

the provision of Pentecost

- Congratulations to **all** our grads!

Let's pray.

Ok, let me start with a question this morning.

2 questions actually.

1. **How important is** the death and resurrection of Jesus to the Christian faith and life?
 - How important is the death and resurrection of Jesus **to your faith and life?**
2. How **important is Pentecost** – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – to the Christian faith and life?
 - **To your faith and life?**

I pose the question because, as we come to our text today – to **Acts 2** – the story of Pentecost – we need to know that this story is not just another biblical story. That this event is not just another interesting moment in the story of Scripture.

No! This event – **Pentecost** – as recorded for us in Acts 2 – is **at the very heart of the gospel.**

For without Pentecost, the Christian life would be utterly impossible, and the death and resurrection of Jesus would be meaningless.

And I know that is **a bold statement** – but it is what the Bible declares.

As the Apostle Paul states succinctly in **Romans 8:9** – "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ."

Reflecting on this and other New Testament texts, John Stott, the great British Bible teacher, wrote years ago,

"Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the Life-Giver, no understanding without the Spirit of Truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from His fruit, and no effective witness without His power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead."

And so, as we turn together today to **Acts 2** – to the story of **Pentecost** – we need to **know** that we are turning to **a game-changing moment** in the Story of God and God's work in the world... In the Story of the gospel... ***As significant for us as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ...***

So, if you have Bible with you, let's turn together to **Acts 2:1f** and let's dive into this Story of stories...

And it all begins with **these words, (Acts 2:1)**

"When the day of **Pentecost** came..."

Right there, we are invited to recognize that Pentecost was already something – and not just something, but a significant event in the life of the Jewish community in Jesus' day. **(It still is.)**

This year, 2018, Pentecost was celebrated last month on May 20th – **50 days** after Easter (April 1).

And this insight – that Pentecost comes **50 days** after Easter or Passover – gives us our first window into the meaning and significance of Pentecost.

The greek word *Pentecost* literally means **50th**. In Hebrew, it's called *Shavu'ot*, which means "**weeks**" – because this Feast comes a week of weeks after Passover.

For the Jewish people, the year is divided up by three great Feasts or Festivals – **Passover**, Pentecost (or Shavuot) and the Feast of Tabernacles. Together, these three Feasts tell the story of God's saving grace to Israel – rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, providing for them in the Wilderness, and making covenant with them.

And not only do they recount these stories, but they all align with different moments in the agricultural calendar. The Passover marks the beginning of the barley harvest – and Pentecost, it's completion – and then the beginning of the wheat harvest...

According to tradition (and biblical command), at **Passover**, a Jewish priest would bring two sheaves of *barley* on behalf of the people as an offering to God (trusting Him for the harvest to come), and **50 days, or 7 weeks, or a week of weeks later**, they would gather to **celebrate Shavuot – Pentecost** – the Feast of Weeks, **the**

Feast of the Harvest, bringing now **two whole fresh loaves** as an offering to God—an expression of their thankfulness for God's provision, *and trust for more to come...*

Simply put: the Feast of Pentecost celebrates **God's provision... how God has provided for the needs of His people.**

And they did this in accordance with God's commands.

Exodus 23:16, "Celebrate the Feast of the Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in the field".

Deuteronomy 16:9f, God instructs Israel:

"Count off **seven weeks** from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. **Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks** to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you. And **rejoice** before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows living among you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees..."

Note that this was a celebration **for all.**

Not just for the Israelites who owned land – but for their servants too, and the Levites, and the foreigners among them, and the fatherless and the widows... **Pentecost was a time to share the bounty of God's provision with everyone!**

By law, since during this Feast they were to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt, *no one* could do any laborious work on this day... Not even the servants. **Everyone** took the day off and was

invited to join the Feast. ***Jerusalem must have been a great place to be during Pentecost.***

And so, although ***not the most important*** of the three great Jewish festivals, many would come from all around to Jerusalem to join in and celebrate this Feast. Which is what we find in **Acts 2**.

V.5 says, "*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*" They'd come from all around to **celebrate God's faithful** and sufficient provision.

Now over the years, Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, came to represent and celebrate **something else as well** – more than just God's provision of the Harvest.

