

Acts 2:1-6, 12-19, 22-23
Signs and Wonders
Pentecost Sunday June 4th, 2017

Most of us know of the major events of the founders of many of today's modern Christian denominations.



Most know this is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg door, which started the Protestant Reformation.



Almost all United Methodists know of John Wesley's Aldersgate experience, which was celebrated last week, where he felt his heart strangely warmed. This was his deep conversion experience that propelled him out in ministry to the world. It is the time at which we would say he received the "gift of faith", which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now it is much easier for our modern minds (that have been touched very deeply by our secular culture) to conceive of a "gift of faith" or even easier, "a conversion experience" for people are always shifting it seems from one point of view to another. It is easier for us to claim **gifts of the Spirit like "helps" or "generosity", or "teaching" or "administration"**.

But what about when we start talking about the more spectacular gifts of the Spirit? What about speaking in other languages as gifts of the Spirit? What about physical manifestations of the Spirit



"like tongues of flame that came to rest on each one of them?"

What about **prophecy, miracles, healings?** **What about raising people from the dead?** As I have gone through this list it seems like each example relies more on God and less on us and so it is a bit harder to believe in.

I was praying about what new and inspiring thing I could preach on for Pentecost, the Birthday of the Church, the time at which the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh, and I came across an article called **“Remember that time John Wesley raised the dead?”** by Rev. Dr. David F Watson.

No, I didn't remember that time; so I read the article, and in it Dr. Watson makes this point, *“Simply put, the less a particular gift seems to require of God, the easier it is for us to believe. We have been taught not to expect very much of God, and our prayers match those expectations. We may or may not actively disbelieve in these gifts, but passive disbelief in them is quite common.”*

In other words do you believe,... really believe,... someone will be healed when we lift them up on Sunday's during our prayer time?

Anyway, here is the story of when John Wesley raised a man from the dead.

Rev. David Watson writes, “Now let's look at a lesser-known story (from Wesley's diary) in which Wesley mentions a Mr. Meyrick who came down sick at the same time Wesley himself did. While Wesley recovered, Mr. Meyrick did not. His health continued to decline, and eventually he died. The story, however, does not end there. Wesley writes,

*“When I came home they told me the physician said he did not expect Mr. Meyrick would live till the morning. I went to him, but his pulse was gone. He had been speechless and senseless for some time. A few of us immediately joined in prayer. (I relate the naked fact.) Before we had done his sense and his speech returned. Now he that will account for this by natural causes has my free leave. But I choose to say, **This is the power of God.**”*

Note, Wesley himself will wrote that some who hear this story will believe it is only natural causes that brought Mr. Meyrick back, but Wesley choose to believe otherwise. He had faith in the power of God.

There are many other examples from the ministry and preaching and praying of John Wesley like this, so no wonder the Assemblies of God also developed out of the Wesleyan movement, but what is the purpose of “signs and wonders” of God? The “deeds of power, wonders, and signs” we read of in Acts 2:22.

Their purpose is to convert those who would believe! Frankly some need signs and wonders to believe. They need to see people healed and the dead raised in order to believe, and our God gives each of us what we need. So again the purpose of signs and wonders is to bring people to faith.

I know I have told this story before, about a little old lady I visited in the hospital, who I prayed for to be healed. I must admit it was a perfunctory prayer. Well the following Sunday much to my surprise she was in line to shake my hand after the service. I said to her, “I am surprised to see you here?” Indignantly she said, “Why? You prayed for me!” She then went on to tell 100s of people for years how she was healed through that prayer.

The sign and wonder of healing she used as a witness for God.

Last week we heard Jesus’ promise to give the Holy Spirit to expressly give us the power to witness. Witnessing is the power given by the Holy Spirit. This week’s reading has the fulfilment of that promise. The disciples were **TOGETHER** in the Upper Room. Can’t emphasis enough the importance of fellowship for the giving of the Holy Spirit in power.

They received a physical manifestation of that power, the tongues of flame for their own encouragement, and then they went out and opened their mouths and out came the Gospel in many languages.

This wasn't the gift of "glossolalia", (a private prayer language), but the gift to communicate the Gospel in other languages. It was instantaneous and effective converting 3000. Many believed, but some just accused the disciples of being drunk. See verse 13. Again we have the choice. Is it by faith? Or is it by chance and natural circumstance?

The gift of being able to communicate across language and cultural barriers is part of the outpouring of the Spirit that is practiced right here in Catalina by the Wycliffe Bible Translators. I believe, it is fundamentally, the most important way to speak in tongues.

Prophecy is sometimes preaching. It also manifests in the gift of teaching. But the mysterious gift of prophecy, the foreknowledge of what God is going to do, is not sought and practiced, because here again you have to rely so heavily on God, and the gift can so be abused.

Healing is a specific sign and wonder given by God to us. Remember when Jesus sent out the 70 he gave them that specific gift and commission. In Luke 10:8 Jesus says, *"Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; CURE THE SICK who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"*

Again here we see signs and wonders tied to the witness of the Gospel that *"The Kingdom of God has come near to you."* Many were deeply attracted to the message by the signs and wonders.

Now the caution about signs and wonders is that even in Jesus' day people would become more intrigued by and committed to the signs and wonders than to Jesus and his message.

In John 4 there is a story about a royal official whose son was ill to the point of death. He came to Jesus to ask him to go with him and heal his son. *"Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.'"*

The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live."

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.

The man actually wasn't interested in seeing any signs and wonders. He wasn't in town for the show. He wanted his son healed and went to the only man who he thought could do. He didn't want to argue with Jesus about his motivations, he just wanted him to heal his son. That happened; so the story ended with the man and his entire family.... You guessed it...they believed!

Signs and wonders convert those who would believe!

The man asked and Jesus responded. The man asked and Jesus healed the boy from afar. Do you see why we have a prayer book and pray for people all over the world? Do you see why we have times when we pray for healing? We as disciples are to do what Jesus did.



Now when Jesus healed, he healed both body and soul. In fact the word Jesus used in Greek that means essentially "be healed" also means "be saved from your sin." So when Jesus healed he healed body, mind and soul. And beyond death we will receive the ultimately healing with new bodies to live in forever more with God in Christ.

So today, I am keeping this message short, so that we and our loved ones can have the opportunity to be healed of body, mind and soul. In the Sacrament of Holy Communion we will be healed of soul. Your sins will be and are at this moment forgiven, and you will be invited to receive a sign and symbol of that when you receive the elements of Holy Communion.

After receiving if you would like to receive prayer for healing for yourself or another I and our retired pastors and Stephen ministers are here to serve you. The front row of chairs has been removed so we have plenty of space. Once you receive Holy Communion step behind

your servers for prayer. If you do not want to receive prayer please return to your seat and pray for those who do.

If you are open to God, God can act powerfully in your life. If you or a loved one are healed, please let me know and share that with others. Let that sign and wonder be your witness for God.



In Jesus' Name amen.