THE WORLD AND GOD

John 14:8-17 Text: Vs.17a *"the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him."*

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. July 4, 1776. Thomas Jefferson from the Colony of Virginia noted the weather for that day was cloudy. A high temperature of 76°F. He was there working on a document with a group of delegates from the 13 American colonies. The group was *The Continental Congress* meeting at the Pennsylvania State House, now called Independence Hall. The document they were working on? *The Declaration of Independence*. And it was signed that day by 56 people to become a significant landmark in the history of democracy. And the American Revolution began. Later, five signers were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. 9 of the 56 signers fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War. Why? Those 56 signers had pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to that cause. The last sentence of the *Declaration of Independence* reads, *"... with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor"*. And from that a new nation was born! Yet, George III, King of England, wrote in his diary on July 4, 1776: *"Nothing of any importance happened today."*

And in the year A.D. 30, thousands of people from all over had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost. It was the beginning of the summer harvest. Spiritually, it celebrated the Jews receiving the *Law of Moses* at Mount Sinai during the Exodus. Jesus' disciples were all together in a house in Jerusalem. Suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. The *Spirit of God* surrounded each disciple with what appeared to be tongues of fire. As the Spirit enabled them, they began speaking different languages. People thought they had too much wine. They said they were drunk. But they had been promised by Jesus to be filled by God's Holy Spirit! Listeners from foreign countries understood exactly what each disciple was speaking to them, in their own language. What the disciples were saying was about Jesus. And the Church was born! Yet, no one felt "*anything important happened."*

Those disciples were just ordinary men. A few fishermen. A couple of housewives. A former tax collector. A few farmers. Some servant girls. Just *ordinary people*! Yet, those *ordinary people* built God's Church! And it's lasted for 1,992 years. That small, insignificant group of ordinary men and women formed what became the official religion of the Roman Empire on February 27th in the year 380. And today, that Church encircles the globe having a membership of over 85 million members worldwide. It has 20,500 full-time Christian workers. And 10,200 foreign missionaries. How did they do it? On that day of Pentecost, 120 followers of Jesus came in contact with God! Yes, 120 followers came in direct contact with God's Holy Spirit and added that day 3,000 new believers to their group. It happened! And Pentecost has now become one of four major Christian events in the Church year: Christmas, Easter, Ascension Sunday and Pentecost. Yes, some probably said, *"Nothing of any importance happened."*

But today we're celebrating the birthday of the church! Pentecost Sunday! Jesus had talked to His disciples about His going away. He had promised the Holy Spirit would come to help His disciples carry on after He was ascended back to heaven. He had focused on comfort and encouragement after they had started to worry. They'd been with Jesus over three years. They were dependent on Him. They needed Him to help them know what to do. And how to live. They realized just how much they still needed to learn from Him. So, the thought of Him leaving them was pretty disturbing. And Jesus set out to reassure them.

John 14 begins with, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me."* He followed that with the promise He was going to "*prepare a place for them in his Father's house"*. Then, He went on to talk about their concerns of losing Him and not being with them every day. He said, *"I will ask the Father. And He will give you another Advocate to be with you, forever."* An advocate is someone who battles for something, or someone. Someone who fights for the rights of others. A good example of an advocate is a lawyer. Yes, Jesus was about to leave them. But His presence with them was going to be replaced by something far greater. Another Advocate! Back in vs. 12 He said, *"the ones who believe in Me will also do the works that I do. In fact, they will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."* We learned about that last week. Now, we're going to see how it worked out!

Charles Spurgeon was an English Baptist preacher who remains today as highly important among Christians and is known as the *"Prince of Preachers"*. Once he told of sitting in a nice restaurant. As he ate, he kept noticing a rather angry looking man sitting across the dining room who scowled at him. Every time he looked his way he scowled. Finally, Spurgeon decided to go over and speak to the man to see what his problem was. As Spurgeon stood up, he suddenly realized. What he was seeing . . . . . was his own reflection in a mirror on the wall across the room.