It came to also represent and celebrate of **the Giving of the Law** to Israel. Which, to us, could seem like that moment on the first day of summer camp when they sit you down and tell you all of the rules. But that's not at all what the 10 Commandments meant and mean for the Jews. The 10 commandments were a gift of grace – the sign and terms of the covenant God made, in grace, with Israel – declaring Israel as His people, and He as their God.

The giving of the Law was God's **gift** to the Israelites at Mt Sinai – that they might continue to live in the freedom of God!

Which, according to the biblical record, took place roughly **50**

days after the Passover – **50 days** after God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt... **Seven weeks** into their sojourn in the wilderness, they arrived at Mt. Sinai and Moses went up to receive the Law.

So not only did (and does) **Pentecost** celebrate God's provision of the Harvest, but it also celebrates God's provision of the Law.

As a custom, some Ultra-orthodox Jews **in our day**, stay up all night before Pentecost, reading and studying the Scriptures in celebration of the Gift of the Law.

So this is **the meaning, the significance and the story of Pentecost** – the stories and gifts that would have filled the minds and imaginations of the Israelites as they'd gather for this Feast – a Feast to celebrates their God who Provides...

And this remembrance of God's provision fueled their hope that God would continue to Provide...

That's what all the Feasts sought to do – to remind us of what God has done in the past and give us hope for Him to do it again... the rescue... to provide... to hear the cries of the broken... to meet us in the wilderness.

But, as the names **Pentecost** and **Shavuot** both convey, this

Feast is intimately bound up in and really **the culmination of** the previous feast – **Passover**...

Pentecost celebrates the conclusion of the barley harvest which began at Passover.

Pentecost celebrates the giving of the Law, God's covenant with Israel – which was **the goal** of God's saving action in the Exodus. Right? God's desire wasn't simply to deliver them from slavery, but to claim them as His people – to make them a people for His glory. A people who bear His Name – who represent His will and ways in the world...

So, again, this is what is going on in Jerusalem as we come to **the second chapter of Acts** – the Feast of Pentecost. God-fearing Jews from everywhere have gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate God's faithful and sufficient provision of their needs – in both the harvest and the Law...

And the apostles and disciples were there (120 of them – men and women) in Jerusalem – not just because it was the Festival, but because Jesus Himself had instructed them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift the Father promised – the Holy Spirit...

Clearly, Jesus understood the significance of this moment.

In fact, as Acts 2 will reveal, *this is was exactly what Jesus*

intended.

And so, on this day of great celebration of the provision of God in the past – we read – **Acts 2:2f.**

"Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (other languages) as the Spirit enabled them.

(v.5) Now there *were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.*

Utterly amazed, they *asked: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors to Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!'*

Amazed and *perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'"*

Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'

We'll stop there.

What an incredible scene. Rich with God's action on all sides – **trying to get our attention** – along with all those present that day.

Imagine the experience of it all – **in the context of the Feast of Pentecost – the Feast that celebrates the provision of God...**

First the mysterious sound of a violent wind filling the house where the disciples of Jesus were gathered.

Then the appearance of flames in the room, separating and descending on each one.

It sounds crazy to us – inexplicable and perplexing!

And yet, is this not strikingly reminiscent of **Exodus 19** – the story and experience of God giving of the law to Israel on Mt. Sinai!

The very story that Pentecost was all about...?!

Exodus 19:16f

"On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightening, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently..."

The Holy God had come near – to give them the Law – by which they would now live – in His ways – as His people! This is the story that they would have been retelling in this Feast.

But on THIS day – on THIS Pentecost – in Acts ch.2 – 50 days after the death and resurrection of Jesus – God provided – not the Law of God – but the Empowering Presence of God Himself – the Spirit of God – to live in and empower all of Jesus' disciples.

We're told that they were all "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" and they all start speaking in languages they did not formerly know.

And *with this*, a crowd outside, which numbered in the thousands, gathered down below because *every one of them* heard their own language being spoken!!! And they didn't just hear their

own language being spoken. They heard ***the wonders of God being declared*** in their own mother tongues!!!

God's Himself was speaking through the disciples. The Spirit of God inspired and empowered the disciples of Jesus to witness to the glory of God!

Think again about the context of all this: the Feast of Pentecost.

