

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
May 20, 2018

On the Day of Pentecost
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. Spirit Filled

A hundred twenty disciples gathered in Jerusalem, prayed for 9 days and waited for the Holy Spirit. And the day of Pentecost arrived. On this day, what happened to the disciples?

Firstly, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. On that day, the sound of mighty rushing wind filled the entire house of the disciples. The wind indicates the Holy Spirit. In Genesis, the Holy Spirit sent the wind on the surface of water and created the world. And, the Holy Spirit came into a man and gave him life. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit Himself came into the disciples and filled them.

Not only the twelve disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, but also all of the disciples. According to Act 1:14, "They all joined

together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” All of them, men and women, young and old in the place received the Holy Spirit and were filled with the Holy Spirit. The disciples who were filled with the Holy Spirit became “Witnesses of Christ” as Jesus said, “But 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” when he went back to heaven.

In Japan, I participated a program called “Total Mobilization Evangelism” This program included the training sessions, evangelistic meetings, and follow up sessions for the Christians to become “Witnesses of Christ.” We used the text book titled “Good Christian Witness” for our training sessions and visited every home with tracts, and personal evangelism. That was well-constructed program and text book was well written. I am sure that we can use it even today.

However, even though we had received such training, many people still did not know how to give testimony for Christ and could not share it because they did not have confidence. There were so many people like this, and I was wondering why. I realized that the people needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit before doing evangelism works. The plan, training, and support system are very important for evangelism. However, no Christians can become the witnesses of Christ without being filled with the Holy Spirit.

A Japanese student visited me immediately after I came to the US as a pastor of a Japanese American church. He got baptized and became a member of a church; however, the church has a quota for all members, to lead at least one person to Christ in every year. He was

suffering from the quota because he could not do it. He said, “I received baptism but I don’t really know about Christ. It’s impossible to lead someone to Christ.” It is not wrong that we try to lead one person to Christ in every year. It is a good goal for Christians. However, it will become a gloomy “Quota” if we don’t have faith to set it our goal and pray for it. I suggested him that he should have the assurance of the salvation and live in the joy of the salvation. Once he were filled with the joy, he would share the testimony out of the fulfillment.

In Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The Holy Spirit will made the disciples “witnesses of Christ.” The Holy Spirit first works in the believers, filled in them. Then testimonies are born and evangelism starts. Before we do evangelical works for outside, we shall invite and receive the Holy Spirit in us. We can not become “witnesses of Christ” and do the mission with human power.

2. The Word of God

Second event in Pentecost was the disciples spoke the Word of God in various foreign languages. The divided tongues as of fire indicates that the Holy Spirit led people to speak the Word of God. People spoke various foreign languages not because they came from foreign countries for the Feast of Firstfruits in Pentecost. They spoke various foreign languages because Jesus’ words were to be fulfilled. These Jesus’ words were in Acts 1:8. “You will be my witnesses to the end of the earth.” and in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make

disciples of all nations, baptizing them” Jesus Christ is the Savior for all people. Therefore, we must go and tell all people in the world about this Jesus Christ’s salvation. The fact that the Holy Spirit enabled disciples to speak various languages was to declare world missions to begin and that is happening today.

I often wish I could be a gifted and talented person for languages. But, since we have the Word of God, we can tell all people about Jesus is our savior even though we are not able to speak foreign languages. The disciples could speak various languages on Pentecost. We tend to pay attention to the various languages spoken by the disciples, but more important is what they spoke. They spoke the Word of God. If we hold the Word of God and the words of our faith, we can tell all people about Jesus Christ’s salvation even though we can’t speak foreign languages fluently. I experienced to become the enabled messenger by the Holy Spirit in both Japan and US.

A lot of people from US and Europe engaged in mission work in Japan after the World War II. A lot of missionaries eventually mastered very difficult Japanese to the point that they can speak it fluently, but some people were not able to speak it well. However, I learned a lot from a missionary couldn’t speak Japanese fluently rather than a missionary could speak Japanese fluently. I was deeply moved by the missionary’s passion and character to tell the Word of God even though they did not speak Japanese well. Because he could not speak Japanese well, he directly told me the Word of God and urged me to believe in God rather than beating around the bush. A lot of people believed in God because of those missionaries’ direct approach to deliver the Good News with their passion and character.

I have been a pastor in US for 27 years since 1991. I started engaging in mission work by speaking Japanese in the English-Speaking country. Because I was exposed to a different language than Japanese, I have been thinking about the relationship between a language and the Word of God. My conclusion is that believing and assuring the Word of God is very important, and a language is the means to serve it. This 2 Timothy 2:15 called me to become a pastor. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” Japanese is my language. I hope my language supplies people the Word of God clearly and firmly.

The Word of God should not be delivered to all people in the world simultaneously by a Satellite TV channel. In most cases, I believe that people believe in God when they meet Christians face to face and listen to Christian’s personal words that resonate with them. It is not the one fluent speaker can tell the Word of God. God allows each one of us to tell the Good News by utilizing our words of life. Each of us have unique words associating with our unique life experiences. God still speaks His Words in our unique personal life languages by giving us the Holy Spirit. Let’s ask God to become the one to tell the Word of God. Let’s seek the presence of Holy Spirit to tell the Good News. The Holy Spirit enables us to speak the Word of our faith fearlessly. Our mouth daringly delivers it by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Let’s witness people boldly by such a Word of our faith.

3. Church

Thirdly, the disciples built church. Pentecost is the birthday of the

church. On the day, three thousand were baptized and joined to the church. Even though we don't see the word "church" until in chapter 5 verse 11 in the book of Acts, the three thousand people were baptized and became "Christians," and added to the church. The church was born by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

I just said that "the disciples build the church." It may be better to say, "Christ Himself built the church by the Holy Spirit." This statement is more accurate. Acts 9:31 reads, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." The colloquial and interconfessional translations of Japanese Bible use "being firm of the foundation" instead of "being built up," but the literal meaning of the original language is "being build up." The New Japanese Bible translated translated the word as "being built up" like English translation. "Being built up" is a passive form. Then, who is building up the church? He is God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. And, at the same time, the church is built up by those who joined through baptism.

Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:10, "According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it." He also said in Ephesians 4:11-12, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" The Biblical principle is that the members of the church build the church led by the leaders."

The church has been built up according the principle from the

beginning. Acts 2:42 says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Here we see four pillars supporting the church. All of the four elements of the church are very important. The church cannot stand without any one of them. The first pillar is the “Apostles’ teaching.” It is the Bible and the sound teachings. The second is the “Fellowship.” It is “koinonia” in the original language and means “joint ownership” or “common property.” All Christians have the same truth and purpose. The third is the “Breaking of Bread.” This is the Lord’s Supper. And, the fourth is the “Prayers.” We should start from and stay in these four elements when we do any kind of activity. As Acts 9:31 says, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up,” the Lord leads and encourages us and builds His church by the Holy Spirit.

The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit to become Christ’s witnesses on the day of Pentecost two thousand years ago. They spoke out the Word of God and testify the Lord and build His church. We want to succeed their works by the same Holy Spirit on this Pentecost Day.

(Prayer)

Heavenly Father, we are not able to become Christ’s witnesses, to speak the Word of God, and to work for Your church. We never seek the wisdom or power of the Holy Spirit for our own satisfaction. We trust in the Holy Spirit and serve you through the Holy Spirit day by day. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit for Your glory and for the salvation of many. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus.