

Sermon AMC- Whom He Calls He Enables

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Sunday, June 4, 2017

Today is the 50th day since Easter. Why is that important? Because on the 50th day, the worldwide church celebrates the festival of Pentecost, which was considered the most important festival in the life of the church second only to Easter. Incidentally, Pentecost literally means 50 in Biblical Greek. Now of course nobody who lives in the US will guess that for the church the order of importance is Easter, Pentecost and then Christmas because the culture has its own ideas about what is the important festival to celebrate. Anyway, just to give you some background, for the Jewish people, they too had three super important festivals, Passover, the Festival of the Tabernacle and the Festival of the First fruits or Harvest the festival of weeks. For these three festivals the Jews were expected to travel to Jerusalem wherever they lived. When you take the Passover Sabbath and count 50 days, you get the Festival of weeks or First Fruits. It so happens that these two Jewish festivals are echoes of two of the most important Christian festivals, because the Sabbath after the Passover is the celebration of Easter and on the 50th day after Easter, you get Pentecost. I go through this background because if you want to understand the true meaning of the festival of Pentecost then you have to understand, the Jewish celebration it was actually replacing. But there are a few for back ground details I need to draw your attention to. The first is that, whenever God's present was said to be manifest in the Old Testament, you would always get an audible effect and a visual effect. So for example in Ex 19:16-19 where God is appearing to give his people the law on Mount Sinai, God appears with thunder, lighting and fire. Our passage today also alludes to another Old testament passage, in Num 11:16 where Moses complains to God about the tremendous burden it was on him to lead these stubborn and rebellious people and God then raises 70 elders on whom he sends his spirit as a one-time act to enable these chosen people to share Moses' burden. And because of God's spirit on them they start

prophesying. Now in our passage, what we have is another gathering, this time of about 120 of Jesus' disciples and suddenly, like a roaring of a mighty windstorm, the Spirit of God descends into the room. Visually it looks something like a big flame or tongue of fire. And this fire then separates out into individual tongues of fire and settles on each of their heads. And when that happens, those individuals are filled with the Holy Spirit and they manifest the infilling of the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues. Just to clarify, there are two kinds of speaking in tongues in the New Testament. The one that Apostle Paul refers to in 1 Cor 14 and other places which is described as an "ecstatic spirit language" which is not understandable by the people around. The term of this ecstatic spirit language is "glossolalia". Then there is the kind of speaking in tongues that our passage is referring to. This is called "xenolalia" and is the power to speak in a different but actual human language. Xenolalia does not appear anywhere else except in this passage.

Another thing to note is that this ability was given not to any international group of people. These 120 were all Galileans and Galileans were known as people with limited language skills. That makes this miracle all the more powerful.

As they began speaking, their tongues they actually spoke was very really diverse. In verse 10, the first set of languages are from Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia . Now all these places had significant Jewish populations. But it list of countries actually fulfills a promise made by God to Abraham in Gen 15:18- I have given you this whole land from Border of Egypt to the Euphrates. The list then goes on to mention the names of two North African countries, Egypt and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and finally the capital of the empire, Rome, itself. Those who get to experience this divine presence was both Jews and proselytes (converts to Judaism). The final two groups come the Mediterranean on the East of Israel and the Arabs from the south of Israel.

And what were these Holy Spirit filled disciples actually saying in these various tongues? They were “declaring the wonders of God” to all the people from the various regions of the world I just mentioned.

Now as all these disciples were speaking in these various tongues, the people around them were really amazed and asking “what’s going on?”. To that Apostle Peter then gets up and explains that what they were observing was nothing but the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. IN that prophecy, it was predicted that in the last days, God would pour on his spirit on “all flesh”, young and old, male and female, and they would prophesy, that means speak a message of God to the people. And they would do it, till all the end times signs take place. That means till the return of the Jesus Christ. What is the purpose of these Holy Spirit manifestations? So that people would repent and be saved. That was the only purpose.

