Pentecost: The Comforter Has Come

# (Acts 1:1-8, 2:1-4)

It feels like forever that we have been in lockdown and so the loosening of restrictions this weekend has been a breath of fresh air. For many of us, we are beginning to identify with those first disciples locked up in the upper room and there is this strong desire to get out, to get involved, and do all kinds of stuff. This weekend we are celebrating Pentecost and it has been a challenging seven weeks since Passover, but it’s been good because there are some things that happen in seclusion they can’t happen in a crowd.

If you are like me you have likely reflected on many things in the past few weeks. I have thought about many things. I have evaluated where I am, where I want to be, and how I’m going to get there, and yet I have been in a season of waiting. This morning Pentecost has come, it’s time for the harvest, a time of gleaning, and that’s good because we’ve been left alone with our thoughts for long enough.

Today we find ourselves in a time of transition spiritually and culturally. As a community we are transitioning from evaluation to application and now it is time for the harvest. In this time of loosened restrictions and freedom to roam we must remember that seasons come and seasons go but it’s the Word of our God that stands forever. The apostle Peter writes to believers in a season of intense persecution, believers who were scattered all over the Mediterranean world, and he encourages them saying,

*“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among (your unbelieving neighbors) that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:11-12).*

*“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (1 Peter 2:13-14).*

*“For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, and honor the king” (1 Peter 2:15-17).*

We find ourselves today in a time of transition, much like those first believers in the Roman Empire. They faced persecution because of a culture of fear but they willingly gave up everything to follow Jesus. They forsook their careers, family relations, and even marital relations for the sake of following Jesus. And I certainly don’t want to diminish in any way the reality of their suffering and pain because of unjust persecution, but I want to make the point that we too have been impacted by a culture of fear, not caused by persecution, but caused by fear of COVID-19. Certainly paling in comparison, and yet in a similar way we too have been called to “submit ourselves for the Lord sake” to every authority, whether to the king or to governors, because we know as the Bible tells us, that “the authorities that exist have been established by God” (Romans 13:1).

And so, there is wisdom in obeying the authorities, there is wisdom in obeying the governor, there is wisdom of following the guidelines of the CDC, there is wisdom in wearing masks and social distancing. In fact, it’s for our benefit, because the Bible says that those in authority are:

*“God’s servant to do you good” (Romans 13:4).*

As I’ve been reflecting on so much over the past weeks, I realize there’s a big difference between fear and being stupid. In fact, I remembered last year when the flu virus B was going around and how it overcame so many people in spite of the flu shot. As I was visiting people in the hospital there were all these warning signs about washing your hands, masks, and contagious diseases. And it’s hard to believe that now in 2020 we’ve transitioned from influenza B to COVID-19, effectively creating a culture of fear, because of this unseen unknown virus which has shut down our economy and many of our lives, but the reality is that we want to be safe and not spread this disease to others.

There is just so much that we don’t know, things that we don’t understand, and just like those early followers of Jesus in 64 A.D. we are living in a culture of fear. Just like those first disciples of Jesus in 33 A.D. we are living in an environment of fear. The Bible tells us that those first disciples, “…were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). And so, it’s been a season of fear, but you need to know that the harvest is coming.

These men were in the upper room and they had the doors locked because of fear. Remember that these were men who had given up everything to follow Jesus. They had given up their careers, their income, their reputation, and even their families. Everything had been shut down because following Jesus meant going wherever Jesus went. And so, whether by land or by sea, through doubts and fears, wherever and whenever it was, for three years they followed Jesus. Everything suffered, their business has suffered, their family relations has suffered, their marital relations have suffered, all so that they could be with Jesus.

Suddenly, the man whom they had followed for years, the man to whom they had dedicated their lives, their resources and their finances, was now stripped naked, beaten like a thief, hung on the cross and left dying in the hot Jerusalem sun. In front of everybody all of their hopes and dreams died with him, it was devastating, it was emotional, and it was scary. Their Lord now somehow just seemed so much less, the overcomer looked like he had been overcome, and all of a sudden, the enemy began to place all kinds of doubts in their minds. And because Jesus died like an ordinary man, dying in such a humiliating way, it’s no wonder that Thomas doubted, Peter denied him, and Judas hung himself. Number one, they were in isolation.

