

“Pentecost”  
Exodus 23:16; Acts 2  
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Today we celebrate one of the three most significant days in our history with God along with Christmas and Good Friday/Easter. Due to the neglect of many of us in the Evangelical church in America, and to our shame, many of us don't even know that this day marks such a significant day in our history.

I can easily imagine that the election of Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa, a number of years ago, is seen as the most auspicious day for black South Africans after so many years of apartheid.

For many in Eastern Europe, a landmark day is when the Soviet Union collapsed in the summer of 1989, symbolized in the dismantling of the Berlin Wall.

Certainly for us Americans, the War of Independence marks our birth as a nation.

More particularly we look to the beginning, not the end, of that war as THE day – the day the Declaration of Independence was made, July 4, 1776.

For Israel, the greatest day in their history was Passover.

God told them that from that day forward they were to annually mark that day with special sacrifices and celebration.

It recalled the day when God caused the plague of death to pass over his own people and strike only unbelieving Egypt.

It marked the day of the beginning of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery.

It marked the birth of a people of God.

What day marks us as the new people of God?

Many, I suspect, would quickly say Easter marks that day for us.

That would not be wrong but it would not be as precise as it ought to be.

And it would miss a significant aspect of our history with God for which Easter provides the foundation.

So what day **does** mark us as the new people of God?

It is Pentecost!

Just as Passover marked the birthday of Israel as the people of God, so Pentecost marks the birthday of the church as the new people of God.

In Exodus 23:16 God commands his people to “Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the first-fruits of the crops you sow in your field.”

Some of you know we are in a series of studies in the book of Exodus.

And you might think, “Wait a minute, how did we get from Exodus 11-12 to Exodus 23?”

Do you feel like Rip Van Winkle who missed a few years?

You didn’t. Because this is Pentecost Sunday I jumped ahead in Exodus to show you the foundation of this special day.

This Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16) is also called the “day of first-fruits” and the “feast of weeks” (Numbers 28:26).

So how is this related to Pentecost?

In the Leviticus instruction about this celebration we read, Leviticus 23:15-16 “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.”

Or as God repeated this instruction in Deuteronomy 16:9-10 “Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD.

The Israelites were told that when they got into their own land, on the Sunday following Passover, they were to bring the first of their new harvest to the Temple and offer it to the Lord.

Including that Sunday (day after Sabbath) they were to count off 50 days.

On that 50<sup>th</sup> day they were to celebrate the “Feast of Harvest” or “Feast of Weeks” or “day of firstfruits”.

Many of you know that Pentecost is the English transliteration of the Greek word meaning 50<sup>th</sup> day.

Israel’s Pentecost was the holy day that fell roughly 50 days after Passover.

It was anchored in Passover and it celebrated the harvest, the provision of the Lord.

What God began in Passover he continued by giving his people what they needed.

They celebrated God’s provision by giving back to God an offering from their harvest.

They knew that they were responsible to plant the seed but God gave the harvest.

And their offering represented the whole harvest.

Now fast-forward about 1500 years to the book of Acts chapter 2: Acts 2:1-4 “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 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 as the Spirit enabled them.”

50 days earlier Passover had been celebrated by the Jews.

But more significantly THE PASSOVER LAMB, Jesus, had given his life as a sacrifice for his people and then rose again from the dead.

This was to prove the sufficiency of his sacrifice and give eternal life to those who would repent and trust him.

Now 50 days later the Jews were celebrating their Pentecost but God took hold of that day and gave it fuller and richer significance.

On this Pentecost Sunday 2000 years ago God gave his people:

1. A new Status
2. A new Relationship and
3. A new Mission

1. I start with **the new status** that is ours since Pentecost.

Notice that I call each of these three “new.”

By that I intend to communicate that what happened at the Acts 2 Pentecost was unique but also continuous with the past.

It was “new” because there was an “old.”

Let me explain that this way:



The Kingdom of God is a way of speaking of God’s rulership over all.  
God’s kingdom is eternal.

Within God’s kingdom rule he has chosen to deal with people in different ways in different times.

Thus we speak of the “Old Covenant” which are other words for Old Testament and using Jesus’ words, we speak of a “New Covenant” described in the New Testament. (Testament and Covenant are nearly synonymous words.)

Now we know that the New Covenant is related to the Old Covenant but it is also a **significantly** new thing that God is doing.

But before describing the difference, please note, as I pointed out last week, the Old Covenant was anchored in the yet-to-come death and resurrection of the true Lamb of God, Jesus, and the New Covenant is anchored in the completed death/resurrection of Jesus.

But while the basis of both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is the same – the outworking of the two is very different:

- Under the Old Covenant the group that belonged to God was Israel.
- The day that marked their beginning as that special people of God was Passover.
- And the only way of belonging to that people was either by being a believing Jew or a proselyte, a convert, to true Judaism. Jews and Gentiles could only belong to God through Judaism.
- Under the New Covenant the group that belongs to God is the church.
- The day that marks our beginning as that special people of God is Pentecost.
- And now ethnicity and religious Judaism no longer play any part in who may belong to the people of God. Now Jews and Gentiles alike belong to God as part of the church.

