

The Pentecostal Life: 3: Apostolic Teaching

Acts 2:37-47

The Rev. Dr. L. Gregory Bloomquist
Calvin Christian Reformed Church (Ottawa)
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Acts 2:37-47

³⁷ Now those who were gathered together in Jerusalem and heard Peter speak were stung in the very depths of their being by what Peter had said. So they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what shall we then do?”

³⁸ Peter said to them: “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift that comes from God alone, which is the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For, know this: the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far away... all those whom the Lord our God now calls to Himself.”

⁴⁰ Peter bore witness with many other words. Among those words were the ones in which he urged them on, saying: “Come, you and your families, and be rescued from this crooked generation.”

⁴¹ Those who received his word were baptized, and their numbers increased by about 3000 souls that day. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to commonality, to breaking bread, and to prayers. That is to say...

⁴³ Fear came upon every soul, and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles.

⁴⁴ Also, all those who had come to believe were of one mind and held everything in common; ⁴⁵ they sold their belongings and goods and distributed them to all according as anyone had need.

⁴⁶ Daily, they broke bread in their homes and shared meals with glad and generous hearts.

Daily, they gathered together in the Temple, ⁴⁷ praising God and being thought well of by all the people.

And daily, the Lord increased the number of those being saved and drew them together to be of one mind.

For the link from Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), see
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_JRAsQwcOo

Over the past two sermons (June 3 and June 10), we have seen what happened on the day of Pentecost and immediately after. We saw how the Holy Spirit suddenly came upon the 120 fear-filled followers of Jesus gathered in a little room and then drove them into the streets, proclaiming Christ. We saw how Peter, a farmer, stood up and explained to the people what they were seeing, that it was the fulfilment of Old Testament promises, fulfilled by and through Jesus. We saw that 3000 people believed and were baptized, that is, they died to their own lives, and began to live a new life characterized by – so far – three things:

- In the midst of everything, the people heard them praising God more than anything else;
- In addition to continuing to eat in their own homes as families, they now started to eat in each other's homes as if they were all family;
- In addition to having their own property, they now started sharing the abundance that God brought to them with others who were also baptized, so that none of those who was baptized was in need.

And today we read about what Luke says was actually the first thing that characterized them: "They were devoted to the apostles' teaching."

I don't think that anyone here doubts that Jesus, who chose the apostles, and taught them everything they knew, was a teacher.

You could easily find evidence that Jesus was a teacher: he taught in parables; he gave a whole sermon once, the Sermon on the Mount. Why we know from John's Gospel that he taught at great length in the wilderness or in the Temple. In fact, even non-Christians believe that Jesus was a great teacher.

But, Jesus was more than a great teacher.

What you just saw in this brief portion from Franco Zeffirelli's amazing 1970s TV series, Jesus of Nazareth is an excellent example of what Jesus was and the fullness of his teaching, in both word AND deed.

According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in word. Then, suddenly something happened. A man possessed of a demon broke into the synagogue. Suddenly, Mark says, "there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him." (Mark 1:23-26).

What happened then? Mark tells us: the crowd "were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."" (Mark 1:27).

Did you catch that? They have heard Jesus teaching them about the Law, but what they call "teaching", a new teaching, with authority, is when Jesus commands the demon and he obeys him.

And this is exactly right. Because what Jesus does throughout his time in Galilee and Jerusalem is to teach in BOTH word and deed. He does sit before crowds and use words to interpret and instruct. The Sermon on the Mount shows Jesus teaching in word as the Law giver - You have heard it said, but I say unto you. But, he also teaches in deeds, mighty deeds. The healing of the demoniac, or of the blind man, or the raising of Lazarus show Jesus teaching in mighty deeds of power.

In word, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God had come near, a Kingdom in which God was going to free His creation from the bondage of sin, in response to the covenant that God had made.

And, in deed, Jesus taught that the creation was BEING freed from the bondage of sin by actually freeing that creation. He did so by

- Freeing from the shackles of sickness imposed by sin,
- Freeing from demons who had become powerful in the world through human sin,
- Freeing from all kinds of human misunderstandings and lies.

And this is what Jesus empowered the apostles to do, those whom he sent out into the world:

- To teach in word what God's promises given to Israel pointed to and how they were coming to fruition in our day, AND
- To bring those promises to fruition in deed.

Mark tells us that Jesus "appointed twelve (men) to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14).

We oftentimes stop mid-sentence and say: "apostolic teaching? Why that's what Jesus did when "He appointed twelve to with him, and to be sent out to preach..." But, is that the end of the command? No, he appointed them "... to be sent out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons"! Jesus appointed the 12 to have the same kind of authority and power that he himself had been given by his Father.