## Isolation

The very real problem they faced was that now that Jesus was dead the religious leaders would begin looking for those who were with him; they’re going to make every attempt to destroy anything associated with Jesus. And so, the Bible says that they hid, because fear leads us to withdraw and so they went into isolation

*“The disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews…” (John 20:19).*

But it was just a season, Pentecost was coming, the harvest, the first fruits were coming.

Now, we don’t know how long they were in isolation, certainly not as long as we have been, but they were in total isolation. They didn’t even dare go out on the street or go to the market. They didn’t dare leave their houses, not because of COVID-19, but because death was right outside the door. And so, they were staying safe, they were hiding for their lives, because they knew what was outside, they knew what would happen, and they chose to be bored and safe rather then to go out and be killed.

As we turn to the book of Acts, I want to show you the second transition, in the first chapter of Acts, Luke who is writing this tells us,

*“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive…" (Acts 1:1-3).*

They were hiding and fearful so that they might be insulated from the possibility of anything happening to their lives and it was into that place of isolation that Jesus came into their lives. You see, he’s not going to show himself to the world because he has already come to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. In Matthew chapter 23 he said,

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing…” (Matthew 23:37).*

And so, he’s not going to do that anymore, but he desires to have a private moment with his disciples, with those who really believe.

You see, there are certain things that God will only show people that believe because he’s not a sideshow type of God. He’s not going to show off just because they’re curious, he’s not going to perform miracles just because they’re fascinated by the supernatural. In fact, Moses wrote in Deuteronomy chapter 29,

*“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever…” (Deuteronomy 29:29).*

And so, there are some things that God will only reveal to his children, to people who truly believe in him, people that have genuine faith. That’s the place of visitation. Number two, that’s the place of visitation.

## Visitation

Now we find that Jesus comes to them, he visits, he comes to his disciples in their isolation, in that place of seclusion and he visits them. Acts chapter 1, verse three says,

*“He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).*

I don’t know about you, but I am so thankful that God makes house calls. This is so important because it’s not like I feel anointed, feel his presence, or hear him speak every day, but a visit from God can change everything. He visited with Abraham, he visited with Moses, he visited with the disciples, and it would change the course of their lives forever. In verse four, the Bible tells us,

*“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, 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, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5).*

You see, God will come in your house, he’ll wake you up at two in the morning, or you might be driving to work, but every now and then God visits. And when it happens you won’t want him to leave, because if you’ve ever had a visit from God, you don’t want it to be over, you want him to hang around.

You see, when God visits, he removes our fear and doubt, and he replaces it was an anticipation of something so much greater. He told the prophet Isaiah,

*“For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you” (Isaiah 41:13).*

And so, Jesus visited, he came to help and he told the disciples, “In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” No longer were they together with doors locked for fear of the Jews, now they’re waiting for the Holy Spirit and their countenance has changed. They returned to Jerusalem rejoicing, because they’re waiting on the promise, they are waiting to see what God is going to do.

The only thing that changed was the fact that he visited them. And so, your situation may still look the same, but it won’t be the same. Before you were locked up because of what you were afraid of, but now you’re in here because of what you’re waiting on. The disciples are no longer worried about what might happen because now they’re excited about what was about to happen.

In the same way, when you stop focusing on what used to be, when you stop worrying about getting back to normal, if you can get this in your spirit, if you will get excited about what’s about to happen, everything will change in your life. You see, just a visit from God can turn your mourning into dancing, your sorrow into praise, despair into revelation. And you don’t need to go to church, you just need a visitation from the Holy Spirit right there in your apartment, right there in your living room. Just a visit from God can get the focus back in your life.

