

Natalie Ford-Cowling
 Pentecost
 May 23, 2010

Gifts of the Spirit
Acts 2

Since the 1997 debut of the energy drink *Red Bull*, people have turned to such juices to give them an extra boost, a little edge—to get past exhaustion, to make it through finals, just to hype up.

And the *vitamin* market?

Notice how many vitamins have things like Gingko and Gingseng for energy now?

I was listening to a 60 minutes special a few weeks ago about college kids taking adhd stimulant prescriptions to give them an edge in class!

All this talk of energy and focus, and the need for a little more drive....
 if you watched enough commercials I guess you might think we've all been dozing.

Of course we all get weary and lose motivation from time to time....

But what is it that we're really after??

I think it's a bit more than a super caffeine jolt....

I think we need something to *fill* us up, when we run dry.

I think we need a fire within us to *inspire* us with something beyond ourselves.

I think we need some true *encouragement* to keep going, and to excel.

And the Bible says that the something we need is a *Someone*—the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is all about the *Holy Spirit*.

The name pente-cost means fifty, 50 days after Passover.

It was the Jewish festival of the harvest

and the memorial of the ten commandments

but just like Passover, Jesus gave new *meaning to Pentecost*.

In Acts 2 it becomes something far more than a harvest or law memorial.

It is the coming of the Holy Spirit, the gift promised to them by Jesus.

It was the coming of wind and fire---of energy and excitement in the church!

It's what we call the '*birthday of the church*'!

See, Jesus had promised to send them Someone after he was gone—
 a Holy Spirit—a Counselor, an Advocate, a Helper,
 A spirit of Truth, his own Spirit.

*And on Pentecost, when Jesus' followers were gathered together,
 devoting themselves to prayer
 And suddenly from heaven there came the sound of a rushing wind into the
 room, and tongues of fire appeared on each one of their heads. They were
 filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the
 Spirit gave them ability.*

The Holy Spirit came, in—**wind and fire**.
 Both were symbols of God's power and presence.
 Wind was synonymous with God's breath & new life.
 And fire?

Remember the burning bush?
 Or God leading by a pillar of fire by night?
 people knew wind and fire were symbols of God.

We call Pentecost the **birthday of the church**—
 because the Holy Spirit came upon the believers
 gave them gifts or abilities---
 and those gifts created the church, bringing people together.

It all began when each one received the ability to talk about God's love in
 different languages— not unintelligible tongues,
 But the languages of the people gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost!
 They spoke in foreign languages,
 And when people heard the good news in their native tongue
 they were amazed, many of them stayed to hear Peter preach his
 first sermon, and 3,000 of them were baptized--right on the spot.
 The church was born.

The entire book of Acts is about the **early church**,
 and the fire of the Holy Spirit inside it.

To be honest, the two cannot be separated—Christians and the Spirit.
 The church was literally created by the Spirit,
 it was the Holy Spirit that inspired and enabled everything the
 Christians did and said.

In the book of Acts we see the church as a whole grow, in faith and numbers, to be God's power at work in the world.

We also see *individuals on fire* with the Holy Spirit inside them, enabling them to do the extraordinary—to stand firm amidst persecution, to preach, to teach, to heal or to serve.

And here's the *best part*—

this same Spirit is available to us today.

The Spirit that enabled those first believers to preach in different languages, the Spirit that set them on fire, is the same Spirit available to each one of us.

We too, have been *given gifts*, maybe not to speak in a foreign tongue, But maybe to pray, or teach, or usher, greet, count, or sing.

And *our gifts*---our gifts make the church the church!

Remember 1 Corinthians 12, we are all members of the body,
With spiritual gifts from God?

Together we make up the church, the body of Christ!

That's the work of the Holy Spirit!

and the power of the Holy Spirit goes well beyond
what we can even dream or imagine.

Unfortunately, in our *denomination* there's a real hesitancy

to talk about this Holy Spirit. It's kind of the stepchild of the trinity.
It's hard because we can't understand God & Jesus better.

But the Holy Spirit is *crucial*—it's the part of God that lives inside us.

I like how one Pastor Jim Cymbala warned Christians about the Holy Spirit,

That we don't want to become cemetery churches...where the Spirit is dead.
We need the wind & the fire!

The *early church* only existed because of the Holy Spirit at work among them.

It was created by the Spirit, sustained by the Spirit.

Unfortunately, that's not always the case in churches today.

Author and pastor A.W. Tozer said once,
*“If the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference.
 If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.*

I don't want that to be true of us, nor of this church.

We need to be on fire.

To know and experience God's Spirit at work—
 in our hearts, and in our church!

We've sure *seen and experienced* the Spirit's power!

Have you strolled through VBS?

Or visited with our Malawi friends or missionary Debbie Chase?

Or helped with the backpacks?

Or seen the families on Easter?

Tozer also said this,

*“God dwells in a state of perpetual enthusiasm...
 whatever else happened at Pentecost, one thing that that cannot be missed
 was the sudden upsurging of enthusiasm. Those first disciples burned with a
 steady, inward fire. They were enthusiastic to the point of complete
 abandon.*

That's something to hope for right here.

It's the Holy Spirit that gives meaning to our worship

that enables people to be touched

by sermons and music and prayers.

It's the Holy Spirit that makes what happens in here

Change lives out there.

It's the **Holy Spirit that stirs in our hearts** so we want to serve and reach out

It's the Holy Spirit that enables us to share our stories of faith

It's the Holy Spirit that sets our hearts on fire so much

that we can't help but share, and serve and reach out!

If we rely upon this amazing Spirit

We don't get burned out or tired out

We have the energy to get up and get out!

We need this Spirit to fill us up,
 When we don't have God's fire within us,
 we start to wither and die...
 We want to resign from our lives, or our faith.

We need the Holy Spirit in our lives.
 To **guide** us, to counsel us, to teach us the truth.
 We need the Spirit to give us **meaning** and purpose in life.
 We need the Spirit to **inspire us and enable** us to do what we
 could never do without God's power.

So, **how do we tap** into this power?

It's in us—God's Spirit.

But it's also something we pray for—and wait for
 the disciples were all waiting and praying together
 when the Spirit arrived.

We too need to wait and pray
 because the Spirit is not our power to do with what we please...
 The Bible says it blows where it will.

But it's a power that is ours for the asking.

Even though it's inside of us, it can be **filled and refilled**,
 just like our faith is always there, but may need a booster shot sometimes...
 Acts 4:8 is but one time when it says *and Peter,*
filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them....

Peter and all believers received the Holy Spirit when God's wind and fire burst
 into that room on Pentecost.

But Peter, like all of us, had to be **filled and refilled** with the Spirit.
 A **lake** is always full of water
 But sometimes it runs low
 And it depends upon the rain and the rivers to keep it going.

It's already inside of us,

But we have to allow the Spirit to work within us.

When **Peter was filled** with the Spirit,
 He was able to speak God's word, to preach, to heal—
 to do extraordinary things for God!

When the ***first Christians were filled*** with the Spirit
they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.
They held all things in common,
sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds to all.

Just imagine what God can enable us to do—
each and every one of us, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Today you have the ***opportunity*** to celebrate the Spirit,
And the birthday of the church,
To celebrate the gifts of the Spirit in your life,
And to share them with this amazing church!

No gift is too big or too small, no talent unneeded,
The Spirit is at work in all of us,
I pray our hearts will be moved with reckless abandon & enthusiasm
and that we will offer ourselves to God in this time and place!

May God bless us, and fill us with the Spirit, Amen.