

Nothing Butters  
Acts 2:1-12  
Pentecost Sunday  
June 9, 2019  
Pikes Peak UMC, Pastor Dea Sharp

**Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)**

**The Coming of the Holy Spirit**

**2** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

**5** Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. **6** And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. **7** Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? **9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, **11** Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." **12** All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

When the Holy Spirit poured onto the disciples that day in Jerusalem...

...and they started to speak in different languages, the people who were there and able to observe probably responded in many ways: confusion, astonishment, amazement, maybe some bewilderment...and then some accusing the disciples of being drunk at 9 a.m.!

'Spose, when we come to church and the Spirit reinvigorated us with a noisy event, that we'd have the same responses?

If we're honest, the response would probably be the opposite. "Oh, we're quiet Methodists. We don't make noise like that!"

We'd probably try to make excuses for the noise-makers.

And try to distract others from noticing the peculiar moment.

But, with that, we'd also take away from the wonder of the moment, too.

Are we too comfortable?

Or could we, rather than saying “that was odd and confusing” or “the preacher shouldn’t be drinking this early” say “You know what, the Spirit is here and a bit of excitement makes sense.”

We sure don’t want to, while trying to make “sense” of things, strip the power from an event like the first Pentecost. That day, when the Holy Spirit came, Jesus’ disciples changed from being frightened and cowering into a bold bunch of evangelists.

What happened, and we can all be Scripture scholars here, is that the curse of the Tower of Babel, clear back in Genesis 11 was reversed in this awesome outburst.

Babel divided people.

Pentecost made the motley crew of disciples into interpreters and unifiers like never seen before.

It’s like Babel only backward and better!

Now, the devout Jews from Elam, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Pamphylia and everywhere could hear the Good News of what God has done through Jesus each in their own native language.

There’s not babble. It’s clear clarity.

It’s no wonder the hearers were stopped in their tracks!

And before the day was over, as you heard John read, 3,000 devout Jews were baptized, they became true followers of Jesus, the Christ.

Babel scattered.

Pentecost gathered...and started the revolution that is the birth of the Church of Jesus Christ...with believers who share a common understanding (not confusion) about the power of God and what that could mean for their lives.

You’d think that something this momentous would convince others; especially eyewitnesses. Regretfully, too many found safety in reducing the event and the disciples’ behavior to heavy drinking! That attitude felt safer, I guess. “Oh, it’s just hysteria!”

There's a book called Quarks, Chaos and Christianity.

It was written by a physicist who became an Anglican priest. (John Polkinghorne)  
In the book he wrote that there are "nothing butters" living among us!

These are the folks who are "reductionists."

They see something as "nothing but" a *physical explanation*.

They look at it and try to find its most basic form so they can wrap their brains around it and explain it.

Let ME explain:

For instance, a "nothing butter" would say that Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony (duh duh duh duh duh) is "nothing but" the variations on vibrations.

We call it music.

They say "Nothing but."

- The Mona Lisa is "nothing but" flecks of paint.
- Baptism is "nothing but" water being poured over someone's head during a ritual observance.

And the Pentecost experience was "nothing but" religious hysteria.

Granted, Beethoven's symphony DOES get to our ears as vibrations.

But we can't just reduce that music to mere vibrations hitting our eardrums!

And of course, the Mona Lisa **is** flecks of paint on a canvas, but we can't reduce THAT smile, or any art, to JUST stuff that forms the art.

Music and art are much more!

Reducing them to "nothing but" a physical phenomena misses the point.

It's the same for the Pentecost experience.

Yes, the Holy Spirit coming to Jesus' disciples on that fiftieth day after the Passover, *would have* created some emotions much like hysteria.

But, whatever caused THOSE "nothing butters" THAT day, to wonder whether the disciples had been drinking, **IS NOT all there was to the event.**

There was something more!

There were immediate reactions and lasting impact that day!

There was immediately the sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ and the power of God's love. It reached RIGHT THEN, people who were visiting Jerusalem, from far away as well as locals.

The lasting impact is that the life and ways of Jesus came to Gentiles through the expanding ministries of the first disciples.

Centuries later the long-term impact still affects us.

It wasn't just a moment in time. It's something we actively believe happened.

Listen, it happened.

If it hadn't – why do we still celebrate this birthday of the Christian church?

“Nothing but” hysteria?

The event of Pentecost defies the “nothing but” explanation.

It can't be reduced to “It was nothing but emotionalism or hysteria.”

Or “It was nothing but a long-ago event we can no longer explain.”

To defy those “nothing butters,” Dear Ones, what we have to do is explain Pentecost this way: “It was nothing **less** than the Presence of God.”

That day, the Jesus Movement, the outreach of sharing about Jesus' life and teachings, was changed, not by human will, but by an act of the Holy Spirit.

And what happened next?

The gospel moved beyond Israel and Judaism.

The chaos and disorder of Babel in the Old Testament was brought back into order, reunited by God's spirit.

Pentecost is a time to remember that God's spirit is still present in a mighty way. That's why we can't let “nothing butters” reduce our worship to “it's just music, readings and a sermon.

And Holy Communion can't be described as “nothing but” bread and just, any more than baptism is “nothing but” water and words.

“Nothing butters” are pretty limited, really.

And we can't let ourselves be limited!

By that I mean, we can't limit OURSELVES saying "I can't do this-or-that. I'm "nothing but" a retiree or a housewife. **You have a message and a calling to share it!**

And we also can't limit who we'll attempt to reach with the Word of God, Jesus Christ with "they're 'nothing but' a druggie or an East-sider.

Because we're empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can't do that anymore than denying, because we have the writings of the Apostle Paul, the effects of Jesus Christ for the world, weren't going to be limited to Israel.

We can't limit WHO God is...  
...or HOW God acts...

For encouragement I'll share this closing story.

There was an old Presbyterian church in Dallas that had a worn out building AND enough money to build a new one. The new building was modern but the congregation found a way to keep their stunning Tiffany stained-glass windows from the old building.

Their most prized window HAD hung behind the altar, a larger-than-life image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, with his arms outstretched. And, at the bottom of the window were the words "Come to me, all you who labor." For generations, people had come into the old sanctuary and had been greeted by the invitation: "Come to me..."

With the construction of the new building the congregation did a lot of thinking and planning and preparing for the future. They decided they wouldn't put the Shepherd window in the front but in the back. Then, when worship was over, the people could view the window depicting their beloved Jesus Christ as they were going back into the world and with the call "Come to me, all you who labor."

They could see Christ and almost hear him say: "Come out into the world I love. Come and see it as I see it. Love it as I love it. This is where my Spirit is...rushing through the streets and the neighborhoods to bring people together – not based

on background or current situation or status or language. Come out here and tell others about me.”

Today, when you leave this place, take a good look, another look at OUR beloved Good Shepherd window as you leave into the world. After you’ve heard the benediction “We’ve been blessed, now let’s go and be a blessing” see Jesus leading us out and calling out “I love you.”

He’s gone ahead of us.

We know that as we recalled Ascension Sunday last week

And don’t let “nothing but” of *that’s just evangelism and I can’t do that* deter you.

Jesus reminded us “Fear not. I am with you always.”

Don’t let “nothing but” keep you, keep us, from continuing the building up of the Kingdom of God, because we who follow Jesus **now** are called to **respond** with our love of God as much as those first disciples, on Pentecost day, were called to **share** God’s love.

Let’s take this Good News that God loves us, and share that in our actions, as well as our words, with everyone we meet. We know it is NOTHING LESS than the Presence of God.

Amen.