Now, the disciples were trying to figure out what to do, even after all of his visits they are still not clear about what to do. And so, in verse six they asked him,

*“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).*

In other words, they still didn’t get it, there’s still waiting for him to overthrow Rome’s influence over Jerusalem. Before they had expected him to be their king, but they didn’t see the cross. Now that they have visited the cross, now that they saw him crucified, humiliated and hanging between two thieves, they’re looking for their King again, but Jesus said to them,

*"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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" (Acts 1:7-8).*

In other words, they’re not witnesses yet, they’ve seen the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead raised, and the good news preached to the poor. They were there when Jesus was arrested, hung high on the cross, and they were there when the stone was rolled away. They were there when he walked through locked doors into the upper room, but that wasn’t the kind of witness he was talking about; there was something more.

You see, everything that they knew about was worldly, physical, and tangible, but they needed a glimpse of the eternal. They needed to see his glory when he said,

*"Let there be light" and there was light” (Genesis 1:3).*

They needed to be there when he wrestled Jacob in the middle of the night. They needed to be there in the fiery furnace. And so, Jesus said, you’ve got a good memory, but you’re not a witness yet. You saw some stuff but you can’t be a witness until the witness comes.

Jesus said it this way in John chapter 14, at verse 26: the King James version says it this way, “The Comforter which is the Holy Spirit…” Or…

*“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).*

And so, when Jesus said “When the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be my witnesses,” he was telling them that you can’t witness things you’ve never seen, you can’t witness things you never got to do, and so he says go to Jerusalem and wait for it. In Luke chapter 24 he says,

*“You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:48-49).*

In other words, “You are witnesses, but you need the witness, you need the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so, they needed to get in the presence of God, seeking the anointing of the Holy Spirit. They needed the Comforter, the Holy Spirit who brings life to dry bones, who loosens the shackles in your life, who opens prison doors and sets the captives free. You see, there is a power that can break every curse over your life, that can bring you off a ventilator, that can drive sickness and cancer out of your body, but you’re going to have to wait for it. And so, there’s an expectation, faith births expectation.

## Expectation

You’re going to have to go to your room, shut the door, pull down the blinds, get on your knees and wait for it. There’s an expectation and God said through the prophet Isaiah:

*“Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31, NKJV).*

The challenge for the church today is to wait, because we don’t like to wait, we are a microwave society and we expect everything to be hot and ready in 45 seconds. But Jesus is teaching us that you’ve got to have faith enough to wait for it. He told his disciples not to leave Jerusalem in verse four,

*“But wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about” (Acts 1:4).*

He told them, “I’m going to send it, but you’ve got to wait for it? You’ve got to have faith enough to wait for it.” He may have already told you some things he’s going to do in your life, but just because it hasn’t happened yet doesn’t mean it’s not going to happen. Just like you don’t raise a child overnight, you don’t lose weight in a week, or have a strong marriage in a year, you’ve got to wait for it.

God is looking for a few people that will come with expectation, waiting on it, lifting their hands in surrender, and saying not my will but yours be done. I know that you are impatient, but I’ve been praying that you would have a holy expectation, that you would wait on it right now wherever you are, that you would open your mouth and lift your voice to God.

You see, we’re going to have to make an altar, going down to our Jerusalem, and we’re going to have to seek him, waiting on him, because he’s not going to spoil us, he said wait for it. And the Bible says in Acts chapter 2, verse one,

*“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:1-4).*

It’s so close, it’s right there on the tip of your tongue, but you can’t let doubt and fear cloud your mind. James tells us, “Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). The Bible says in Isaiah,

*“When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him” (Isaiah 59:19, NKJV).*

Some of you right now, your living room has become a sanctuary, and I pray for the anointing of God to come into your house. I pray for the power of God to cover you because Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Now I know Thomas was doubting, Peter denied knowing Jesus not just once but three times, Judas committed suicide, but I’m going to wait for it because the Bible says,

*“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).*

And so, you will receive power over fear, power over depression, power over suicide, power over nervous breakdowns, but you are going to have to get down on your knees, you’re going to have to wait for it to show up in your life.

I have laid out his Word for you, the promises of God are at your door, but you’ve got to let it in, you’ve got to let it happen, you’ve got to wait for it. I know that sooner or later everything God promised is going to come to pass. And so, I want to encourage somebody, he may not come when you want him to, but he is always right on time. Would you wait on him?

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