And after Pentecost, they actually showed this power under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- On their way into prayer in the Temple, the apostles passed a beggar who asked them for money. The apostles said: We don't have any extra for you, but we do have this: Get up and walk. And he did!
- Liars and adulterers would come in to one of their houses. The apostles wouldn't just nod, greet them with "Good morning", thanks for your offering, brother Ananias and sister Sapphira, but would point to them and say: What you are doing bringing your filthy lies into our midst? Repent and you may stay. And if they didn't, they might die on the spot. Whoa. The reaction of the people was obvious: What's going on here?
- And it went on as more miracles happened, as people were delivered miraculously from prison, as people found themselves transported miraculously from one place to another. One thing after another provided irrefutable evidence of power, the same kind of power that had characterized the teaching of the Lord Jesus and which was now attributed by the apostles to the risen Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

This was powerful stuff. And this was the kind of thing that characterized the Pentecostal community in Jerusalem in those first weeks. No wonder "fear came on the people". No wonder people began to say

about this community as they had said about Jesus: We've never seen teaching like this before. This is teaching with authority! This is "apostolic teaching" as Luke says in vs. 43: "Fear came upon every soul, and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles."

My friends, it is no wonder that we get worried when we read about this kind of thing, even we the baptized, living here in the 21st century. This is powerful stuff.

Perhaps you, like many Christians, have read vs. 42 and said: Oh, the early church was devoted to the apostles' teaching means that these new believers went to a church like this, perhaps on Sunday, perhaps more often, and were lectured to by the apostles or about the apostles and their doctrine.

But, as you can hopefully see by now, "apostolic teaching" is modeled on Jesus' teaching and it is much more than lecturing to people, even if it is lecturing out of the most holy of Scriptures. It is something much more powerful, much more dangerous, much more out of human control. Apostolic teaching is teaching in word and deed! It is telling people about the mighty acts of God in bringing about the Kingdom of God in Christ and it is showing them how the Kingdom of God was coming about in their midst through amazing signs and wonders done by the Holy Spirit, what we would call miracles, happening right in their own midst.

Today, unfortunately what goes by the term teaching in our churches, even apostolic teaching, is a very, very weak substitute indeed. It's almost a caricature of true, biblical apostolic teaching.

At its best, what happens in our day is helpful moral instruction or theological interpretation that gives people clues as to how to live out our Christian life. At its worst, what we most often call "apostolic teaching" is simply the unhelpful opinions and speculation by those who cannot see beyond the horizon of their own, known world and, not knowing better, cannot keep their mouths shut. They should not be speaking at all, much less from pulpits. They are usually men, but women who become ordained don't do much better if any better.

Worse still, what is often called apostolic teaching is simply just a veneer over long-held cultural and political prejudices and preferences. For that reason, there is sometimes no discernible difference between the voice of the church and the voice of the world.

My friends, I believe that it is the abandonment of apostolic teaching practiced by Jesus, the apostles, and the early church, along with an abandonment of the other characteristics of the Pentecostal life, that has led so many of our young people to leave the church. They say and rightly so: "What you are offering me is no different from what the world is already saying. So, why should I spend my valuable free Sunday hearing someone say what I can already hear others in the world telling me, and usually doing a better job? Show me that you have something different to offer and I'll be there."

And they're right. What our young people are crying out for is what the world is crying out for: true, apostolic teaching, belief in a God who is praiseworthy even in the bad times, a new family brought together in the blood of Christ, living a life that does not cling to what we have but shares the abundance

that God gives us. This kind of life is impossible without the Holy Spirit, but with the Holy Spirit... it will take your breath away.¹

So, my friends, let's start to re-cap as we prepare for our final exam in the Pentecostal life. Let's take one last look at what the Pentecostal life looks like as Luke describes it.

