

2015_05_24 Pentecost
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Recognize the Holy Spirit by the Language He Speaks

Acts 2:1–21

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Acts 2:1–21

- ¹⁶ But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:
¹⁷ *'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.*
¹⁸ *And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.*
¹⁹ *I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.*
²⁰ *The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.*
²¹ *And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.'*

This Word of the Lord was spoken for you.

We pray, O Holy Spirit, enter in, and in our hearts Thy work begin. Give to thy Word
impressive power That in our hearts, from this good hour, As fire it may be glowing.
Amen.

In Jesus name, who has promised that the Spirit will lead us into all truth, dear fellow
students of His Word,

Have you been hearing voices lately? If you say yes, some might say you're crazy; but if you say no, some might say you're not a Christian.

The Charismatic movement has been around for a little over a century. You will notice it most often among churches that identify themselves as Pentecostals. Charismatic theology emphasizes God in us over God in the Word or God in Christ. They teach that God speaks directly to your heart. He reveals himself directly to you apart from his word. They argue that what happened on Pentecost, is something that God does for all true Christians. See what it says, "You're young men shall see visions. Your old men shall dream dreams."

For the most part these ideas have been on the outskirts of Christianity, not given much credence. However, lately, the Charismatic movement has become more mainstream, just by different names. It has become more popular now among those identified as evangelical Christians. From TV evangelists like Joel Osteen, to the best selling books like Rick Warren, it is out there. It is the idea that God speaks directly to Christian's hearts.

So the question we take up today is this: have you been hearing the Holy Spirit lately? And if so, how do you know? How do you recognize the Holy Spirit? We'll be looking to identify the Holy Spirit by the language He uses when he speaks to us.

Recognize the Holy Spirit by the Language He Speaks

1. The Holy Spirit is NOT poured out in a vision of greatness
2. The Holy Spirit is poured out in a word of salvation

1. The Holy Spirit is NOT poured out in a vision of greatness

Rick Warren is the author of the popular book "the Purpose Driven Life." This book was on the NY Times best selling list for over 4 years and it is said that it is world wide the second best selling non-fiction book, second only to the Bible. Rick Warren has trained many pastors in vision-casting church leadership and has really pioneered the popular seeker growth model that so many church's have adopted.

One of Rick Warren's latest sermon series is called "God wants you to dream big." God wants you to have a vision for your life, a dream for something better, some greater purpose. He introduces it as the "doctrine of imagination."

In a recent sermon he uses the story of the Tower of Babel to emphasize this idea of the need for imagination. As God looks down on what this tower that the people are

building, he says, "Look they are all of one mind and one language. Now nothing they imagine to do will be withheld from them." He then turns the story on its head by suggesting that this is a great model for growing a business. How do you make the impossible, possible? You need three things: cooperation, communication, and imagination. They need to be united; they need to speak the same language; and they need a dream, a vision. If you can do accomplish those three things, then you can make the impossible possible.

He then goes on to talk about how Christians need to have a vision. If you can't imagine it happening to you, then guess what, it won't. You need to imagine something great for yourself. And a church that doesn't have a vision, is going to die. So say many popular preachers like Rick Warren.

This is such an appealing way of thinking. The power of positive thinking. If you can dream it, you can do it. This is familiar to us, since we know it better as the American Dream. It's the dream we've all been part of – a dream for something better, something bigger.

And think of how it affects us in the way we think: dreams for a bigger car, a bigger house, a bigger church. Why aren't we growing faster? Why aren't there people banging down our doors to get in? Why doesn't my life seem as successful, happy as other people? Why don't I feel as excited about my faith as those other Christians? Maybe we need to do something differently. Maybe we should do things more like these mega churches.

But what was the end result of the Tower of Babel. They had cooperation, communication, and imagination – they had a vision, a dream for greatness, and it was going to reach to the very heights of heaven. God tore it down. He scattered them. Their vision was not His vision. As Mary said in the Magnificat – He scatters the proud in the imagination of their heart.

The imagination is more often described as a bad thing in Scripture. After all, how do we know who's speaking? How do we know it's not the devil? So God addresses Jeremiah about the prophets who went about speaking in God's name. He speaks to Jeremiah in chapter 23, "Who are these guys?" Jeremiah responds, "I don't know. Did you send them?" "No," says the Lord, "I didn't send them, did you?" Jeremiah, "No." And the Lord says, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets. They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; But he who has My word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? Is not My word like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

So when it comes to visions, dreams, etc. – recognize who’s doing the talking. And recognize the language being used. This language of a church’s vision or a pastor’s vision, or a vision of something greater – it’s just not the way the Holy Spirit speaks. The Holy Spirit is not poured out in a vision of greatness.

