

Pentecost

DAVE BAST

Of all of the days in the life of the Christian Church during its nearly two thousand-year history, none has ever been as exciting and dramatic as the very first one, the Day of Pentecost. The very first Christian sermon was delivered by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. It established a pattern of authentic Christian preaching that continues to this day; and the early Church in Jerusalem described at the end of Acts also gives us a pattern of Christian community. It is the way it is supposed to be; all of this is the story of Pentecost.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and today we are beginning a series of programs, Scott, on the book of Acts; now that is a tall order, so we are not going to do the whole thing. We are going to pick and choose some of the high points – some of the great chapters – of Acts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is always good to look at Acts because, of course, it is instructive; it shows us where we began, and I think of the New Testament, where the Church begins sets a keynote in very many ways for what it is supposed to continue to be, but one of the reasons that I also like the book of Acts and when I was a preacher one of the reasons I liked to preach on it is that the book of Acts does not really pull any punches. It does not give us some idealized, sugar-coated picture of the early Church like back in the first days they had it all together, it is very honest about some of the failings of the early Church, some of the arguments even the Apostles had with each other; they disagreed now and then; but that is a good thing for us today, because how they handled that gives us a model for how we can handle it yet today in our times of disagreement or dysfunction or some of the things we fail at as well.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is a really good point, I think. In the very first story in the Bible we start in the Garden of Eden, and there is a perfect paradise before the fall into sin. Well, that really is not true in the story of the Church in the book of Acts. There is no perfect paradise; although the very beginning is pretty ideal under the influence and power of the Spirit. You know, Jesus had told his disciples – almost the last thing he said was I want you to go back and wait in Jerusalem and you will receive power; and on a Sunday morning somewhere around the year 30 A.D., it did happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right, and we can also note at the beginning of this series that Luke – the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke and addressed it to a Greek friend named Theophilus – Luke is also the author of Acts. Luke is one of the great storytellers of all scripture, as many of the stories in Luke's Gospel were utterly memorable, and many of them now in the book of Acts are memorable, starting with this one in Acts 2.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is the story of Pentecost; the Day of Pentecost – maybe again, another little note just for background – Pentecost means 50th, and it was a Jewish ceremony originally; one of the great festivals of the Jewish year that took place 50 days after the Passover. It happened on a Sunday; it is still celebrated on a Sunday every year – the 50th day after Good Friday. So, we take up the story in Acts 2:1:

When the Day of Pentecost came, they (that is, Jesus' followers) were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶And when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: Aren't these all who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia; ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia; Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism; ¹¹Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues." ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

DAVE BAST

So, that is the story, and maybe a good way to approach it, Scott, is just to pick up that question of the first onlookers: What does this mean? So we have these phenomena; there is the sound of a wind and...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Tongues of fire...

DAVE BAST

Tongues of fire dancing over their heads; and then they begin to speak in other languages.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is always a debate, actually, here, Dave, as you know, among commentators as to whether the Apostles were actually speaking in different languages or whether by a miracle of the Spirit they were speaking in their normal language, but everybody heard their own language. Was it a miracle of speaking or hearing? I do not think it really much matters; it was a very amazing miracle because that is quite a list of people. It is almost like a gathering of the United Nations or something; but it did not matter where they were from or how obscure the dialect of their language was, the Spirit opened mouths and/or ears and the Gospel was getting through to everybody. What an amazing symbol that was for what Jesus predicted; and that is that the Gospel was going to go out into all the earth.

