

You were just hired to work in a carpentry shop. Your first day on the job, your boss assigns you the task of making a beautiful cabinet. Excited for your first project, you grab the necessary lumber, and ask your boss where he keeps the tools. He responds, “Oh...yeah, sorry! We don’t have any. I’m expecting a top notch cabinet, though!”

So the next day, you bring some of your own saws. But when you look to plug them in, your boss says, “Yeah, we don’t have electrical outlets either. Looking forward to the finished product, though!” You’d quit that job, right? If you weren’t equipped with the necessary tools or power to accomplish your task, it’d feel futile to even try!

Have you ever felt that way about doing evangelism—sharing Jesus with others? Has your neighbor, co-worker, or family member shut you down so many times when you talk about Jesus that it feels like you’re just spinning your wheels? Do you feel like God hasn’t given you some important “tool” that would let you accomplish the task? Do you wonder, “Why didn’t God empower me with more eloquence, charisma, or wisdom?” When our evangelism efforts fail or feel futile, we can respond in one of four ways: get frustrated and quit; be afraid and quit; become apathetic and quit; or trust in God and keep sharing Jesus. It’s my prayer that we choose the last option, brothers and sisters. And I think Pentecost helps us, because **Pentecost Empowers Your Purpose**. Pentecost reminds us that God has provided all the tools and power we need to joyfully fulfill his purpose for us!

For fifty days after Easter, Jesus’ followers had felt the epitome of joy, because Jesus was alive! For forty days, he appeared to them, comforting and teaching them, just like before. Then, on the 40th day, Jesus ascended back to Heaven, his work of salvation complete. The disciples “**returned to Jerusalem with great joy, staying continually at the temple, praising God,**” obeying Jesus pre-Ascension command, “**Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.**” All the believers “**joined together constantly in prayer,**” reminding each other of God’s love, and eagerly anticipating the Father’s gift that Jesus promised.

And can you blame them for being joyful? Jesus was alive, and had returned to Heaven to take back the full use of his power and glory, and to rule the universe for their good! They only desired to bask in the joy of Jesus that filled their hearts and changed their lives.

Now, we might view that body of believers as the model of what the church should be! But if believers only pay attention to fellow believers, God’s purpose for his church is only half-completed. Before he ascended, Jesus commissioned his followers, “**Go and make disciples of all nations.**” He told them, “**You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**” I wonder if those 11 disciples, and the 120 total believers fretted at the time, “How can WE reach the ends of the earth? We’re not equipped for that!”

And if it were completely up to the disciples, they’d have every right to make excuses and quit, because on their own, they weren’t equipped or empowered for that purpose. But God didn’t leave it up to them. God set into motion his plan prophesied over 500 years earlier, to empower and equip his people to fulfill their God-given purpose to proclaim Jesus to the world.

Probably around a half-million Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, or “Pentecost,” a festival thanking God as Israel gathered the wheat harvest. But on this Pentecost, God had a different kind of harvest in mind-- a harvest of souls! Everything was about to change.

As usual, the believers were all together, praying and praising God. Suddenly, what sounded like a hurricane-force wind rushed from Heaven and filled the house they were in—but no wind blew. As they stared, what looked like tongues of fire appeared on their heads—but their hair didn’t burn. Finally, foreign languages they’d never spoken flowed from their tongues. This was the Father’s gift Jesus promised! Not the sound of wind, tongues of fire, or even the ability to speak foreign languages. Those were merely signs that God’s gift had arrived. The gift of Pentecost was that **“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”**

Like the sound of sirens usually brings gawkers, the strange sounds of Pentecost drew a curious crowd to the house. As the perplexed onlookers gathered, Jews from all different corners of the world—from Asia, to Africa, to Europe-- their

jaws dropped, because “**each one heard them speaking in his own language.**” And not like freshman in German class, struggling to pronounce words. The believers spoke fluently. As these foreigners each heard the wonders of God declared in their native languages, it became strikingly clear that something big was happening.

Some skeptics mocked, assuming the influence was wine, not divine. So Peter set the record straight. The same Peter who, 52 days earlier, denied even knowing Jesus because he was terrified of a servant girl. Peter, flanked by the other eleven Apostles who’d also abandoned Jesus, raised his voice and explained that what was happening wasn’t wine talking, but God speaking through his messengers in a completely new way; the fulfillment of God’s promise, prophesied through Joel over a half-century earlier. “**In the last days...I will pour out my Spirit on all people.**”

Empowered by the Spirit, the believers immediately put that power to work, proclaiming God’s love through Christ in foreign languages; reaching people from the ends of the earth, without leaving Jerusalem. Peter taught the crowd the truth about Jesus from Scripture, and 3,000 people came to faith—25x more people in one day than the 120 believers before Pentecost.

