

**Acts 2:1-21 N.T. 111 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

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<sup>17</sup>‘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.

<sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

<sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

**Acts 2:1-21 N.T. Page 111**  
**“Don’t Vitrify, Vivify!”**

**Opening Prayer:** Please bow with me in prayer. Gracious God, if it were not for your Spirit, our souls within us would be wasting away. Revive us again; breathe your life-giving Word into our souls today. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

**Introduction:** I have to admit that the world of fashion designers and supermodels is alien to me. While other people look at fashion shows and let out oohs and awws over the top designers’ latest creations, I find myself looking into the faces of the fashion models and getting depressed. That’s because fashion models act like lifeless mannequins. A top model will suppress all emotion and blankly stare off into the distance supposedly to help keep people’s attention off of them and onto what their wearing. If you’re having trouble grasping what I’m talking about, **just look at a few pictures** of the face of Gemma Ward, an Australian supermodel who began modeling professionally when she was 15. I’m sorry, I’m sure she’s a very pretty young woman, but those blank expressions just give me the creeps. It feels like you’re staring into the face of corpse. For all I can tell she could just as easily be playing a zombie in a B-grade horror film rather than modeling the latest designer fashions.

And it’s not just supermodels; I suspect that at least a few of you can remember this **picture of a young Afghan girl** on the cover of National Geographic 35 years ago back in 1985. **And here she is again** 17 years later. Most pictures are worth a thousand words, but these pictures speak volumes. Sometimes living can feel more like dying. Heartache and hardship takes the joy out of life. You just exist from day to day. **Some blank stares** aren’t play-acting; they’re real. You’re still breathing and walking, but the fire in your soul has gone out. You’re body’s still there, but nobody’s home.

**PAUSE**

**Move I.**

**We want so much more than just lifeless living.** Each of us has a yearning within our soul to live with a smile on our face and a song in our heart. We want to experience the best that life has to offer. **We wanna** hear children giggling. **We wanna** see smiles on the faces of the people around us. **We wanna** feel the gentle embrace of our friends. **We wanna** smell mom's fresh backed cookies. **We wanna** be able to say, "*I love you*" to someone special.

**Let's contrast** two pictures of Australian supermodel Gemma Ward. Which Gemma would you rather have as your friend, the one on the left, or the one on the right? (Wait for answer) Of course, you want the Gemma on the right. The professional Gemma on the left is so cold and distant, while the casual Gemma on the right is warm and inviting. A face isn't just a face; it's a window into a person's soul. And nothing is more depressing than a lifeless soul.

**Today is Pentecost Sunday.** Today is the day when we celebrate the **birthday of the church.** A birthday is supposed to be a happy day, that's why we've decorated our worship space **with balloons.** Days like today remind us that it's great to be alive. It's great to be the people of God. It's great to be a community of faith. I know it's strange this year, not being able to be with each other in-person. But just as God's presence with us is a spiritual presence, our presence with each other is a spiritual presence too. Sure, we have many special days in the life of the church, but for me this is one of the happiest. Like everyone else I like Christmas and Easter too, but those days are so commercial, so stressful. **But today** is a day the rest of the world doesn't pay any attention to. Pentecost isn't a national holiday. You won't find any stores running Pentecost sales. In the secular world today is just another day, **but in Christian community today is our birthday.**

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**Our Bible lesson today** from the book of Acts is Luke's account of the miraculous events on that first Pentecost. **When Jesus** had ascended into heaven, he told his followers to go and wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come. Now the day spoken about by the prophets had come, and **God poured out the Holy Spirit** upon Jesus' followers. **There were no blank stares** on the faces of the people gathered in Jerusalem on that day. There were only expressions of amazement and joy. They heard the mighty wind; **they saw the tongues of fire**, as the Spirit of the living God came to dwell within their souls. Like the Pointer Sister's classic song, they we're just so excited they couldn't hide it. The Spirit filled believers spilled out onto the streets of Jerusalem and they shouted the good news to all who would hear it.

**Now in those days**, just as today, Jerusalem was a very cosmopolitan city. The people on the streets spoke many different languages. The native Jews spoke **Aramaic**, while some foreigners spoke **Greek**, and other foreigners spoke **Arabic**. But no matter which language the people on the streets spoke, they all heard Spirit-filled believers speaking in their language. It was a miracle akin to the **universal translator of science fiction**. People heard and understood the good news. **People caught a glimpse** of the kingdom of God right here on earth. The yearnings within people's souls were coming true. People had a smile on their face and a song in their heart. **Yes, we really do want so much more than just lifeless living.**

**End I.**

**Move II.**

**Yet, the charismatic crazies turn us off.** We're uncomfortable with the chaotic atmosphere and the weird things that happen at a charismatic worship service. It's not so much that we don't believe that the power of the Holy Spirit can manifest itself in the ways described in Acts 2, but that many times we sense that what we're seeing is fake. **There have long been charlatan preachers** who will play with people's emotions so they **can prey on their pocketbooks.** Besides, worship should be orderly and uplifting, not chaotic and threatening. The key to determining if what you're experiencing in worship is real or fake is actually another one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the gift of **discernment.** As you mature in your faith, you learn to rely on God to help you discern the real manifestations of the Holy Spirit from the charlatans.

