

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Signs and Wonders: Acts 2

Sunday, May 31, 2020 Sermon

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I've learned that in this world there are two types of people: People who love to be surprised, they love the unexpected; and then there are people who hate the unexpected, they're scared of it. My wife discovered very quickly that we fall into different camps. My wife loves surprise, she loves exciting things, unexpected things. Me, I'm terrified of it.

Our honeymoon trip was to Universal Studios in Orlando Florida. We got married in late October, so it was during their Halloween festival. And so, they have this event in the evening hours. They kick everyone out of the park for a couple hours and they open it back up for a separate ticket fee. They flooded it with fog and their professional actors scare you in haunted houses of professional quality. I said, "This sounds like a good idea". It was not! My wife and I walked through the haunted houses. We'd been married five days. I was terrified! These people were coming at you with knives and chainsaws and I was scared, and my wife thought it was funny. It got so bad that I moved my wife in front of me, in front of the chainsaw, because I was so scared at one of the houses. She looked at me and realized then she had married a "scaredy-cat". It was devastating for her and one lesson she has never recovered from.

The idea of not liking the unexpected--that's kind of what we're finding in Jerusalem in the time period of the upper room. There's about 120 people, we think, more or less, waiting for this gift that Jesus says is totally unexpected. You must remember we can go back, or we can go forward in scripture and say, "Oh, this is what it says; this is what's going to happen". They couldn't do that, so they had no idea what this gift was, this Holy Spirit was totally unexpected. And so, the Holy Spirit comes on in this scene in Acts chapter 2 and there are tongues of fire and there is wind and noise. It comes on, and some people think it's figurative and some people think that the wording is literal for the Holy Spirit and for God coming upon them. Either way, it was a major scene, a very intense scene, as the Holy Spirit comes on them and it ends amazingly. They start to speak in tongues. At least that's what the Bible says. People started hearing them in their own language, so it makes us think that their tongues were actually languages that were known. Other people feel it was God's language and it didn't make sense except that it was interpreted. It seems from what we can understand, though, that it was actual languages.

In fact, the Bible says in verses 6 through 8 of chapter 2, which Reverend Emily read earlier, when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because they heard them speaking in their own language. These Galileans--how could they know this? They don't know our language, how are they speaking it? People thought it was so crazy, they thought they were drunk at 9:00 in the morning, which is another whole issue for another time, but that's what they were worried about!

So why were there so many people around, that they could start gathering and hearing these disciples who had just received the Holy Spirit? Why were there so many people there? It was the day of Pentecost--the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover. It was

the first day of the week; it was a big festival. It was known as the festival of weeks, the festival of harvest and a day of first fruits. Pentecost was traditionally seen as the day Moses received the law. So there was a ton of people in the city, just gathered together celebrating, and you start hearing the message of something coming through in their own language and they're trying to see the scene and obviously they probably heard all the noise. They came and saw, and they think, "They're drunk".

So, Peter starts talking, and the first thing he says is "Hey, we haven't had too much to drink. It's only 9:00 in the morning", which is just hilarious that he says that! And then he uses prophecies in chapter 2 to start talking to them about what was happening. Why use prophecies? Remember the Old Testament was not only the most important part of the scripture then, it was the *only* scripture they had back then. The scripture that Jesus used was the Old Testament, too. Today we're all guilty many times of flipping to the "good stuff", in our opinion, the New Testament. For Jesus and the disciples, the Bible, so to speak, *was* the Old Testament. It was so important to their faith and important in Judaism.

So Peter, in just a brilliant way, utilizes the Old Testament in chapter 2 and speaks to the people. He first quotes the book of Joel, which predicts that this situation right now that's occurring in the day of Pentecost *would* happen. He was saying, "Look this is legitimate, this was predicted in our scriptures, in the Old Testament". And then later he quotes David and he says, "Jesus, who we're talking about, he is the Messiah". Many of the Jewish people didn't believe and still don't believe that to this day. He said Jesus was predicted by David long ago in the Old Testament. Again, this is why we need to know the Old Testament; it is so important. But Peter does a great job of brilliantly saying, "Hey, David predicted Jesus".

He shows how Jesus was the Messiah in this long message he gives to all these people who had come to see how this Holy Spirit, and this commotion, has come upon the upper room. Then, at that time, 3000 people go, "I'm in. I'm joining the church". That's amazing! That is a powerful sermon. If that were to happen here at our church, can you imagine the logistics of it? And probably Rev. Campbell would have to give that sermon because I couldn't give that good of a sermon. But let's imagine that happened and 3000 people heard something we said and joined the church. The logistics of it would've been crazy. How do we fit them in the building? How do we do all these things? The early church didn't know what to do but they had 3000 people join right at that instant.

So it leads us to our first main point today and I want you to think about this: The gospel, the gospel is open to *everyone*. The gospel is open to everyone. Do we treat it like that? Or do we sometimes maybe look at some people and go, there's no way they could really be Christians! Look at what they've done to me or what they've done to others. Maybe the gospel isn't so open to them, in our opinion. I mean we learned last week that the way we live our lives is spreading the gospel even more than what we say does. Your life and mine, the way we lead it, not just at church, but *all* the time, does it prove the point that the gospel is open to everyone like we learned here in chapter 2 of Acts? Or, sometimes, well, does the way we act not really support that the gospel is open to everyone and that we're a witness for Christ? Questions to ponder. Main point #1: the gospel is open to everyone.