2. The Holy Spirit is poured out in a word of salvation

So how can you recognize the Holy Spirit? How can you know who’s doing the talking?

Listen to the promise that Jesus spoke to his Apostles in John 15:26 – “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” The way to recognize the Spirit of truth is that He will testify of Jesus. His only goal is to bear witness to Jesus and His work of salvation. The Holy Spirit is not poured out in a vision of greatness. Rather He is poured out in a word of salvation.

This is the language of the Spirit. The language of salvation. And it comes to us in a word. Notice what happened at Pentecost: “They spoke to each in their own native language.” Yes, the Holy Spirit was poured out directly and miraculously upon the disciples, but how did the Spirit come to all the other people who were listening. He didn’t just speak directly to their heart. No, He spoke to them through the Word. He used human language to communicate the thoughts of God. Language matters.

This means grammar, word order, word usage, and above all, context matters. Notice, v.16, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.” This is what Joel was prophesying about when he wrote these words centuries earlier. “This.” Meaning, the last days are already upon Peter and those people. Joel was talking about the events that would surround Pentecost. The pouring out of the Spirit to every nation under heaven that are now gathered and how this would then be delivered to all the world. Young men seeing visions; old men dreaming dreams. And they will prophesy.

Young men seeing visions – Paul on the road to Damascus in Acts chapter 9 sees the risen Lord Jesus and is called to be a missionary. Old men dreaming dreams – Peter at the house of Corneleus goes into a trance and God reveals that this gospel is intended for Gentiles. And they will prophesy. The whole NT is filled with prophesy. There were many prophets in those days as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians. This is what was spoken by Joel.

“And there will be wonders in the heavens and signs in the earth.” The blood, fire, and pillar of smoke brings back memories of Egypt. Memories of God’s mighty acts that led to the deliverance of His people. The river was turned to blood. Fire rained from heaven. And a cloud pillar led them out to the promised land. These were the mighty acts of God.

This is what Peter and the others are preaching. We hear the crowd say in verse 11, “we hear them speaking in our own language the mighty acts of God.” And where are these mighty acts revealed? Just verses later in Peter’s sermon, he will refer again the signs and wonders. v.22, “Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man testified by God by signs and wonders that he did in your midst.” The mighty acts of God were brought to the people again. Signs and wonders. And darkness.

Darkness was the second to the last plague upon Egypt. God made it so dark that the people could feel it and no one could leave their home. Then the final judgment, the death of the first born. And it was upon the death of God’s first born that darkness did fill the land. And it was not an eclipse. It was the forsaking of God’s own Son. It was the plague that would accompany the final punishment of God upon the world’s sin. These are the mighty acts of God.

“And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This is the language of the Spirit. With everything going on – the Spirit shaking the house, tongues of fire on their heads, speaking in languages they’ve never learned, dreams and visions, signs and wonders, apocalyptic events – with all the wonders swirling around this event, it is all directed to this central point – whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

This is where we recognize the language of the Holy Spirit. In the language of salvation. The goal of all that is happening in the Joel prophesy is to lead you to call upon the Lord for salvation. The dreams, visions; the signs, wonders; the events of judgment; the preaching of the crucifixion and resurrection – it is all meant to bring us to this: “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

As Peter goes on with his sermon, this is where the Spirit is headed. “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The whole goal of these events is to save.

The language of the Holy Spirit is not a vision of greatness, but the language of humility. Here God brings us low, so that we realize that the last days of this world is upon us and that the end of the world has come upon Jesus on the cross, and then to lift

us up with the news of His resurrection and the promise of forgiveness given in baptism. The language of the Spirit is the language of salvation. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Our whole worship experience is a living fulfillment of Joel 2:32. Our whole liturgy is a calling upon the name of the Lord for salvation. From the invocation where we call upon the name of the Triune God which was made ours in baptism. To the confession and absolution. To the Word we hear and the confession we make of who God is in the creed to the prayers and Lord's prayer – it is one living enactment of Joel's prophesy – whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved, for in Mount Zion; here in the church where we are gathered in the presence of God, there shall be deliverance. And it culminates for us in the Lord's Supper – for as the writer to the Hebrews says, you have come to Mount Zion, the Holy Jerusalem. This is the language of the Spirit. The language which leads us to call upon the Lord, and which saves us. Here he is poured out in a word of salvation, a word given in water, in bread and wine, and in the mouth of the pastor who speaks God's word faithfully.

Well, I ask you again, have you been hearing voices lately? Yes. And the important part is that you can recognize who is talking. The way to recognize the Spirit is that He testifies of Christ. He did it directly to the apostles and now through His written Word to you. And the vision to be trusted is the one who proclaims forgiveness and salvation, through Jesus Christ alone. Amen.