



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW”

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 20:1-17; Acts 2:1-21

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Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray...

Almighty and everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, even joyful in your sight, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

There is a well-known bridal tradition which includes the phrase: "Something old. Something new." It comes from an Old English rhyme which, in its entirety, goes like this: "Something old. Something new. Something borrowed. Something blue. A sixpence in your shoe." To this day, that phrase, along with the accompanying items, it is observed, not only as a means of sweet tradition but also as a matter of invoking a smidgen of good luck. The part of the phrase which reads, "Something old", it carries with itself the weight of continuity, a connection with the past, a keepsake or an heirloom, perhaps. I know, in Martha Ann's case, that which was classified as "old" was a small piece of lace which had belonged to her grandmother and which was wrapped around her bouquet. And then there's the phrase "Something new." As we might expect, something new suggests a measure of optimism for the future. It speaks to a new life together, perhaps being a part of a larger family than before. I found myself thinking again about that classic rhyme as I was preparing this morning's sermon, and not just because the church has historically, and biblically, borne the distinction of being the "Bride of Christ." That is true, of course, but it is also true that when we come upon the story of Pentecost, that time when the church is most profoundly constituted, we quickly realize that even the church takes very much to heart the value of both the old and the new! Now, to be certain, this awareness on the part of God's people about the old and the new, I did not start with Pentecost. In fact, God's children of antiquity, they continually looked upon the past. They were constantly about the business of remembering God's faithfulness.

Naturally, the people of God also looked ahead. They looked to the new, as it were. Now by the time the Day of Pentecost had arrived, many people had come to know that Jesus was, in fact, God's promised Messiah. They had seen his resurrected body. They watched as Jesus ascended into heaven and they looked forward to the time when Jesus would come again, but they, like us, would have to wait, yet praise be to God, Jesus did not leave them alone in their waiting. Jesus had previously told them to "Stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Jesus also said this about the Holy Spirit: "I have said these things to you while I'm still with you. But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I've said to you." And so, it happens that right away we understand that part of the role and function of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of the old and teach us the new.

With that in mind, it is interesting to note that God wastes no time at all tapping into the rich and wonderful repository of Israel's memory. What I mean is this, as Christians, we have taken the day of Pentecost and we have rightly ascribed to it the significance of what we read about in Acts chapter 2; but, for the people who gathered there on that first Pentecost, they were there for different reasons! They were there for a Jewish festival called the "Feast of Weeks," which was a festival marked by both an attentiveness to the "first fruits" of the harvest as well as an emerging sense of commemoration for God having provided the law at Mt. Sinai. In other words, the People of God were celebrating and remembering God's provision in the harvest and in the wilderness. This was not some small festival. In fact, only three times a year were all faithful Jews required to stop what they were doing and make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They would have done it for the Passover, they would have done it for the Feast of Booths and they would have done it for Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks.

The point I want to make is that, we are reading a story wherein God utilized a festival that was rooted in the past in order to initiate something of God's promised future. And this happens all of the time in the Scriptures, the fact that God is doing something new, we are reminded of something God has done, and this is true at Pentecost as well. I mean, given that the people who gathered for Pentecost were being intentionally mindful of the Law of Moses and the Exodus story, would we presume that when they saw and heard the rush of the mighty Pentecost wind that they failed to remember that east wind which some 1400 years earlier blew all night long and pushed the waters back so that the Israelites could walk upon dry ground? And when divided tongues as a fire descended upon them, are we to think that none of those people had enough sense to pause and remember that nighttime pillar of fire with which God had led his people in the wilderness? Even Peter, when he stands up to speak, even Peter was reverently attentive to the old, expressing how Pentecost was the fulfillment of that which had been spoken by the Prophet Joel, some 800 years earlier!

It is almost as if the story of Pentecost is telling us that if we are ever going to understand something new that God is saying to us, then we will need to understand what God has already said. Something old! Something new! In the case of Pentecost, that which is new is extraordinary. Think about it. God, who had previously fashioned a prophetic voice from people like Moses and Joel, now fashions from "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and the list goes on and on. God fashions from the breadth of the world's diversity a veritable priesthood of believers, each of whom testify to God's deeds of power! Something old! Something new!

Consider what Jesus said when he was asked the question "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." What we sometimes forget is that while Jesus was giving us a new commandment, he was essentially summarizing the old ones. Think about it like this: if we "Love the Lord our God" then we will be fulfilling the first four Commandments and if we "Love our neighbor as ourselves" then we will be fulfilling in the next six Commandments, which is why Jesus can say, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets," Because, quite literally, they did and they do! Something old! Something new!

Tomorrow our newest class of officers will be examined by the session. It is one of my favorite Session meetings of the year, because we get to know our incoming officers better and hear a little bit about their journey of faith. Upon their successful examination and their ordination and/or installation at the end of June, they will find themselves as part of a wonderful legacy of leadership within our church family. They will be the latest links in a venerable chain of witnesses. And I have no doubt that the things that have been said and done in the nearly 300 years since we were chartered as a church family will influence them in their decisions, but we also affirm that God will present new things to them, that they will bring to the table of discernment new voices and new vision; nothing in contradiction to what God has said, mind you, but if we do take seriously what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit reminding us of the old and teaching us the new, then we will trust that God isn't finished with us yet. That there is still work to do. That the Spirit of God still blows through his people!

But what does that look like? Well, let's keep in mind that there's still more of Acts chapter 2 that we have yet to consider. After Peter finished his sermon, and after the people had been prompted to remember the things God had said through his prophet, they were duly empowered to respond to God's present call upon their life and their life together. Beginning in chapter 2 verse 41 we read: "So those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized, and that day about 3000 persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching in fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. The Apostle Paul goes on to say that, "Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having a goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who are being saved."

I dare say that however the Holy Spirit chooses to be at work in your life and mine. Don't be surprised if it looks something like that. Some have said that the power of Pentecost is very much ongoing and with that I agree. For we are still the bride of Christ and we are still most faithful when we by God's grace, not only remember God's wonderful and previous work in our life, but also when even today we hear the things that God would have us to hear and see the things that God would have us to see and do the things that God would have us to do! And, more than likely, that will be something old, but it will also be something new!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.