- The Pentecostal life does not mean that we will no longer offer regular prayers in churches, even in ritual form, or that petition and intercession have no place.
 - What it does mean is that our prayer will be characterized by praise. Even when life leads us, into occasions of real challenge, real difficulty, real pain, real suffering. The Holy Spirit will urge us to praise God, not just when things are going well, but even in those difficult situations. And others will take notice.. When people look at us as a church they will ask: “Why are these people so filled with joy, praising God for what is happening to them, especially in times of difficulty? This must say something about the kind of God that they serve. Is He able to fill even someone like me with that joy-filled hope?”
- The Pentecostal life does not mean that we will no longer have regular meals in our houses with our immediate families.
 - What it does mean is that we will also be sharing meals with those who are not our family members by our blood and with those who are our family members by the blood of Christ. God will give us many, many occasions to meet brothers and sisters in Christ, from other churches, from other lands, of other races and languages. The Holy Spirit will urge us to invite them out for coffee, or better yet a beer. The Holy Spirit will urge us to bring them to our homes, to talk about what God is doing in our lives. And other people will notice. They will ask: “Why are these people always eating with strangers, so different from them in terms of race or gender or social class, or even eating with former enemies? What’s the point?”
- The Pentecostal life does not mean giving up your private property.
 - What it does mean is that when we, the people of God, experience supernatural abundance that comes from the riches of God, we will begin to make that available for the needs of our brothers and sisters, here and far away. Those who are blessed by a windfall will have an opportunity to take that windfall, or even a portion, and lay it at the feet of the deacons of this church. Deacons, you heard last Sunday that among your responsibilities are the following, that In Christ's name you show that Christians live by the Spirit of the kingdom, fervently desiring to give life the shape of things to come. Deacons are therefore called to assess needs, promote stewardship and hospitality, collect and disburse resources for benevolence, and develop programs of assistance. In other words, you are called to demonstrate the care of the Lord himself. Well, here’s your chance: receive the abundance of God that will be laid at your feet. You who bring your abundance don’t need to worry

¹ “Apostolic teaching”, though we normally think of it as instruction in the truth of the faith, is really more unimpeachable, irrefutable evidence **for** faith, faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It is the kind of evidence for God’s sovereignty that we associate with the miracles (i.e., “signs and wonders”) of Moses to Pharaoh that left Pharaoh with no option other than to “let my people go” than it is with University or theological education. For that reason, the term “teaching” may not be the best term to translate the Greek word used here, since we associate “teaching” with didactic instruction. Perhaps a better word would be “apostolic testimony with a view to following and practicing it, rather than just acknowledging, it”. The notion is that all Christians should become “apostolic” in being able to bear effectual and unimpeachable witness to the risen Lord Jesus Christ!

about losing your money. God will bring returns on that diaconal investment in ways that you cannot even begin to imagine.

- The Pentecostal life does not mean giving up the regular study and teaching of Scripture.
 - What it does mean is that we will tell people about the Kingdom of God and practice the signs and wonders that are bringing about the Kingdom of God in our midst. This is the apostolic task commended to the church. I was talking with Jacqueline after the service last week and she made a really good point: all those who are baptized in the blood of the Lamb receive the gift of the Holy Spirit but some, who were baptized a long time ago, have gifts from the Holy Spirit that have gone dormant, while others, perhaps newly baptized, don't know what gifts God has given them. OK, Elders: last week in your ordination you were told that your responsibilities include, among other things, the following. You have received this task when Christ entrusted the apostles and their successors; you are responsible for the spiritual well-being of God's people which includes true preaching and teaching. And you must promote fellowship and hospitality among believers, ensure good order in the church, and stimulate witness to all people. Well, my brothers, here is your chance to assist your people to discern their gifts so that the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to people in our midst might be unleashed.² I spoke with one young man here last week whom God has gifted with the kind of teaching powers that we know God continues to give to His church. All God's people, regardless of age, regardless of preparation, have this ability to teach. But, it must be done together, so that when people see it they will know that we are of one mind, not a bunch of lone individuals working at creating our own little spiritual empires.

My friends, I know that much of what I have said to you over these 3 weeks sounds wild, even impossible. It is... unless God the Holy Spirit leads us into it. Because, in our own strength, with our own power, none of what I have said will ever happen. It's impossible. The Pentecostal life is an impossible life made possible only by the indwelling and in-working of the Holy Spirit. But, here's what you will start to see if this Pentecostal life takes hold here:

And people around will notice. Oh, it won't make headlines, I can assure you. As I was discussing with my good friend Leo van Arragon this week as we talked about these sermons, Leo made an excellent point: The church following the day of Pentecost grew in explosive ways but it barely made the headlines of the day. People flocked to the church. But, it happened without making the headlines. In fact, one of the greatest Roman historians of the day, Tacitus, writing in the first century describes the whole time that Tiberius was emperor, a period that included the ministries of John the Baptist and of Jesus, that included the death and resurrection of Jesus, that included Pentecost and the incredible growth of the church in Palestine following Pentecost, as a period in which, he writes, "nothing happened in Palestine".³

Nothing happened? My friends, everything was happening that would change the face of the world, and it continues to this day where the Pentecostal life is lived out. Beware believing that all that happens is reported in the headlines of the news or even captured by historians of the day. Believe that the Kingdom of God has drawn near, and that you are part of God's great Pentecostal life that continues to change the face of the world.

² On this point, see Frank Tillapaugh, Unleashing the church: Getting people out of the fortress and into ministry (Regal Books, 1985).

³ [Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.9: sub Tiberio quies.](#)

Let us pray.