DAVE BAST

It is absolutely that, and as you point out, we are not quite sure of the nature of this miracle, and it really does seem as if it is unrepeatable, or at least it has not been repeated; maybe there are reports here and there, I do not know; but the idea that they are not just uttering gibberish or speaking ecstatically; the emphasis that Luke places in the whole thing is not so much the nature of the languages or whether it was a miracle of speaking or hearing, but the content of what they were saying; that is what our attention is drawn to. How is it that we hear them declaring the mighty acts of God in our own languages? So, the focus is on the mighty acts of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A friend of mine, Beverly Gaventa, who teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote a commentary on Acts a few years ago, and I remember her telling me once that whenever people would say to her: Oh, you

are writing a commentary on Acts; what is Acts about? And she would say: It is about God. This is a story about God and God on the move. That is what happens here. These people hear the wonders of God – the mighty acts of God – in their own languages; and of courses, in just a few moments we are going to get to the content of Peter’s sermon and exactly what that was that they heard, but it is all about God. This is the story of God and God’s people establishing the Church and proclaiming the Good News.

DAVE BAST

Somebody has said that the name of the book really is not the Acts of the Apostles, as it is sometimes called; it is the Acts of the Holy Spirit, and the star of the book is the Gospel itself, not Paul, not Peter, not any human being; that is an important point as well, but in answer to that question, what do these things mean? Peter is the one who gets up, and he begins by saying: This is what was prophesied by the prophet Joel. This is the fulfillment of God’s promises; His ancient story in the Old Testament; this is happening now; that is what you are experiencing; and we want to look at how he develops that theme in detail in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are beginning in this program, Dave, a series of programs on the book of Acts, and we are in Acts Chapter 2 today, and the great Day of Pentecost, and you were just saying a moment ago, Dave, that the whole book of Acts is not really the acts of Apostles, it is the acts of the Holy Spirit. The whole book is about God, and God’s forward movement and God and the Holy Spirit is the hero of the story, not the Apostles; however, in Acts 2, Peter does shine. Peter, who Jesus renamed from Simon; he named him Petros, the rock – Rocky – you are the rock on which I am going to build my Church, although of course, as we all remember near the end of the Gospels when Jesus was arrested Peter the Rock ended up having feet of clay and he denied Jesus and ran scared for his life; but now, on the Day of Pentecost, transformed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter becomes one big, bold proclaimer of the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, Jesus had made a promise and a prediction just before his ascension, and it is described in Acts Chapter 1; we skipped that chapter, but to refer back to it, he said: I want you to wait in Jerusalem; and then he added: You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you – that is the promise – and the prediction: And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Well, here is Peter; he has received power, and now he has turned into a witness; and I do not know of any more compelling argument for the truth of the resurrection, the factuality of it, than in the Peter that we see on the last pages of the Gospel and the Peter that we see on the first pages of Acts, because at the end of the Gospel, he is cowering, he is weeping, he is full of remorse, he is so scared by the simple question of a serving girl: Hey, weren’t you one of his disciples? That he runs away and denies ever knowing Jesus; and now, six weeks later, he stands up in the middle of Jerusalem and addresses this crowd and says: You know what? You killed Jesus! Evilly, wickedly, but God has raised him up and we are witnesses of that. So, he has become the witness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We do not have time to read the entirety of Acts Chapter 2 here in Peter’s sermon, but indeed, he says: Look, God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep a hold on him. And then he has some quotes from the Old Testament there. He talks about David and David is dead and gone, he is still in his tomb, but not our Lord; not Jesus. So, in verse 36:

“Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” And Peter was so effective that the very next verse: ³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and they said to Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do?”

So, Peter is not only bold, he is very – by the power of the Spirit – very effective. They are cut to the quick. They are cut to the heart.

DAVE BAST

You know, there are a couple of things here that really jump out at me, and I know you do, too; we are both preachers by trade; that is really what we are; that is what we do; we are not terribly good at anything else, at least, I am not, and not as good as I would like to be at that even; but this is a great pattern that shows us what we are supposed to be doing – and really shows any Christian what to do when they are trying to share their faith. It is really a focus on Jesus; what God did in and through Jesus; it is based on the scriptures. As you point out, Peter just quotes passage after passage. He quotes from the prophecy of Joel about how in the last days this is what is going to happen and it is happening now; the last days have begun, he is saying. He quotes from the Psalms; the Psalms prophesied that God would not leave the soul of his servant in death or in Sheol, but he would bring him forth to life, and that could not have been applying to David, Peter says, because David is dead and buried here. He is talking about Jesus. So, he is basing what he says on the scriptures, but he is centering it on Christ. Christ is the heart of our message...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