Now that we have taken a look at the main background details of our passage, we are ready to look at the chronological context of this event. For the church, the church year really starts with Easter or Resurrection Sunday. This is the day, Christ rises from the dead thereby proving all his I Am sayings and all the prophecies and proving without a doubt that he was God. Now that the Resurrected Christ retakes all this divine power and authority, what does he do next? He appears to all his disciples commissions them with a task. The task he asks them to do is to go and preach the Gospel and make disciples everywhere from Jerusalem all the way to the ends of the earth. But Jesus also knows that going and sharing the Gospel to the ends of the world is one of the most challenging assignment that has ever been given to anybody. Because that would mean going to people who would be hostile to the message they are going to share, there would be cultural and language differences, there would be the material expense of the task and to top it all of there is God’s enemy who is always looking for ways to mess whatever God is trying to do. Jesus Christ is not ignorant of the challenges his disciples will face. He knows the challenges better than anybody else. But he has a plan for his disciples. So

Jesus Christ after he gives them the assignment, actually tells them that they should not run off the start doing the job. They were to wait for further instructions and prepare by gathering together and praying. So that is what they do. The disciples prepare for their task by praying together and waiting for God to show up and give them further instructions. After exactly 50 days, when it was time to celebrate the festival of the gathering of the First fruits, God shows up in a mighty way, with a big roar like a windstorm and like a blazing fire and He empowers his disciples to go out and start sharing the Gospel and gathering the first fruits. Suddenly, Jesus' Jewish disciples eyes were opened to see why for hundred's of years they were celebrating the festival of the First fruits 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. You see the Passover Sabbath was pointing forward to the liberation from sin and the ultimate Sabbath rest that comes from the liberation from the bondage of sin and death that Jesus Christ had come to earth to give his people. The Sabbath rest was the good news that Jesus' disciples were asked to share to the whole world. And exactly 50 days after Jesus conquers sin and death, he sends his spirit on his disciples to enable them to fulfill their calling and bring in the harvest of souls. When God gives a commission, it is a God sized commission. And when he calls someone to the task, he always equips those who he has called to fulfill the task. He has done that over and over, whether it was helping Adam name the animals, or Noah building a boat or Abraham demonstrating the meaning of faith or Moses leading a whole race of people out of Egypt or any of the New Testament people, the pattern by friends you cannot miss is this, God call out people to be his servants, he will give them a clear but very challenging task and then he will equip them to fulfill that task. He calls, he assigns and he enables.

Let me give you an example of how this works. Lars Olsen is one of the most famous Norwegian missionaries and founder of a mission society. But before he was a missionary, Lars was nothing more than a bum on the streets. He was an alcoholic with a wayward lifestyle. In 1858 he was arrested and put in prison for theft. But God works in mysterious ways and when he was in prison he heard the Gospel, gave his life to Christ and felt a call to be a missionary. So while he was still in prison he received this gift for

mastering languages. So he learned English and German while he was still in prison. Now because he was an ex-con the Norwegian mission board would not accept him. But that is where his German came in handy because he was then accepted by a German mission board. Now the Germans sent him to work among a tribal group called the Santals in Northern Calcutta in 1863. These were a people who spoke a language that did not even have a written form. Lars Olsen not only learned their language but also created a script for it, then translated the whole Bible into the Santal language, produced a hymnal in native tunes, wrote text books and other books in the native language and also made disciples so that at the time of his death Dec 11, 1910 there were 15,000 to 20,000 believers in the Santal community because of his work. Remember before Lars Olsen was called by God, he was just an alcoholic behind bars. When God calls, he equips and empowers and enables with nothing less than his own power to accomplish the task that he is calling is for.

The question for us is have you experienced this power of God in your life? Well, I am not talking about tongues of fire or even God appearing with big bangs of sound. There was only one Day of Pentacoste. God did not keep sending tongues of fire, but what he has never stopped doing is sending his power on his servants to do what he has called them to do. Now I am not going to ask for the show of hands but I want you to think about this carefully. If you have not experienced God's power in your life it is either because you have not received God in your life or if you have received God you have not taken the trouble to do something specifically for God in your life. You see the way it works is like this. God first calls you to do some. Then you realize that this task is completely beyond your capacity. You realize your inadequacy and you ask God to empower you. And He comes through for you. That is the kind of power that I am talking about. I really want you to experience this kind of empowerment because then you will feel like God is very real in your life and others around you will also see that God is very real in your life. When that happens they will also start praising God. And that is the whole point of God making Himself known to us.

Let's just take a little time in silent meditation to ask God what he is calling us to do today and what is He calling us to do next? Is it a God sized task? Then surely you need God's power to accomplish it. So pray for clarity and power. And then watch God do his thing in your life.