The major point I make in all of this is that Pentecost marks a change in status – now it is through the church that we are the people of God.

Under the Old Covenant Israel alone was called the people of God. Now the Church is called **the people of God**.

1 Peter 2:9-10 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In Trinitarian fashion we are also called:

**The body of Christ**.

1 Corinthians 12:27-28 “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed...”

The church is the center of Christ’s activity in the world now just as his physical body was when he was physically present.”

And we are called **the temple of the Spirit**.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 **Speaking of the church**: “Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

And in Ephesians 2:21-22 we see the same: “In (Christ) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Were it not for this change, we would still be sacrificing sheep and goats and living under the Jewish civil and ceremonial laws. But there is more.

2. Secondly, because of what happened at Pentecost we now have a new relationship with God.

Acts 1:3-5 “After (Jesus’) suffering, he showed himself to (his disciples) and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of **forty days** and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

How could they not remember his earlier words just before his crucifixion?

John 14:16-18 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

If Jesus was crucified on Passover and it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> day (counting Friday and Sunday) that he rose from the dead plus 40 days during which he showed himself before his ascension, the words of Jesus in Acts 1 would be about a week before Pentecost.

Pentecost fell “on the day after Sabbath” (Sunday), 50 days after Passover.

Acts 2:1-4 “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 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 as the Spirit enabled them.”

In acts 2:33 we are told that this happened in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit.

In both the OT and NT, the wind and the fire are clearly symbolic of divine presence and specifically the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. (Cf. John 3:8; Matthew 3:11 along with many OT passages)

And what is interesting is how what seemed to be tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each of them.

The Spirit’s presence was not only in the room, but consistent with what Jesus promised, the Spirit came to all of them.

John 14:16-18 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you...the Spirit... He lives with you and **will be in you.**”

When Jesus met with his disciples before the crucifixion, he told them he was going back to the Father but that he would send the Holy Spirit.

I suspicion the disciples didn’t think that was a good trade.

But here’s the point: After Pentecost: Never again in the New Testament will you hear the disciples lament the absence of Jesus. Why not?

Because with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples experienced again the presence of Jesus.

- As I said, they never again wished Jesus were with them.
- They never again wished they could talk to him or hear from him.
- They never again expressed disappointment that Jesus wasn’t there to teach, encourage, protect or guide them. Jesus was again “with” them in the person of the Spirit.

After the coming of the Spirit, the disciples realized and experienced that to have the Spirit was to have the Son – they weren't missing anything.

And it was not that they now talked to the Spirit in hopes that he would convey the message to Jesus.

No, to have the Spirit was to have Jesus – He was with them.

The Spirit comes to be Jesus “in” us.

Theologian J.I. Packer put it this way: “The truth of the matter is this. **The distinctive, constant, basic ministry of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant is... to mediate Christ's presence to believers** – to give them... a knowledge of Jesus presence with them as Savior, Lord and God. (Packer, *Keep in Step...*, 50)

We are describing a relationship with a Person – the Person of Jesus in the Person of the Spirit.

Writing 20 years ago, Richard Lovelace said this relationship “involves moving about in all areas of our life in dependent fellowship with a person: “So I say, live by the Spirit”. When this practice of the presence of God is maintained over a period of time, our experience of the Holy Spirit becomes less subjective and more clearly identifiable... A normal relationship with the Holy Spirit should (include) a profound awareness that we are always face to face with God; that as we move through life the presence of his Spirit is the most real and (influential) factor in our everyday lives; that underneath the momentary static of events, conflicts, problems, and even excursions into sin, he is always there...” (Lovelace, 131)

The Holy Spirit is Jesus-God with us.

It is a relationship so close that the only way Jesus can describe it is as “in” us.

As Robertson McQuilkin put it, “Incredible as it may seem, God has planned my life around Himself - uninterrupted companionship with the greatest Love who ever lived! No getting an appointment a month in advance. No taking a number and waiting my turn. He doesn't just tolerate me. Outrageous mystery – God actually desires my company.” McQuilkin 79



Because of the coming of the Holy Spirit into every believer, it is now possible for every believer to have an intimate relationship with Jesus.

How can we have such a relationship?

Let's be clear on what this relationship is and what it is not.

In our psychological and consumerist age, image is more important than substance and feeling something is more highly sought than having something.

In the rush to fill some felt-need for intimacy we run from conference to conference and read book after book trying to find the secret to feeling something about the Holy Spirit.

We want the feelings of joy, peace and intimacy more than we want the true relationship with the Spirit that brings joy, peace and intimacy.

I suggest that joy, peace and intimacy are by-products of a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

So then how do we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit?

First of all know that you already do.

- Nothing less than the person and work of the Spirit are involved in you becoming a Christian.
- In saving us God imparts his Holy Spirit to us.
- That is not something we pray for or wait for or do something special to get – God does it.
- As an adopted infant has no feeling of adoption, so we are given the Holy Spirit regardless of whether that experience is felt or not.

