

Alive: The Spirit is Moving Acts 2:1-12

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When our kids were little, we ate a lot of Kraft Mac and Cheese. I mean, a lot! And one day I noticed that if I saved 50 box tops from those Mac and Cheese packages, I could get an official Kraft Mac and Cheese transistor radio. Well, those box tops were just going in the garbage so I thought I'd put them to better use. And after about a week I had 50 box tops and mailed them in. And about eight weeks later, I got this very cool official Kraft Mac and Cheese transistor radio. Pretty sweet, huh?

And when I got it I thought to myself, "I'm going to put this in a safe place and in 20 years or so this is going to be a collector's item and it's going to be worth a lot of money." So, I kept it in its original packaging...this is actually the box they mailed it in. That was about 30 years ago. And if you go to Ebay and look this item up, do you know how much it's worth? About \$26. Not much. By the time this thing is worth \$100 there won't even be radio stations.

The question I want us to wrestle with as we celebrate Pentecost is, "What does it mean to be a people filled with the Holy Spirit"? And I want to suggest to you that there are some things that we can learn about being spiritual from this radio.

Before I read today's scripture lesson from Acts 2, let me provide a little context. Four hundred years before Jesus' birth the prophet Joel foresaw that one day God would liberally pour out the Holy Spirit into the lives of people. Then Jesus promised his disciples that once he ascended to the Father, he would send them the Holy Spirit. And that's what we're reading about today in Acts 2.

¹ On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And

everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

⁵ At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷ They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, ⁸ and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! ⁹ Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" ¹² They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other.

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

According to the book of Acts the very last words that Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended into heaven were, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Did you catch that? Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came upon those disciples, they would receive power. The Greek word there is "dynamus" which is where we get our words "dynamic" and "dynamite" from. The dictionary defines "power" as "the ability to do something or act in a particular way." In this case, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would empower the disciples to bear witness to him, to reveal his Kingdom of love and grace to the world.

And that's exactly what we see happening in today's Scripture reading. According to Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, the Spirit manifested as wind and fire. Suddenly, the Spirit-filled disciples were empowered to speak in languages they had never learned. And so, people who had gathered from all over the region for the Jewish celebration of Pentecost were able to hear these disciples bear witness to Jesus in their own language. On that day, the story says, 3,000 people

heard the good news of God's love proclaimed and put their faith in the risen Christ. This is why many people call Pentecost the birthday of the Church. It was like a spiritual big bang which set in motion the global expansion of the Gospel, an expansion that now includes you and me.

The creation story says that God took the dust of the ground, formed it into a human shape and breathed the Spirit into it to bring humanity to life. According to the story, the Spirit enlivens us. We could think about it like this radio. Without the battery it can't do much, but when I put the battery in, suddenly its empowered, enlivened to play music or report the news.

Now, in today's Scripture reading the disciples were empowered to speak in the known languages of that region in order to bear witness to Jesus. Not long after this some disciples were empowered to speak in languages unknown in this world, something called "glossolalia" or "speaking in tongues." I know people who have this spiritual gift. I don't understand it, nor do I understand what they're saying when they speak in tongues, but I want to suggest to you that every one of us has been gifted with a language that bears witness to Jesus. Just as this radio can play classical music, country, jazz, rock n' roll and talk radio we, as the body of Christ, have been gifted with a variety of languages to bear witness to Jesus.

Some of us are preachers. We love to open Scripture and proclaim what it means, what it says about God and how to follow Jesus.

Others of us are encouragers, people who have been gifted with the ability to come alongside others in difficult times to build them up, support and embolden them.

Others of us are prayers, gifted with the ability to hear the needs of others and lift them up to God in such a way that the person in need feels as if they've been seen and heard by God.

Others of us are servants, people who proclaim the love and grace of God by practically addressing the needs of others, people who know that sometimes actions really do speak louder than words.

These are just a few of the various spirit-inspired languages that we've been given so that we might bear witness to Jesus. Wondering what it might look like in real life? Watch this! [Steve Hartman Video]

Isn't that awesome? Reminds me of a group of guys I knew at another church where I used to serve. They

were talking one day about how they could share the love of Jesus and one of the men said that earlier that day he had seen a children's bike that someone had put out on the curb to be taken to the garbage dump. He thought what a waste it was to throw a bike away just because their child had outgrown it, when there were other kids in the area who would like a bike but couldn't afford one. And that's the day that the bike ministry was born. These guys have now repaired and repurposed literally thousands of bikes and gotten them into the hands of kids in need. And while some of them would say that they are uncomfortable talking about Jesus, in the next breath they will tell you story after story about how giving a child a bike has opened spiritual conversation with grateful parents. As one of the guys put it, "Service is our love language."

So, what's your language? What language has the Spirit gifted you so that you might bear witness to Jesus? Or perhaps you're one of those extraordinary people that happens to be bi-lingual, or even multi-lingual...fluent in multiple languages that bear witness to Jesus. That's awesome! But if you don't know what your language is, that's okay, too. It's never too late to learn. It just takes a little dialing in. If I turn this radio on I can slowly spin this dial and pick up all sorts of stations until I find one that just feels right. That's really what we were teaching you to do during our Lenten worship series called "Dwelling." Remember that? We talked about learning how to dwell with God, to be still and to listen. So, let me encourage you to dust off those skill if you've gotten out of practice. This week, spend a little time talking to and listening to the Spirit, asking what language you've been given to bear witness to the love you know in Jesus. Because the world still needs people who will bear witness to God's love revealed in Jesus in the language with which you've been gifted. Let's pray...

Come, Holy Spirit, breathe deeply into each of us and enliven us. Empower us as witnesses in a world that needs to know your love and your life. Enlighten us, revealing to each of us the unique ways in which you've gifted us to bear witness to our neighbor. And then embolden us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in all that we do and all that we say. We ask all this in the strong name of Christ, and together all God's people said, Amen!