And what he did. He died; he rose, and God has exalted him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is one of the great and clever things about Peter’s sermon; but it is also very important for us to notice that the Day of Pentecost and this miracle of speaking and hearing that we talked about; tongues of fire, violent wind, all of that – this feels brand new. All the people are like wow, this has never happened before. This is new. But Peter’s sermon says: It is not that new. We are continuing a story that has been going on ever since God said “Let there be light.” This is God’s ongoing story, and so he masterfully stitches together a couple of different psalms, a prophecy from Joel to say: Look, this is a new development, but it is not a new story. This is God’s story; God’s covenant being fulfilled in Jesus.

As you said, Dave, obviously not every sermon in the two thousand years since Pentecost has to match theme for theme exactly what Peter did here, but what we have here is the chassis for all preaching. All preaching is about Jesus, raised from the dead as Lord and Christ now. That is the one message the Church has to proclaim, and it has always been a temptation in Church history to talk about other things in the church. Even today, you can go to some places and people want to hear about successful living or tips for being successful in business or raising good kids, or something. Worthy things to think about, but when it comes to preaching, at the end of the day, whatever any given sermon is about or what text it is based on, it has to be about the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, I just was listening to a podcast sermon about a very, very outstanding preacher, a guy named Sinclair Ferguson, and he said: A lot of preaching today seems to take the Where’s Waldo approach – you know, those kids books where you are looking for Waldo – and the preacher is saying: Where are you in this story? Where are you in this story? Especially in the Gospels; where do you find yourself? And Ferguson said: The answer is, you are nowhere in this story. It is about Jesus. That is where the focus is. He is right. We have to begin there and only look at ourselves in relationship to him. He is the center; he is at the heart of it. So, it is not here are ten tips for how to be a better you; that is not really Christian preaching.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and it is not what cuts people to the heart either. What cuts them to the heart is the Good News. They said: What do we do? And in answer to the question Peter does not say: Well, here is how to become a better you; no, he just says: Look, ³⁸repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and all who are afar off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.

That was the message on the first day of the Church – on the Church's birthday, as we sometimes call it – and it is the exact same message we still have to proclaim today.

DAVE BAST

And it demands a response. So, we all have to ask: What must I do? If this is true, if God in Christ has dealt the decisive blow against sin and death and has created new life and he has given witness to that in power by the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Spirit, what does that mean for me? What does that mean for us as a church? We are going to see a picture of that, too, at the end of Acts Chapter 2. We will go there next.
Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are in Acts Chapter 2 today, digging into the story of Pentecost. We have already seen, Dave, the drama of the day. We have looked at a good bit of the content of Peter's amazing sermon, where he makes it clear that this is a continuation of the story of God; but of course, among other things, this is also – as we said just a moment ago – the birthday of the Church, and some of what we see here in Acts 2, in many ways, gives us a blueprint.

Our friend, Neal Plantinga, in his book on sin some years ago had the title: *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, but in many ways in terms of the Church, Acts 2 gives us a little bit of the blueprint of the way it is supposed to be in the Church. I think we could probably, very quickly here as we close out this program, notice three or four – we could call them marks of the Church or characteristics of the Church that we see on display in this chapter.

DAVE BAST

Right, and we did point out earlier, this is not perfection; this is not the Garden of Eden; and in our very next program we are going to see deep flaws that still existed even in the earliest church, but there is a wonderful description in verse 42 of Acts Chapter 2 of how it was with these first Christians in Jerusalem. Incidentally, three thousand people were converted on the Day of Pentecost when they heard Peter's sermon; so immediately the Church goes from about 120 to over three thousand, and it seemed to be growing almost day by day as more and more people came.