Key things that hold things together. My first car was a Pontiac 6000, dark purple, a beauty. It was named Betsy. Why did we name it Betsy? I have no idea! One thing about Betsy, beyond the fact it didn't start all the time, was that the speaker on the right side, well, the wires weren't held together very well. One time, I got mad. (I know if you know me, that it's impossible to imagine me getting mad!) But I was driving on the road and the speaker went out and it bothered me, so I slammed my hand on the dash right next to the speaker. It turned on! I realized the connection was bad; it wasn't being held together. And so, I just got used to driving on the road, and every 15 or 20 minutes, slamming my hand against the dash. My friends all knew this; it was great.

Then I went on one of my first dates. The girl was in the seat next to me, and we're driving along in Betsy, Pontiac 6000, thing of beauty, and the speaker goes off! I had failed to really think about the fact that I should have told her about the speaker beforehand. I instinctively slammed my hand, in front of her, on the dash. It did turn back on the speaker. I did *not* get a second date, however!

Things that hold things together are important. I am such a great handyman that I can't do anything at my house. If anything breaks, Sarah, my wife, fixes it. But I've learned one thing that holds things together--duct tape! That saves me from so much headache. Other than electrical, I could pretty much duct-tape anything and it'll hold stuff together. It's brilliant! Here's the thing though, what was the 'duct tape' of the early church that held church together when they did not know what they were doing? Well, at the end of Acts, chapter 2, verses 42-47, explain, hey, here's the 'duct tape' of the early church. Here's what held the church together. It says in Acts 2:42, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the people were giving food to each other and supporting each other. The four main things or principles, though, did you catch them, the 'duct tape' of the early church? I think they are principles, we can apply today. The first one was teaching. Teaching was an incredible part of their faith. They didn't think they knew all they needed to learn, so they got teaching. Today we need to still have teaching in our lives. How are you doing in that? I know it's a challenge today, in the pandemic, but you know the brilliant thing, we live in an era, in a time, that's unprecedented. You can listen to any speaker, almost in the world, and you can listen to teaching. Vary it up, listen to podcasts, listen to sermons online, and we can learn through teaching.

The second thing was fellowship. Fellowship was key. They voluntarily shared with each other so that those who had less had enough. The people, that early church, sacrificed for the good of others. In fact, it says they even sold property and their possessions and provided for those in their church that were in need. I read one theologian who put it this way, so poetically, "The early church in Acts was a happy church". They took care of each other. Fellowship-- how do we do that today? It's a little hard. We have social distancing. We're just getting out of the lockdown. Are you putting others before yourself in our church family, in your personal family or do you do that *after* number one? I must be honest. Many times, I'm taking care of number one, myself, first, but we can take what we learn from the fellowship in the early church. We need to put others before ourselves. You can do that whether you're in lockdown, quarantine or roaming freely.

The breaking of bread, or communion, was the third principle--the 'duct tape' that held together the early church. It was based on the upper room meal with Jesus and they had it with glad and sincere hearts. When we say "communion" you think of the cup and the wafer. For them, it was a meal, it was a big festive meal in which they remembered Jesus's death on the cross. It was more than just a ceremonial thing. I read a passage by N.T. Wright, one of my favorite theologians, who said, "Jesus's death and resurrection was at the center of *everything*". Jesus's death and resurrection were at the center of everything. That's why they broke bread and that's why they got together in community. The question for us today, by breaking bread, so to speak, is Jesus at the center of everything? Is his death and resurrection at the center of our lives, in the center of our church? Food for thought!

The last thing was prayer. They keyed everything off prayer. I must be honest. As I went over these notes this morning before teaching, I don't do that enough. I fail in this regard. You see, I like to rely on my own wisdom, as limited as it is. When I face a struggle or problem, I'll figure it out in my head, work over it, and then realize, oh, yeah, I better ask God about it! Instead of relying on God's wisdom *first*, I go to my finite, almost pathetic wisdom and try to figure something out. That's not what the early church did. In *everything*, they went to prayer first, and that's what the lesson is for us today. We need to key everything off prayer first, not try to figure it out first, but go to God in his infinite wisdom first. Do you do that? Do I do that?

Main point 2: how do you sum up everything--these main points and the principles of the early church? Well here it is: *they were family!* Main point 2: they were family! I've got a question for you, before we go. Do you treat our church like that? Do I treat our church like that? Is it like family? Or is it something we just pop into on a Sunday and maybe one time during the week, but it's just a little part of our lives and it's not really that important and if anything comes up, we go to that first. Do I do that?

The early church would not have understood a church building like we have today. In the whole idea of formal "church", they were family first. They did life together. In studying that early church, I realized they did life together. They were family. They wouldn't have known anything different. That's a lesson for us, or at least one we can take from Acts, chapter 2. Do we treat church like that? The second thing is, who else do we need to include in this family? Acts 2, Verse 47B says this, *And the Lord added to their number daily who were being saved*. Did you catch that? He added daily to the number being (what??) *saved*. We aren't just supposed to invite people to church so they are busy for an hour a week or they can join our "club" and we can have more attendees and more money. That's not the point. We invite people to church, we live our life in the Holy Spirit, based, so people can see our lives, so they want to come to know Jesus Christ as Savior. That's why we invite them to church. That's why we interact with people and we have the gospel open to everyone. By the way we live our lives, we can reach people for Christ. Yes, people will be added every day to the church because they are being saved!

Two main points today: the gospel is open to everyone. That's what we learned from the upper room when the Holy Spirit came in the day of Pentecost. Are you and I living our lives like the gospel is open to everyone? The second main point, they were family-based. On those principles--they were family and we treat church like family and we

invite others to be saved through coming to our church family. These are challenges from Acts, chapter 2. May we go forward and apply these to our lives. Amen.