

TRANSFORMATION BY THE SPIRIT

Pentecost Sunday is a day to celebrate hope, a hope evoked by the knowledge that God through His **Holy Spirit** is mightily at work among His people. It is a celebration of newness, of recreation, of renewal of purpose and of **transformation**. It is a celebration of God's ongoing work among all the nations in the world. But most of all, it is a recognition that God's work is being done through His people - as He pours out His Spirit upon them (**Joel 2:28**).

This focus on the church's mission to the world, and the enabling presence of God through the work of the Holy Spirit in the church (to empower that mission) should provide a powerful impetus for churches today, especially those like Cornerstone. Pentecost gives us a tremendous opportunity to use this time to see people **transformed** through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

The Day of Pentecost tells of remarkable **transformations** in the lives of the Lord's disciples, and this change was in sharp contrast to their lives 50 days earlier. The Gospel accounts are not flattering about their humanity, because at Christ's arrest and trial, all forsook Him and fled (**Matthew 26:56**). Peter, who had vowed he would always stand by Jesus, cursed and swore - even denying he knew Him (**Matthew 26:69-75**).

Yet within the span of seven weeks, by Pentecost, we see a **transformation** in the disciples' courage. They are now able to speak openly to large crowds, declaring boldly that Jesus was resurrected from the dead; and they daringly confront the civil and religious authorities.

We find them courageously defying orders and threats that they will be imprisoned if they continue to speak about Jesus (**Acts 4:18-23**). They fearlessly face beatings and death threats for preaching Christ (**Acts 5:17-33**). Yet seven weeks earlier they denied that they even knew Jesus. Suddenly nothing can stop them from openly declaring what they know to be the truth about Christ. What a **transformation**!

Peter's boldness on the **Feast of Pentecost** stands out most. At the temple he addresses a large crowd, of which 3,000 later become disciples of Jesus. They had travelled to observe the Feast of Pentecost (**Leviticus 23:15-16**), so Peter confronts them and fearlessly tells them they are the ones who had crucified Jesus.

The reaction of the crowd is very significant. There's no denial, outcry or attempt to stone Peter for this outrageous charge. They sense a personal involvement. They know of the events surrounding the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Christ. They know that many - perhaps even some standing there listening to Peter - had shouted for Christ's blood. They'd heard of the strange events that had taken place at the time - darkness over the land as Jesus was being crucified, people resurrected from their graves and walking the streets of Jerusalem, an earthquake and the veil in the temple being torn from top to bottom. Peter then challenges them to change their lives and make decisions that will affect future generations.

The crowd asks what they should do to change, and Peter replies they should *repent and be baptised*. This is how they will receive the only power that can truly **transform** any human life - **God's blessed Holy Spirit**.

Before He left His disciples, Jesus promised He would send another “Comforter” in His place - *the Holy Spirit* (**John 14:26**) This invisible power from God is what makes possible the *transformation* of a human life. It’s the power that can change ordinary men from ordinary walks of life to ‘great men of God’.

This divine power transformed a frightened band of disciples who had been ready to throw away everything and flee. Men who had failed miserably just 50 days before are now, by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, changing into dynamic leaders for the Church. By the power of the **Holy Spirit** they perform miracles. Even Peter’s shadow passing over the sick brings instant healing (**Acts 5:12-16**).

The truth about **Pentecost** is that the very same **power** that **transformed** the early disciples is also available to transform and change people today (to become the **firstfruits** of God). Might you be one? Through events on the Day of Pentecost God reveals that He is now dealing with a specific group of people - the **firstfruits** of the huge spiritual harvest to come. *Firstfruits* are challenged to be the first to change their lives and do as Jesus would do. To be transformed into His likeness

The first-century Church was the first (as a group) to work at this task. On **Pentecost** the Holy Spirit dramatically changed their lives. Their *transformation* started when they received the Holy Spirit. Some 20 years later they were viewed as turning “the world upside down” (**Acts 17:6**). Such was the dynamic, miraculous power of the **Holy Spirit**. It was the same divine power at work in Jesus’ ministry (**Luke 4:14**). It led the first-century Church to understand their battle with human nature (**Rom. 7:22-25**) and those unseen evil forces (**Eph. 6:12**).

Firstfruits are called to be holy - to be different! They learn that when there is a conflict with a job and the Sabbath, it isn’t a Sabbath problem but a job problem. They know the Sabbath was here before the job. They are prepared to be different to serve God. **Firstfruits** demonstrate a willingness to follow, obey, take orders, learn and repent because the **Holy Spirit** brings an attitude of respect and adoration before God. To be holy is to be different, and **firstfruits** don’t apologise for being different in a world under the sway of a corrupt system.

Jesus’ counsel of the first century holds true today. A few common threads are woven into His clear instruction to the **firstfruits** of God’s Church in **Revelation 2** and **3**: “***I know your works.***” “***He who has an ear, let him hear.***” But the reward is offered exclusively “***to him who overcomes.***” Those challenging words apply to **firstfruits** in every age, including our own. Since every age on earth has been a violent, dangerous one in which to live, **firstfruits** are called to be the first to demonstrate that “commandment keeping” can be done, even in an evil time. **Firstfruits** are first in learning the limitations of man’s government - whether it is Caesar, an emperor or Western democracy.

Firstfruits are first in being accountable for their actions. They are confronted with making righteous judgements on what is right and wrong. They strive to do what Jesus would do and to have a true Christian attitude. God reveals that Spirit-born **firstfruits** will be those who are as good as their word - people of high integrity. “***They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless***” (**Rev. 14:4-5**).

As we see in **Acts 2**, it was on the day of Pentecost that Jesus' promise to send another Comforter was fulfilled. It is by the power and presence of the **Holy Spirit** in our lives that we become the **firstfruits** of God's Kingdom - and it is only by that power and presence that we can live up to the responsibilities and opportunities of the **firstfruits**. Our **transformation** has a distinct purpose! To be as Jesus was, and to do as Jesus did! For *“in Him we live and move and have our being.”*