And you think, “Pastor, why aren’t your sermons good enough to convert 3,000 people?” First, that’s mean. Second, it wasn’t about Peter! “What did Jesus’ formerly fragile followers do to become such faithful messengers?” It wasn’t about them! It was about the powerful, transformational Spirit, with whom God filled his people like never before; who empowered and equipped them to fulfill their purpose—to faithfully and fearlessly proclaim the resurrected Christ to the unbelieving world.

That’s why Pentecost 2 millennia ago is so important for 21st century Christians. Pentecost reveals God’s purpose for us, and why we don’t need to be afraid, frustrated, or apathetic as do evangelism. “**In the last days,**” the time between Pentecost and Judgment Day, God “**pours out his Holy Spirit on all people...sons and daughters...young men and old men...both men and women.**” In the past, God sent his Spirit on chosen prophets who spoke for him. After Pentecost, all people, regardless of gender, age, race, or social status are called to be God’s messengers!

Maybe you’re thinking, “If God empowered me with tornado sounds, a flame on my head, and the ability to speak fluent Russian, people would probably let me tell them about Jesus too, but I’ve got nothing.” No! You have everything! Those signs did nothing but signal the arrival of the powerful, transformational Holy Spirit who did all the converting, empowering, and emboldening. God fills you with the exact same Spirit, to equip and empower us for our purpose—to faithfully and fearlessly proclaim the resurrected Christ to the unbelieving world.

That’s why we should never quit evangelizing—whether from fear, frustration, or apathy, because God has given us all the tools and power we need!

The other day, I had shaved half my face with an electric trimmer when I heard it start to sputter, because its charge was dying. I rushed so I didn’t have to come to church with a partially-shaven face, but it was close. The tool God gives us for evangelism, his Word, never fails and never runs out of power. The prophet Isaiah wrote by inspiration of the Spirit, “**So is the word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**”

The Spirit, working through the Word, never fails to accomplish God’s will! Isn’t that incredibly comforting? Sharing God’s Word with people is never futile, because the all-powerful Holy Spirit ALWAYS works through it, and God’s will is always done! When we proclaim God’s Word, we use a tool unimaginably powerful!

And to tap into that power, you don’t have to be an eloquent speaker, or the wisest scholar. We simply “**proclaim the wonders of God**” and the Spirit does the rest! That’s why we can always trust God and keep sharing Jesus, because it’s not about us. It’s about the Spirit! Even if we don’t witness it, God’s will is done!

But why us? Why didn’t God use angels instead? I mean, they were pretty top notch at Christmas and Easter! Why would God choose fearful, stumbling messengers who so often quit, grow apathetic, or lose courage? Why sinful messengers like us and the Apostles to share Jesus with the unbelieving world?

Which do you think would be a more compelling account of D-Day? A veteran who survived storming Normandy's beaches? Or a college student who wasn't born until 5 decades later?

Why us? Because we're living the message we proclaim! Because we've felt the sting as the Spirit crushes us with our failures to keep God's law. Because we've felt the utter joy of the gospel as the Spirit reminds us that our salvation and forgiveness are certain through faith in Jesus. Because we've lived a life of hatred and blind ignorance towards God, only to have the Spirit shatter our stony, unbelieving hearts and giving us spiritual sight through hearts of faith that fully grasp God's perfect love for the world in Christ. Because only people who know the pain of starvation can fully appreciate being fed, and the joy of pointing others to the one who can fill them.

We've been filled, brothers and sisters. Filled with the Holy Spirit so that you're empowered and equipped to share our Savior Jesus. Don't be afraid, frustrated, or apathetic. Your witness of the Word is always powerful, because the Holy Spirit always works through it, so that God's will is done!

Be filled, brothers and sisters. Be filled to overflowing with the Spirit through the Word, through baptism, through Holy Communion. It's like a pitcher pouring water into a cup. The cup fills until it overflows, and runs into everything around it. As God continues filling us with the Spirit, the Spirit overflows from us to all those around us. You are his messenger, dear Christian. Be filled. Trust in God. Keep sharing Jesus.