But you say, "I know that. I'm talking about a day-to-day awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. How do I have the kind of life the disciples had following Pentecost?"

Someone wrote, "We can be no more spiritual than we are scriptural."

(Source unknown)

This means we will only experience a true relationship with the Spirit to the extent that we let the Bible shape our thinking and acting.

I suggest than instead of looking for some secret let's simply look at how the Bible describes the person and work of the Spirit and then begin to act, in faith, on those truths.

Author, Myron Augsburger, wrote, "In relating to a person, we open our life to that person... We are consciously identifying and sharing..." (Myron Augsburger Practicing the Presence of the Spirit, 30)

Isn't that true of our human relationships?

The relationship deepens when we consciously identify and share with that person.

Even when we are physically separated so that we can't sense them with our five senses, we can still read their words, remember common events, recall what draws us together.

I don't mean to reduce our relationship to the Spirit to simply recalling biblical facts because I know that the Spirit is present and active not only in the recalling but in the applying of the truth to our hearts.

So how do we identify and share with the Holy Spirit?

I think I can say with a high degree of confidence that if we would reflect intentionally and regularly on the following biblical truths our experience of a relationship with the Holy Spirit would grow.

**I think of the Holy Spirit as the one who gave me birth into the family of God – the church.**

John 3:5-8 "Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

**I think of the Spirit as the one who confirms that I belong to God.**

Romans 8:15-16 “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3 “No one can say, “*Jesus is Lord,*” except by the Holy Spirit.”)

**I think of the Spirit as Jesus in me, with me, and by me always.**

John 14:16-20 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you... On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”

**I think of the Spirit as fully sovereign and benevolent and present in every situation I encounter.**

Romans 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

**I think of the Spirit as the one who is constantly praying to the Father for me and shaping my prayers to conform to the will of the Father.**

Romans 8:26-27 “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us... The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

**I think of the Spirit as the one who authored the Scriptures:**

1 Peter 1:20-21 “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

**I think of the Holy Spirit as the one who helps me understand the spiritual significance of the scriptures and think “Christianly.”**

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. <sup>13</sup> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the

Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. (Cf. 2 Timothy 1:13-14)

**I think of the Spirit as one who is changing me – conforming me to the character of Jesus:**

Romans 8:9,13-14 “You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you... For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,<sup>14</sup> because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Cf. Galatians 5:22-26)

**I think of the Spirit as the one who enables me to serve others in the family of God.**

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.<sup>5</sup> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.<sup>6</sup> There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.<sup>7</sup> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

**I think of the Spirit as the one who empowers me for service to a world around:**

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Cf. John 14:12)

**I think of the Spirit as the one who lives in my body as the sacred temple of God.**

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

**I think of the Spirit as the one who guarantees my future.**

Ephesians 1:13-14 “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory. (Cf. Romans 8:11; 2 Corinthians 1:21; 5:5)

Can you imagine how your daily relationship with Jesus would change if you thought of the Spirit in these ways?

Again from McQuilkin: “Incredible as it may seem, God has planned (our lives) around himself, uninterrupted companionship with the greatest lover who ever lived. No getting an appointment a month in advance. No taking a number and waiting my turn. He doesn’t just tolerate (us). Outrageous mystery – God actually desires (our) company!”

(Robertson McQuilkin, Life in the Spirit, 79-80)

3. Pentecost marks not only a new status and a new relationship but it also marks **a New Mission**.

Again I emphasize that this relationship with the Spirit is not just for our psychological satisfaction, though it is a very satisfying relationship.

The relationship has a definite kingdom orientation.

We are related to him for service.

Under the New Covenant the mission of God in the world is clearer and the outcome, certain.

Again I quote Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Cf. John 14:12)

Compare that to Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Pentecost – does it matter?

Oh, yes on this day we were given **a new status** (the new people of God), **a new relationship** (the Spirit of God is now so present that the best way to describe it is to say he lives “in” us), and we have **a new mission** (Make disciples in all the world and I am with you always even to the end of the age).

250 years ago, hymn writer Joseph Hart wrote:

Come Holy Spirit come!

Let your bright beams arise;  
Dispel the sorrow from our minds,  
The darkness from our eyes.

Convince us of our sin,  
Then lead to Jesus' blood,  
And to our wondering view reveal  
The secret love of God.

Revive our drooping faith,  
Our doubts and fears remove,  
And kindle in our breasts the flame  
Of never-dying love.

Show us that loving Man  
That rules the courts of bliss,  
The Lord of hosts, the Mighty God,  
Th' Eternal Prince of Peace.

'Tis Thine to cleanse the heart,  
To sanctify the soul,  
To pour fresh life in every part,  
And new-create the whole.

Dwell, therefore, in our hearts,  
Our minds from bondage free;  
Then shall we know, and praise and love,  
The Father, Son and Thee.

Joseph Hart 1759  
The Lutheran Hymnal

Pentecost – God in us!