For centuries the Israelites had gathered for the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of the Harvest, the Feast of Pentecost – **50 days** after Passover – to celebrate God's provision of the Harvest and of the Law...

The Law to guide their lives and the harvest to sustain them day by day...

A **Harvest** that would always be depleted, and the **Law** that was impossible to keep (for them, just as much as for us today).

Oh, I'm sure the disciples felt this – in the wake of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension – as they waited in Jerusalem.

They knew that they were not up to all that Jesus asked of them – to all that Jesus wanted of them and for them...

But here, in the grace of the gospel – on this great day of Pentecost – Jesus – who'd died and been raised and ascended to the

right hand of the Father – ***now poured out the Spirit – providing for their – and our – deepest need.***

For without this – the call of Christ – to live in the way of Christ – **is impossible!** None of us can do it.

Oh, we can be religious. But not righteous.

Not without Christ Himself alive in us...

And in the grace of the gospel – at Pentecost – this is exactly what God has done. He has poured out His Spirit on all who bow to Jesus. ***He has provided for our deepest need – with Himself –*** that we might live today as followers of Jesus ***by the Spirit – by the grace of God's very life in us.***

This is how Peter explained all this to the gathered crowds that day. He quoted the prophet Joel **(Joel 2:28f)**

*'In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your young men will see visions,
Your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
And they will prophesy.*

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the same event...

Jeremiah 31:31f

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them... This is the covenant I

*will make with the people of Israel after that time... **I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people...**"*

In the grace of God, this is what Jesus did **at Pentecost**.

*And remember what we said earlier about the intimate connection between Pentecost and Passover. How Pentecost is bound up in and really **the culmination** of what God did at the Passover....*

*How Pentecost celebrated the culmination of the Harvest that began at Passover. That Pentecost celebrated **the goal** of the Exodus – not just for Israel to be free from their slavery in Egypt, but for Israel to be **God's people** – a people alive with His glory – alive in His will and ways...*

*How much more so now because of what **Jesus** has done at Pentecost in Acts 2 **for us**...*

*For in this great ACT – Jesus has **fulfilled the goal of the cross**. That you and I would not just be forgiven of our sin, through faith in the grace of Christ – but that we would be filled with the very life of God Himself – that we would live now, in Christ, **by the Spirit**...*

Because of Pentecost, **this is the gospel!**

A gospel that is sufficient to meet **our deepest need**.

I asked at the beginning: *How important is Pentecost to the Christian faith and life? **To your faith and life?***

In truth, it's everything. As important as the cross.

For without it – without Pentecost, without the Spirit alive in us, at work in us, the Christian life would be utterly impossible, and the death and resurrection of Jesus would be meaningless to us.

But ***because of Pentecost*** – because of the grace of God in Christ and the gift of the Spirit, we can know Jesus and life in Him today.

This is the gospel.

A gospel **open to all.**

That's what Peter declared to the crowds – ***and to us.***

Which is good news. Because, if we're honest, the Gift of the Law – God's Law – only serves to reveal the lawlessness of our own hearts.

And we know it.

For all of our desire in our best moments, to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves – our hearts (and consequently our lives) so often turn the other way. So often turn inward – in selfish and destructive ways.

As the old hymn says, we are all "*prone to wander, Lord I feel it...*" Our hearts do not run in the paths of God's commands.

But this is where the gospel meets our need.

Because in Jesus, in his life, we encounter One who has fulfilled

the Law. Whose entire life – every moment – was lived in love for God and others...

And, according to scripture, in his death, He died for us – paid the penalty of our lawlessness.

And now ***by the Spirit***, He offers to live in us – to fulfill the Law in us.

John Stott summarizes it **this way. He says:**

"The gospel is good news not only of what Jesus did (he died for our sins and was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures), but also of what he offers as a result. He promises to those who respond to him both the forgiveness of sins (to wipe out the past) and the gift of the Spirit (to make us new people). Together these constitute the freedom for which many are searching, freedom from guilt, defilement, judgment and self-centeredness, and freedom to be the persons God made and meant us to be. Forgiveness and the Spirit constitute salvation."

What incredible good news...!

The forgiveness of our sin and the indwelling of God.

This is the gospel – that Jesus offers to us all today.

To you. To me.

This is the gospel that we celebrate today.

The provision of God for our deepest need.

Let's pray.