

May 24, 2026

Acts 2:1-21

“The Harvest Begun at Pentecost!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On that Pentecost morning in Jerusalem, the city was alive with movement and expectation. Scattered Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism had come from all over the known world, filling the streets with a mixture of languages and cultures. The smells of fresh bread from the new wheat harvest filled the air. This was Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks - what we call Pentecost - a day rich with meaning.

Shavuot, or Pentecost, was a celebration of first fruits - the beginning of the harvest, the first yield that promised more to come. But it was also the anniversary of Sinai, the moment when God descended in fire and spoke his Law to his people, forming them into a covenant nation. So there was joy, yes, but also a sense of awe, even anticipation. This was a day when God had acted powerfully in the past - and perhaps he might act again. And then, suddenly, he did - Jesus fulfilled everything and was enthroned.

Acts tells us, "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1). What happens next is no ordinary event. A sound like a mighty rushing wind fills the house of the apostles. Tongues as of fire appear and rest on each of them. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in languages they have never learned.

To understand the full weight of this moment we must recall again what this day already carried with it. This was the day when Israel brought the first fruits of the wheat harvest before the Lord, as commanded in Leviticus. It was an act of trust and thanksgiving - trust that the God who had given the first portion would provide the rest. The feast was also understood as the anniversary of Sinai, when God came down in fire, when the mountain trembled, and when His voice spoke His holy Law: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice ... you shall be my treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5). Pentecost was about the God who speaks - and a people called to hear his voice. We see Pentecost as a counterpart to Sinai.

And that is where the tension lies. For if Pentecost is about a God who speaks and a people called to hear him, what happens when we do not listen? Or when we hear his Word and still fail to keep it? The command was clear. The Lord called his people to obey, and they answered, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). They heard his voice. They received his Law. They made their promises. And we are no different. We have heard his Word. We know what he commands. And yet our lives often tell another story. Our hearts resist God. Our ears grow dull. We hear his Word, but we do not live according to it. Sinai itself, for all its glory, exposes this reality. The people who stood before the mountain, who heard the voice of God, who promised obedience, would soon turn aside and worship a golden calf. And we are no different. Pentecost, apart from Christ, becomes not only a reminder that God speaks, but a revelation of our failure to live as his people. The harvest is commanded, but where is the fruit?

And that is why what happens in Acts 2 is so extraordinary. The signs of Sinai return. There is wind pointing to the breath of God. There is fire - the presence of God. And there is speech. But notice carefully where it begins. The Spirit fills the apostles, the very men whom Christ had chosen and sent. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). This is not unexpected. It is the fulfillment of what Jesus had already promised. On the night before

his crucifixion, Jesus said, “The Helper, the Holy Spirit ... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). What we are witnessing at Pentecost is that promise being kept. The Spirit comes to the apostles so that their witness to Christ would be sure, true, and Spirit-given. From them, the Gospel goes out into the world. From them, the Church is built. This moment is not simply about power. Rather, it is about eye-witness testimony. The risen Christ, exalted at the right hand of the Father, now publicly pours out his Spirit upon his apostles so that they may faithfully bear witness and proclaim him. And we proclaim their message.

The apostle Peter makes this unmistakably clear. This outpouring of the Spirit is not random, but is the work of the risen and ascended Jesus. “This Jesus God raised up ... being therefore exalted at the right hand of God ... he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:32–33). Pentecost proclaims Jesus. The Spirit comes because Christ has completed his saving work - his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension. And the Spirit’s purpose is always to point us to him, to proclaim him, and to bring us into the reality of what he has finished.

And the harvest begins! Remember what this day is - Pentecost - the feast of first fruits. So where is the harvest? It comes through the very means Christ has established, namely, through the apostolic proclamation. Peter, standing with the eleven, lifts up his voice and bears witness to Jesus - crucified, risen, and exalted. And as that Spirit-given Word is preached, the result is immediate and unmistakable: “Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). These are the first fruits - not of grain, but of people brought into Christ through Word and baptism.

And there is a deeper echo here that reaches back to Sinai. When Moses came down from the mountain and found the people worshiping the golden calf, judgment fell: “And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men” (Exodus 32:28). Under the Law, three thousand perish. But here, under the Gospel proclaimed by the apostles, three thousand are given life. This is no coincidence. What the Law could not produce, the Gospel now creates. Where the Law exposes sin and brings death, the Spirit works through the Word of Christ to bring repentance, forgiveness, and life.

So this is the harvest of Pentecost: not human effort, not spiritual enthusiasm, but Christ at work through his appointed witnesses. The exalted Lord publicly pours out his Spirit, the apostles speak his Word, and the Spirit gathers a people to himself. The harvest has begun, and it comes exactly as Jesus promised, through the Word and Sacraments that gives life - because they are connected to him.

And this is not just history. It is for you. The same Spirit poured out at Pentecost is given through the Gospel and the Sacraments even now. And what does he do? He gives you a new heart. You are not left to make yourself holy or to fix what is broken within you. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5). He points you to Jesus again and again, for no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). And he bears fruit in your life - not by your strength, but by his work. The fruits of the Holy Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience - this is the harvest God produces in you (Gal. 5:22). You begin to live as what James calls “a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (James 1:18), a sign of the harvest that is and the greater harvest that is still to come.

So how do we live in this reality? We remain where the Spirit has promised to work - in the apostolic Word and in the visible Word of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, where Christ himself is given to us. There the Spirit does what we cannot do: he creates faith, forgives sins, and preserves us in Jesus Christ our Savior. Our confidence is not in what we are going to produce, but in what Jesus continues to give. And once you begin to see that, you begin to see something else: You are no longer standing outside, wondering if there will be a harvest. You are standing in it.

The harvest is underway. The first sheaves have already been gathered. What began at Pentecost has spread across the whole field. The grain is being cut and brought in, gathered together under one Lord. And the field is still not done. There is still more to come. On that day long ago, three thousand were gathered and bid to repent and be baptized. And ever since then, the same Lord has continued his work - through preaching, through Baptism, through his Supper - gathering sinners into his kingdom.

And here you are! Gathered in! Forgiven! Made alive in Christ! You are a sign that the harvest is very real and that the Lord will finish what he has begun. Yes! The day is coming when the field will be done when every last one has been gathered. Not one will be lost. And on that day, you will stand secure in Christ as part of his finished harvest. Until then - the reaping is not done! "Who will go and work today? Fields are ripe and harvests waiting - Who will bear the sheaves away?"

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott