

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
June 26, 2022
Scripture: Acts 2: 14-41

Sermon: The Start of Something Big

I have read that the number one fear that people have is the fear of public speaking. It ranks ahead of the fear of death! **Glossophobia, or a fear of public speaking, is a very common phobia, and one that is believed to affect up to 75% of the population.** Some individuals may feel a slight nervousness at the very thought of public speaking, while others experience full-on panic and fear.

The fear of speaking in public would increase if a person knew that he or she would be speaking to a hostile audience. Add to that the fact that the audience is not just a small group, but at least five to ten thousand hostile people, and you must address them without a microphone. To make matters worse, you have no time to prepare your message. The opportunity presents itself and you're on without any notes!

Such was the situation facing Peter on the Day of Pentecost. The sound of rushing wind from heaven had drawn a large crowd, which then heard all the believers speaking of the great deeds of God in the many different languages of the people.

This perplexed them as they asked, "What does this mean?" But the others in the crowd were mocking and accusing the believers of being drunk but they weren't drunk they were filled with the Spirit of God that day. They were filled with joy beyond measure and were overflowing with joy.

It was to this Jewish crowd, in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been killed just over seven weeks ago, that Peter delivered the sermon that launched the church—it was the start of something big. In terms of results, about 3,000 people got saved that day and it was one of the

greatest sermons ever preached—in fact, it was the first sermon preached after the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is the first of fifteen sermons in the Acts of the Apostles book. Many of them are by the Apostle Paul, one of them is by James and another by Stephen and the rest are by Peter.

What in the world has happened to Peter? Wasn't Peter the one who denied knowing Jesus in the courtyard? Something extraordinary has gripped the heart of Peter. We've already seen him in chapter one with the disciples, reading scripture, reading Psalms, exhorting the disciples that Judas must now be replaced by another in order that the number be made twelve again, so Matthias is chosen. Peter is taking a leadership role with Jesus gone.

Peter stands up in this large crowd of people and boldly proclaims this wonderful and extraordinary and powerful sermon that grew the church that day. Peter's heart had changed, and he was ready to share what this all meant.

What happened to Peter, of course, is that he has seen the resurrected Jesus. In the six weeks from the resurrection to Pentecost, God has brought this backslidden, timid and fearful disciple to a place of extraordinary usefulness and power.

Half the book of Acts is about the Apostle Paul, but half of the book of Acts is about Peter and his journey of faith and the extraordinary power that God infused in this restored disciple.

We are all like Peter in many ways. Many times we are timid and fearful and may even deny our Lord, but there is a wonderful lesson here. No matter how great our sins are, no matter how poorly we may have failed him in the past, that doesn't mean that we are forever confined to some back-room closet. God restores, forgives, and can take a broken vessel like Peter and remake him into something useful for the work of his Kingdom.

In Peter's sermon, he begins with a connection back to Joel 2, showing that God's great promise is being fulfilled. The Jews longed for the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, which the scripture foretold would come through David's son being seated on Israel's throne who

would, in turn, rule not just Israel but to the ends of the earth. The Messiah would usher in a time of peace and healing. The Jews would be longing for this because they had been under captivity and foreign occupation for nearly 700 years. Joel, among other prophets, said that strange things would happen in those days with the pouring out of God's Spirit. There would be great wonders in the heavens and signs on earth, social and political upheaval leading up to the judgment day. Peter was saying, this is what is happening right here, right now. This is why God's Messiah has come.

Peter also quotes David from Psalm 16 concerning the resurrection of his descendent—the Christ. Jesus was raised by God, and we all are witnesses. Peter said we saw him, spent time with him, he is not just back from the dead but resurrected.

Can you imagine what was going on in the mind of this crowd when they heard Peter's sermon? They had been waiting for thousands of years for God's messiah, for deliverance and for salvation, and now Peter is so excited to tell them about how their lives can be changed by knowing and believing in Jesus.

This is where this sermon comes to us when we see God doing for us, in Christ, what we could not do for ourselves. We cannot redeem ourselves, as much as our world tries to convince us of this. We cannot create a utopia on earth, and we cannot bring ourselves the peace, the healing, the rest, the true home our hearts long for.

Many people believe that "This life is all there is," so why do so many people long for something beyond this life? Could their longings be a sign that God is real, and God is working in their lives to show them that there is more to life beyond what we can see now?

St. Augustine said, "If there is a God who created you, then the deepest chambers of your soul simply cannot be filled up by anything less." And he also said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

God our Creator is our true home. But we are lost and separated from God by our sin; we cannot get back to God on our own. And since we cannot, God sends his one and only son, Immanuel, God with us, to do

what we cannot do. Jesus suffered the punishment we deserve. Jesus brings us to God so we will know and experience the healing, love, rest, peace and home our hearts need but alone we cannot attain.

When you realize it was your sin, that put Jesus on the cross, that he died because of his great love for you, to bring you into God's kingdom and rescue you.

The people said to Peter, "What shall we do?" Peter's answer was simple: Repent and be baptized. This will result in the forgiveness of sins and the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

When you are baptized there is a new freedom, a new family, a new identity, and a new community of faith – the church.

When you have the Holy Spirit come into your life it changes you from the inside out. God offers everyone redemption, forgiveness of sins and restoration.

Peter calls the people to repent. Repentance and faith are flip sides of the same coin. You can't have saving faith without true repentance. Repentance means a change of direction in a person's life and turning away from the ways of the world and living a Spirit-filled way of life and realizing the mercy and grace we have all received from God.

In February 1739, George Whitefield, an evangelist whom God raised up, was preaching outside a coal mine in Bristol, England. Coal mining was a dangerous job and men would be underground for days working. When the men would finally emerge, their faces would be blackened by the soot, and as they emerged from the mine, George Whitefield was there preaching a sermon, a sermon full of Christ, as Peter's was on the Day of Pentecost.

When the coalminers listened to George Whitefield preach about Jesus, tears came down their cheeks, and hundreds of coalminers with these white streaks down their faces, their blackened faces, as the tears gushed forth as they heard the redeeming message of the gospel and like at Pentecost they were added to the church.

The well-known evangelist Billy Graham had over 400 crusades and preached to over 215 million people over his years of ministry.

You see. Pentecost isn't just about that day. There's a sense in which we, too, long for and should pray for the outpouring of the Spirit, that God would continue to bring thousands to be filled with the Spirit.

Let us pray that we will be a part of the start of something big each day we share the love of God and invite others to be a part of the Kingdom. Remember, God will fill you with the Holy Spirit and use you just like he used the fisherman Peter.

Remember what Peter said to the people, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." *(Acts 2: 37-39)*

Repent, turn toward Jesus, believe he forgives you and serve the Lord with a joyful heart trusting in the saving grace of Christ.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." *(Acts 2:21)*