Now, you may not always recognize yourself as reflected in God's Word, the Bible. You may not like it! But what you see is the truth! And it's always best for you to understand how the Holy Spirit guides you. How He leads you. How He teaches you. And when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they heard the Word of God. And Peter said to them on that Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, *"God raised Jesus up the third day, and showed him openly; Not to all the people. But unto witnesses chosen before God. Even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. And He*

commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter spoke those words, the Holy Ghost fell on all of them which heard the word". (Acts 10:40–46)

And do you know when the Holy Spirit came upon you? It was when you were baptized with water! The baptismal water combines with the Word of God, (Ephesians 5:25–26) just as the Lord's Supper has bread and fruit of the vine combine with Christ's words in order for the Holy Spirit to work in you through Holy Communion. (Matthew 26:26–28) Do you understand that? God is in the world today. And by His Holy Spirit, God is in you just as the Holy Spirit was in the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus predicted the Holy Spirit would be available to every believer. That's you! To guide you. To teach you. To remind you of God. Jesus' words were meant to comfort His disciples. And they are to comfort you. Jesus knew in advance what would happen. And because of that, you can be even more confident as you put your trust Him. So, just how big is your God?

When New York City *fathers* imagined the future growth of New York City, the Commissioners' Plan of 1811 laid out the streets. They numbered them from the center outward. When they began, there were only six or seven streets in New York City. So, their planning maps show just how large they thought the city might become. Reaching beyond their wildest imagination, they drew streets on the map, all the way out to ***19th street!*** They called it *"Boundary Street"*. They were sure that's all the larger New York City would become. But history has proven them shortsighted! At the last count, New York City reached to 284th Street. Far exceeding their expectations of 19! Manhattan has 214 numbered east–west streets ranging from 1st to 228th. And Broadway is the longest street in the world! It starts at the southern tip of Manhattan and goes all the way up to Albany 150 miles to the North.

So, what's so special about the work of God's Holy Spirit? The Bible says, God's Holy Spirit has been active on Earth from the beginning of creation. From Genesis. Through the times of the Patriarchs. Judges. Kings. Prophets. All those accounts show God's Holy Spirit resting upon individual people at different times. For specific purposes. It was temporary. They were *task-specific* visitations by the Holy Spirit. Visions. Prophecies. Miracles. God anointed His servants. But it didn't last long. And what happened at Pentecost in Jerusalem was very different! This great Pentecost saw the Spirit of God descend upon 120 disciples with tongues of fire and a loud sound of rushing wind. It transformed them from fearfulness to boldness. From doubtfulness to unshakable faith. And It took them to the ends of the Earth with the promise, that all who would believe in God would never perish, but have everlasting life.

So, this Christian holiday of Pentecost is celebrated on the 50th day, the word Pentecost comes from a Greek word meaning fiftieth, or the seventh Sunday from Easter Sunday. It celebrates the falling of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and all followers of Jesus Christ, while they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Weeks. It's described in Acts 2:1–31 as a *"driving wind"* to represent God's first breath of love (sounds like *Ruah*) He breathed into all of creation. Fire represents enthusiasm. It replaced their fear with the courage to go forth and share Christ's story. *"Tongues of fire … came to rest on each one of them."* Red is the color of liturgical vestments and paraments on the altar to represent the energy of the Holy Spirit and the passion of those who open their hearts to the Spirit. Red recalls the fiery tongues that descended upon the Apostles when they received the Holy Spirit. Water represents new life first made at the time of baptism and renewed throughout faith-lived lives. Believers often choose to get baptized on Pentecost. It has become the most common day for baptism. A dove represents the Holy Spirit that descended "like a dove" and hovered over Jesus when he was baptized. It's a symbol of peace.

The 3,000 converted on the Day of Pentecost were saved by faith. They demonstrated the reality of their faith by their baptism. They received the Holy Spirit. They became involved in the church. They *"continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers"*. (2:42) In the New Testament, there's not one instance of a person believing and then refusing to be baptized. Or refusing to become part of a local church. Three thousand Jewish people repented. 3000 were baptized. 3000 received the Holy Spirit. And 3000 immediately began meeting together to experience the power of the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives. It was a beautiful sense of oneness.

And so today, we should be one in the Spirit! Today is a celebration! Today is the celebration of the birth of the Church! Happy Birthday Church! Happy Birthday! AMEN

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