five languages other than English are spoken by more than a hundred thousand people. They are Spanish, Chinese, French, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Hindustani, Arabic, Korean, German, Russian, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, Japanese, Persian, Gujarati, Thai and Laotian, Greek, Serbo-Croatian, Armenian, Hmong, Khmer, Hebrew, Navajo, Scandinavian in order of the number of speakers according 2015 statistics. The churches in the States work hard for language ministries. The Holy Spirit speaks the Word of God for all the people on the earth in many languages, not only on the Pentecost day, but also now, in order that people may hear the Word in their own

language and be saved. The Holy Spirit wants everyone of the world to hear the Word of God.

It is not true that the sign of “wind,” “fire,” and “tongue” does always accompany when the Holy Spirit works among us as it happened on the day of Pentecost. It’s also not true that the Holy Spirit always gives us the gift of talking fluently in the foreign languages which we never learned previously. If so, how wonderful! Actually many team members spend a lot of time and work so hard for providing English translation for each Sunday. And we should know that all excitements and impressions are not the works of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit may calm our excitements and lead us into silence for giving us the Word of God. He may give us even “the holy griefs” against sins and injustice for leading us to repentance. The most important aspect is not “signs and wonders.” It is that we hear the Word of God.

What did the Holy Spirit do on the day of Pentecost? He led the people to hear the Word of God. Though the people came to the place that the disciples gathered by seeing the signs, the people finally heard the Good News of the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ, and understood that the Cross and the Resurrection happened for the sake of their salvation. They repented and believed in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit still leads us to the Word of God and invites us to repentance and faith. People hear the Word of God, repent, and have faith. This is the unchanged “sign” and “mark” of the works of the Holy Spirit through the ages.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us the Word of God which saves us and gives us life. Most important is that we listen to the Word of God.

When we hear the Word of God in the worship service, it's not enough to enjoy listening to your own language in either Japanese or English. We should listen to God Himself, and accept the personal message to each one of us, and answer his call. When we come to the worship service or read the Bible, let's do it with this prayer: "Holy Spirit, lead me to the Word of God and help me understand it." Let the Holy Spirit lead us to the Word of God.

2. The Holy Spirit Leads Each One

Next, let us focus on the phrase, "each one of them" in verse 3. Verse 3 says, "And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them."

You will find that the Holy Spirit worked among the group of believers, that is the church, when you review a series of accounts of Pentecost. The disciples were once scattered in many locations, but they gathered together and were devoting themselves to prayers after Jesus went back to heaven. To this group which gathered in one place and were praying in one mind, the Holy Spirit came down. The Holy Spirit came from heaven when the disciples gathered in one place and filled all of them.

Acts 2:42 says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." The church started as a Jews only congregation. As it spread over the world, it became a mixed congregation of Jews and gentiles, and in some places, congregations of gentiles only. The church changed, but Christians never changed their practice. They have been keeping the teachings of the apostles, remaining in Christian fellowship, observing

the Lord's Supper, and devoting themselves to prayers.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." As you find the phrase, "one another" in Colossians 3:16, the apostles taught the church to keep "the fellowship of faith" by using the phrase, "one another" in many places. Paul said, "Through love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13) and James said, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another." (James 5:16) I found the phrase, "one another" in over fifty verses of the New Testament letters written by the apostles.

However, the Holy Spirit has not created the Christian fellowship for us to run away into a group for the purpose of avoiding our individual responsibilities. Though we can encourage faith among one another, each of us still needs to have his or her own faith before God. Billy Graham often said, "A bike never become an auto mobile, even though it sits in a garage for an auto mobile." in his preaching. This illustration shows the fact that a person was not born as a Christian even though his/her parents are Christians; a person cannot become a Christian automatically because he/she has been attending the church for many years; and, a person cannot become a Christian because he/she stays in a Christian environment for a long time. Billy Graham said that each of us needs to make a decision to accept Jesus Christ and give himself/herself to Jesus Christ.

The one hundred twenty people did not gather in Jerusalem because other people were there, and they didn't want to feel lonely. Neither did they hope to receive the Holy Spirit just by mingling with

another group of people. Each one of them repented that he/she couldn't follow Jesus to the end in the dark days following the crucifixion, and that they then didn't believe in the coming Resurrection of Christ. Each one of them waited for the promised Holy Spirit. And, to "each one of them," the Holy Spirit came down.

It was same as the three thousand people who were baptized on that day. It sounds like a "mass conversion" because three thousand people were baptized at once. However, I don't think this case was a "mass conversion." Peter said to the people, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) He encouraged each one of them to make a decision. Each one of the three thousand people made his/her decision to have faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized.

Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (verse 38) Each one of the three thousand people received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. They were connected to Christ and to the church as his body. Each one of us needs to make the personal decision of faith, then we, like all of them who were connected to Christ that day will never be spiritually lonely. They connected to the fellowship of faith, and were nurtured and led in the fellowship.

It is not a coincidence that we gather together in the church on this special day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit gathered us here to lead us to faith in Christ, and to lead the believers to the depth of the truth of the Word. The Holy Spirit leads us to the Word of God, and the Word of God teaches us to follow Christ by the Holy Spirit. Answer the call

of the Holy Spirit. It is the first step to being filled with the Holy Spirit.

(Prayer)

Dear Father, the disciples spoke the Word of God, and the people listened to, believed, and accepted the Word. The Holy Spirit sent by you and your Son Jesus still works in the church and in the world. Holy Spirit, make the people listen to the Word and help them come back to God. Lead and teach us how to trust in the Spirit and work with Him. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.