

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
The Day of Pentecost, Series B  
Sunday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021<sup>1</sup>

**Sermon: Not Drunk<sup>2</sup>**

**Texts: Acts 2:1-21**

Focus: Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower and equip his Church.

Function: That they would rejoice over the strange, unpredictable pattern of the Spirit's work.

Structure: Story Applied

Locus: "In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (SC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

After the miracle of Pentecost, when God poured out his Holy Spirit on the disciples, and they spontaneously prophesied in foreign tongues, some of the people of Jerusalem mocked them and said they were drunk. "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13, ESV).<sup>3</sup> But the Apostle Peter protested and insisted, "These men are not drunk! It's only nine o'clock in the morning!" (cp. 1:15). The Church on Pentecost was not drunk on wine. If they were "drunk" at all, they were punch drunk from the powerful impact of the Holy Spirit hitting them like fire from heaven.

That sort of thing doesn't happen every day! Or does it?

For as long as there have been Christians, we have had detractors who mock and make fun of us. During the times of persecution by the Roman Emperors, there was a vicious rumor circulating that Christians ate the flesh of babies sacrificed on their altars. No doubt, this confusion came from a conflation of misunderstanding. Because Christians worship Christ who was born as a little baby in Bethlehem, and because we eat his body and drink his blood in the Lord's Supper, the enemies of the Church must have concocted their bizarre, terrifying tale of

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<sup>1</sup> I only preached this sermon Sunday morning. I preached a different sermon titled "Dem Bones" on Saturday night, but it was too long.

<sup>2</sup> I originally preached this sermon at Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado, on Sunday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Spirit, English Standard Version.

ritual child sacrifice and cannibalism. Or maybe they knew better anyway and just didn't care. "They are filled with new wine!"

Christians are a strange crowd. We in the Church are not supposed to look like the world around us. We don't always speak, think, act, or even love in the same ways that our unbelieving neighbors do. We are in the world, but not of it. Theologian Stanley Hauerwas refers to us as "resident aliens." Others say we have more than a green card and more like aliens out of this world—more like Martians than unbelievers.

And that is how it's supposed to be. When Jesus told Nicodemus what the Holy Spirit is like, he said, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Someone once complained to me, "Pastor, we don't ever know what you're going to do next!" I smiled and said, "So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." I didn't say that to belittle my friend's bewilderment. To him I seemed erratic and not quite on the level. And maybe that's exactly the way it should be! Christians aren't supposed to be predictable. People led by the Spirit are driven by a mighty wind—"a holy hurricane" (Barbara Brown Taylor). We march to the beat of a different drum. And that's scary to people who won't march at all.

When people look at the Church as a whole and individual Christians in particular, what they see should surprise them, shock them—perhaps even disgust them. Like the early Church, we should be amazing and perplexing—and utterly refreshing—all at once (Acts 1:12). When the world looks at the Church and sees what we do and hears what we believe, teach, and confess, they should be prompted to ask, "What does this mean?" And the only possible response should be to love us and convert or hate us and reject us as detestable. A lukewarm, tepid response will not do. I'd rather be embarrassing or baffling than boring. Wouldn't you?

I'd rather appear to be drunk—drunk on the Spirit. “They are filled with new wine.” Of course, we are not drunk at all. But the world doesn't know how else to describe the activity of the Spirit until they too believe in the one to whom he bears witness: Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord (cp. John 14:26; 15:26).

Throughout history, Christians have shocked and surprised people by the industry of our compassion and the sharp beauty of our message. When the ancients viewed women as property (“chattel”), Christian husbands were called to love their wives and lay down their lives for them (Eph. 5:25, 28). In a time when foreigners and strangers were looked on with distrust, Christians were called to demonstrate radical hospitality, “for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2). When the ancient Romans left their unwanted children to starve or die of exposure, Christian families took them in and adopted them. That's how orphanages got started. When Plague struck the cities, and the pagans fled the cities and abandoned their infected loved ones to die, Christians cared for the sick and dying at great personal risk to themselves. In the 1700's, when alcoholism became pandemic in England because of cheap gin, it was circuit riders and preachers like John Wesley who began the temperance movement and restored hope to those chained to addiction. When the world said that black Africans were better off as American slaves than free men, Christians began the abolitionist movement and brought an end to slavery in the British Empire and the United States. During World War II, devout Christians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Corrie Ten Boom resisted the Nazis and helped to protect and smuggle Jews out of Europe. So also today there are Christians who labor tirelessly to end world hunger, sex trafficking, and—probably the worst social injustice of all time—abortion.

And whenever believers in Christ have set their hand to the plow without turning back, the world has looked on with wonder and mockery. Why waste your time on something like

that? Don't you know you're too small to make a difference? Don't you know that you can't resist the tsunami of human progress? Don't you know think it's time for the Church to get with the times and update its doctrine? Are you crazy? Are you mad?

And maybe we are a little crazy. Maybe we don't think in the same way the world thinks. Yet that is because we are possessed by the Holy Spirit and not the spirit of the times (*zeitgeist*). We believe and love a God whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways. Jesus came to make all things new (Rev. 21:5). Jesus says that you cannot put new wine into old wine skins, or the old wine skins will burst, destroying both the wine and the skins. But you put new wine into *new* wine skins (Matt. 9:17). And so he sent the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life" (Nicene Creed), to give us eternal life, abundant life, and life to the full (John 10:10).

Ever since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit remains on his people—and in them. *We* have the Spirit because of our Baptism and belief in the Gospel. So now we are God's temple, and his Spirit lives within us (1 Cor. 3:16). And when you're full of the Spirit, there's no telling what you might do next! "The wind blows where it wishes.... So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). The Spirit is creative and spontaneous—never ho hum, hum drum—and so it is with the people of God. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17). By the power of the Holy Spirit, God will enable us in the church to create amazing works of music and art, find creative solutions to tremendous obstacles, and preach a mighty Word that gives hope to the poor and brings down the mighty from their thrones. The Spirit empowers and equips us to do even greater things than Jesus did! That's *not* blasphemy. It's what Jesus said we *would* do because of his going to the Father and sending of the Spirit (John 14:12).

Jesus makes all things new. We have an unchanging God who changes everything—including us—“when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity” (SC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Petition of Lord’s Prayer).

So let the world mock us, make fun of us, and make a mess of things for us. The world cannot stop us. Filled with the Spirit of Christ, the Church is an unstoppable force (Erwin McManus). “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against [us]” (Matt. 16:18). Let the world look on, amazed and perplexed, continually asking, “What does this mean?” Let them see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). And let’s always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us: “Let this be known to you and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose.... But this is what was uttered through the prophet... that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:14-15, 21).

So we lift up our hands in worship and praise, and together we pray, “Come, Holy Spirit!” *Veni, creator Spiritus. Amen.*