

Text: [Acts 2:1-21 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: May 19, 2024 – Pentecost Sunday

Title: “Mystified, Surprised, Amazed”

Theme: Part of the Holy Spirit’s work is to draw attention to what God is doing in the world.

1

One of the privileges of being a pastor is that people share with me accounts of their spiritual experiences
A lot of the time, those accounts start like this:

“Pastor, you’re never going to believe this, but...”
When you share a story that starts like that
Know this: I’m always going to begin with belief

I’ve had people tell me stories of dreams, visions, healings, chance encounters that they could never have planned, of people who appeared out of nowhere like angels to help, financial blessings that came at just the right time

When someone shares a story like that, I always begin with belief
Because bedrock to my faith are two ideas:

- 1) That God is real and
- 2) That God does stuff in the world

2

I’m gonna admit though
I have never seen or heard about anything as wild as the biblical account of Pentecost
I mean, a mighty wind?
Tongues of fire?
People speaking in languages they’ve never learned?
A scene that’s so chaotic that the preacher has to defend the Holy Spirit
Folks have made such a spectacle that Peter has to stand up and say, “no, no, you’ve got it wrong – these people aren’t drunk – it’s only 9 am!”

Pentecost, this moment the disciples have been instructed by Jesus to wait
and pray for
When the Spirit of God descends with power
And moves the Church from a place of fear
To a place of fearlessness

No longer are the disciples cowering in the Upper Room
Wondering why Jesus has left them for a second time
Suddenly, they are filled with the courage of their convictions
And they have signs and wonders to establish who they are
As the rightful heirs of Christ's ministry in the world

The power of God among them is undeniable
And presence of God with them is palpable

Now, I know I've preached sermons before about how the work of the Spirit
is often subtle
That we really have to look for it in our lives
Really have to pay attention

Pentecost was anything but subtle
It was loud and garish

To the point where we might be tempted to chalk this up as a story of the
long-distant past
Where God seemed much more present than God is now
It feels hard to connect with it, honestly

Because it's so easy to look at the world and take away the impression that
God has given up
That the Holy Spirit has checked out
That the only thing that matters is power and might and money

But I don't really believe that
And I suspect you don't really believe it, either
Otherwise, why did you come today?

3

Have you ever had an experience that you just could not explain?
Perhaps you've been hesitant to attribute it to God
Because you still can't be sure, even to this day, if you imagined it
So maybe you never talked about it, never shared it with anyone
But somewhere, deep down, you've always wondered: did God do that?

As Christians, why should we be afraid of admitting to our belief that God is
real, and that God does things in the world?
Why should we imagine that those things happen only to other people, and
never to us?
That God shows up for other people, and not for us?

Peter stands up and quotes an ancient prophecy from the book of Joel:

*I will pour out my Spirit on ALL people
Your sons and daughters will prophesy
Your young will see visions
Your elders will dream dreams.*

*I will cause wonders in the heavens above
And signs on the earth below.*

So why are we surprised when God shows up and does something
amazing?
Why are we so quick to explain it away?

3

I was really struck by three words in the passage today
Three words that describe the reactions of the crowd

The scripture says they were *mystified*, *surprised*, and *amazed*
Now, part of my habit in preparing to preach – especially the New
Testament – is to dig into the Greek when words catch my eye

And what I found for these three words spoke to me about what God may
be trying to do here

What we translate as *mystified* literally means “mixed up” – like when you pour together two liquids in a kind of aggressive way
Surprised is literally “thrown off balance” – like when you come up behind someone and push them
And *amazed* is literally “wondered, marveled” – in other words, *stopped to gawk at*¹

I started to wonder if a big part of the Holy Spirit’s job might simply be this:
To stir us up, to turn us around, and to get us to stop long enough to look at something new

In other words, to get our attention by any means possible!
What the text says is that when people heard the sound of the wind, a crowd gathered
People began to pay attention

What if the Holy Spirit’s job is to be like the wild, wacky, inflatable tube man – you know what I’m talking about – those things used car dealers put on their lots to draw you in?
I love those things, by the way

And here we are, just pretending like we don’t notice what God is doing
Or, worse yet, talking ourselves out of it, till we’re convinced we never saw anything at all?

One of the things I take pride in is trying to find moments of beauty in the everyday
The color of the sky in the morning
The light in the trees just before sunset
Purple or yellow flowers in a meadow

Alice Walker, in her book *The Color Purple* tried to capture this:
“I think it [makes God angry] if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.”

When God is trying to get our attention,
shouldn’t we, as people of faith, be willing to give it?

4

Sometimes, yes, God is subtle
But my fear is this: because God sometimes CAN be subtle, we often will
question what we're seeing
Even in moments when it should be blatantly obvious that God HAS shown
up and IS doing something

That's what I want us to consider today:
Whether we've written off the PRESENCE and the POWER of God in our
lives

Because we just decided:
"God doesn't do those things anymore"
"It couldn't have been"
"I must have imagined it"

Instead of just admitting that if something amazing just happened
Maybe God DID do it
Maybe God provided the breakthrough you needed in that relationship
In your workplace
In the challenge that has been stressing you out now for YEARS

Maybe we've been guilty of ignoring the wild, wacky, inflatable tube man
Because if we begin to believe that God's done the miraculous once
If God's done that thing that mystifies, surprises, or amazes -
Then maybe we'll have to begin living as though the Spirit might do it again
Even EXPECTING the Spirit to do it again

And all that sounds a touch too, well, *religious* for us
Because it means admitting we're no longer in control

5

One of the commentators I read on this passage said this –I'll paraphrase:

Pentecost is proof that our big God
Has a big Word
For a big World ²

When I asked you earlier about *the thing* that God did for you
You know, that you're not *sure* if God did for you?
That experience that you're not 100% certain how to explain?

What if God gave you THAT to get you to stop and pay attention
Even if it means that you're paying attention again just now

That's the great thing about God: it's never too late
It's never too late to notice and appreciate what the Spirit has *done*
What the Spirit is *doing*

And then to do what the disciples did in response:
To tell the story
To take that big Word out into a big World
To be God's witnesses to the ends of the earth

It's the Spirit's job to get your attention – by any means possible
And my prayer for this morning is that the Spirit has your attention now

Whatever that experience was that you've not told anyone about
That thing that mystified, surprised, and amazed you
Let me challenge you to tell someone this week

Don't doubt it anymore
Instead, find the courage to share it
The Spirit did a job
You're paying attention now
So go and tell the story

Amen.

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¹ Verse 6 – mystified: [Strong's G4797](#) | Verse 7 – surprised: [Strong's G1839](#) (which is itself a compound of [G1537](#) & [G2476](#)), amazed: [Strong's G2296](#)

² Jana Childers in her commentary on this passage in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 3, page 17.