**Ever since the church got its start** in Jerusalem back in the first century, there has been concern and discomfort associated with speaking in tongues. The problem has been that some Christians have decided to use the gift of speaking in tongues as means of **certifying an individual's standing with God.** If you speak in tongues, then that's physical proof that God has filled you with the Holy Spirit. This of course begs the question, "**what if you don't speak in tongues?**" Does that mean God hasn't filled you with the Holy Spirit? In this way tongues speaking has become a litmus test for determining if you're a Spirit-filled Christian or not. If you speak in tongues then you're in, and if you don't speak in tongues, you're out. Of course, this is all pretty silly, because speaking in tongues is just **one spiritual gift among many.** **But I've watched this issue spilt churches** in two. **The tongues speakers** see themselves as being more athletic, more spiritual, as the true Christians. **And the non-tongues speakers** see the tongues speakers as being conceited and maybe even fake. So rather than uniting the Church, speaking in tongues divides the church. I can assure you that that's not what God wants.

**God doesn't send the Holy Spirit** to divide the Church, but to unite the church under its head, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is present with his people, through the person of the Holy Spirit. And God gives specific spiritual gifts to various believers to build up and strengthen the Church. **The Apostle Paul** provides instruction about spiritual gifts to the first-century church in Corinth that's still just as valid for us today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. **In 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NRSV)** Paul writes, **“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”** Not everyone gets every spiritual gift and no one gift is superior to any other. A gift is a gift, not a merit badge, or a seal of approval. And God expects everyone to use his or her spiritual gifts for **the common good**.

Where is the common good in dividing the Church? **The purpose of spiritual gifts** is to build the church up, not to tear it down. God gives spiritual gifts for the common good. **Yet, the charismatic crazies are often nearby turning us off.**

**End II.**

**Move III. But God's Spirit makes us fully alive.** It is through the Holy Spirit that God maintains connection with us and connects us with each other. For the Christian, the Holy Spirit isn't some luxury option. For the Christian, the Holy Spirit is standard equipment. **God's presence with us** here today is a spiritual presence. When you accept God's offer of salvation of through Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God comes and dwells with you as a seal of your identity as child of God. The Holy Spirit assures you of your identity. **Once again**, it's the Apostle Paul that clearly spells this out in another one of his letters this time to the church in Rome. **In Romans 8:16 (NRSV)** Paul writes, **"It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."** To be a follower of Jesus Christ is to live in communion with God through God's Spirit that lives with you.

**Throughout history**, poets and theologians have spoken of there being a "God shaped hole" within the human heart. We all have a yearning for a connection with our creator. **Saint Augustine**, the great 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, wrote of this hole in his *Confessions*, **"What place is there in me to which my God can come, what place that can receive the God who made heaven and earth? Does this mean, O Lord my God, that there is in me something fit to contain you?"**<sup>1</sup> At Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit to come and fill that God shaped hole in the human heart. **The Holy Spirit proceeds** from God the Father and Christ Jesus the Son in heaven and comes and dwells within our hearts.

**The title of today's sermon** is "*Don't Vitrify, Vivify*." Of course, that's a play on two similar sounding words that have opposite meanings. Without God's Spirit, our souls would **vitrify**. To vitrify is to make solid, to become ridged. **Our faces** would become as lifeless as the supermodels, only we wouldn't be play-acting, it would be real. We need God's Spirit to fill that God shaped hole in our hearts.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hindsfoot.org/godsha.html>

A **thousand years** before the first Pentecost, the psalmist knew of our need for God's Spirit when he pleaded with God, "**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a right spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me**" (Psalm 51:10-11, NIV). We don't want God to vitrify our lives; **we want God to vivify our lives**. We want to be fully alive. We want to have a smile on our face and a song in our hearts. **Without God's Spirit**, our souls would waste away within us. Our lives would be an emotionless blank stair. **But God's Spirit does make us fully alive.**

**End III.**

**Conclusion:** Sometimes, living can feel more like dying. You're just going through the motions with a blank stare on your face. **Yes, we want so much more than just lifeless living.** We want to live with a smile on our face and a song in our heart. We want to catch a glimpse of heaven right here on earth. **Yet, the charismatic crazies turn us off.** Rather than using their spiritual gifts to build us up, they use them to tear us down. They make us feel inferior. **But God's Spirit makes us fully alive.** God's Spirit fills that God-shaped hole in all of our hearts. O God, **Don't vitrify, vivify.** In you, O God, we live, and move, and have our very being. (Acts 17:28)

I want to close today with a video by the good folks at Journey Box Media that wrestles with the questions of who the Holy Spirit is and what it means to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Let's watch:

**{Play Video: "The Source—Power.mp4" [3:31]}**

**Closing Prayer:** Let's pray. O Lord our God, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to come and make our lives whole. You brighten our world and vivify our souls. **Amen!**

**Sending Forth:** Is your life just a blank stare? Is your soul withering inside you? Then open your heart to Jesus today and let the Holy Spirit come and fill that God-shaped hole. Go forth with a smile on your face and a song in your heart because where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. **And all of God's people said...Amen!**