⁴²So they devoted themselves (Luke writes) to the Apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the Apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶And every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all of the people, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. And no wonder, if you had a fellowship like that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, we can lift very quickly just out of that tag – those tag verses of Acts Chapter 2 – I think we can lift out a few things that have been true of the true Church ever since Acts 2 and the Day of Pentecost, and need to be true. The first one is being devoted to the Apostles' teachings.

I heard somebody a while back ask a well-known theologian: What if the Apostles got some stuff wrong?

What if they got it wrong? And his answer was: Then we are lost. Then we have been off the beam from the

beginning and there is no such thing as a Christian Church. It is just all a lie. We have to believe they got it right. So, that is the first characteristic that we are devoted – to this day, now – the Apostles are long dead and gone, gone to be in glory with God, but we are devoted to what they said is true about Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, and thankfully, they have left their teaching to us in written form. One of the marks of the scriptures of the New Testament that the Church looked for was apostolicity. That means either an Apostle wrote it or it came from very close; maybe one of his disciples actually wrote it down; and so, really, from Matthew to Revelation, each of the New Testament books bears this characteristic that it embodies in some form the teaching of an Apostle that is an authorized eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection; and therefore, an authoritative teacher of the truth of what this means.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as the people – as we continue ticking through what we learn here at the end of Acts Chapter 2 – as they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching – they had that in common, that they were devoted to that teaching – a very tight fellowship formed. They found a community in which they shared, and they wanted to be together; they wanted to help each other; the love of Jesus was oozing out of this community all over the place after the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, and it led to this bond of fellowship and of communal sharing and of supporting each other.

DAVE BAST

Yes, well you know, Communism comes from the same root word as communal or community; and they did seem to hold things in common. Now, again, as we look at the rest of Acts, we see that this is not absolutely one hundred percent true. It was voluntary. It was not imposed. It did not last forever. They did not abolish private property; but the key thing, I think, to see here is that there was an authentic and genuine meeting of one another's needs; and the Church has to still be about that today. Somehow, some way, we need to find ways of relieving the needs of those who are in want and sharing out of our abundance when God has blessed us with more.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you just have to think that that stemmed at least in part from the fact that what was one of the core teachings of the Apostles? They devoted themselves – well, the core teaching that Peter and the others offered was Jesus gave himself up for us; he sacrificed himself for us; he gave his all. That set the tone for the community: Well, if he did that; if that is our leader, then we give. We give sacrificially. We give to support each other, too. How could you follow that Jesus and then be stingy; it does not make any sense.

DAVE BAST

Well, then, we move on to the next thing, which Luke calls the "breaking of bread," and pretty clearly a little bit later he says they ate meals together; so they had this fellowship on that level, too; but really, most Christian commentators, all the way back to the early Church, have seen in this phrase something a little bit deeper than merely having a sandwich together after the service, or a cookie and coffee. The breaking of the bread really is the central act of worship in the early Church; the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Worship, really, worship of the risen Lord through his Spirit, and even experiencing the presence of the Lord in the sacrament is at the heart.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Luke basically never uses the phrase "breaking bread" without meaning basically the Lord's Supper, as we would call it today; so that was certainly true then.

Then the final – the final thing that we see – the fourth thing that we can see in the early Church, which sets a tone that needs to continue to be true for us today is a sense of mission. The Holy Spirit compels us to mission, to bring in more and more. If we know the best news; if we know the best story that has ever been told, then we do not keep it to ourselves; we keep telling it to more and more; and indeed, they did. They kept adding more to their number, and it did not happen automatically. People went out and got these people.

DAVE BAST

Right; well, you know, there is that last word in verse 42: Prayer – so, prayer is a bridge; okay, prayer is part of our worship, but prayer is really prayer for your kingdom to come, Lord; and show me what I need to do so it bridges over into the mission of the Church, the outreach; and this wonderful, natural thing in the life of a church that is devoted to the authority of God's word, that is proclaiming it faithfully, that is practicing genuine fellowship, that is worshipping the Triune God in the power of the Spirit and praying for outreach – here come the people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen to that. Well, thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we always like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So, visit groundworkonline.com and tell us topics and passages that you would like us to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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