

Are You in Need of a Change?

A sermon on Acts 2: 1-4, by Dr. Dwight A. Moody
Rosemont Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky, June 29, 2008

This sermon is part of Dr. Moody's teaching and preaching through the Acts of the Apostles. It is one of the focal points of his Sunday morning and Wednesday night ministry. This second chapter of Acts is the most interesting, influential, and enigmatic stories in the Bible and Dr. Moody will take it as his text for the next few weeks on Sunday morning.

Acts: 2:1-4: When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The birth of a baby is a time of change; and I mean that in its double meaning. This Tuesday our family will experience this change as we await the birth of our first grandchild. Our text today in Acts is also a story of change: a change in a religious tradition; a change in a community; a change in lives of people; a change in the history of the world. This story has been the launch pad for the transformations of people, churches and entire nations. It is the story of what the Spirit of God can do in your life. Are you in need of a change today? Open your mind and heart to this portion of the word of God.

The basic elements of that memorable day are simple. The followers of Jesus were gathered together praying. It was Pentecost, a great religious festival, somewhat like Christmas or Easter. What were they praying for? I suspect their prayers included the basic elements of The Prayer of Jesus:

- the praise of God as maker of heaven and earth;
- the surrender of their wills to the purpose and rule of God;
- trust in God as the provider of the necessities of life;
- a prayer to forgive their friends and enemies; they needed to forgive Judas who betrayed Jesus, the Jewish authorities who pressed charges against Jesus, and the Roman soldiers who killed Jesus.
- and a plea to keep them from all evil.

These are the things people pray about: then and now, there and here, you and me.

The biblical account which we read says there came a sound and a sight; they heard something and they saw something. What they heard sounded like what we call a tornado. I have never been in a tornado but I know what it did to the first church of which I was pastor, Hopewell Baptist in Ripley County, Indiana. It picked up the parsonage and carted it away somewhere, and it crushed the old church into the basement. I have never been in a fire, but I have watched pictures this week of one thousand wild fires in California raging out of control. The Spirit of God is symbolized by these two things, a wind and a fire, two things that are essentially uncontrollable. Jesus said, "The wind blows and you do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone that is born of the Spirit."

The Spirit of God is a change agent. Think of the episodes in the biblical narrative where the Spirit plays a prominent role. It was the Spirit that changed the natural order from primordial chaos to purposeful creation: "The Spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep," the book of Genesis records. It was the Spirit of God that transformed human speech into a divine and revelatory word: "And the spirit of the Lord came upon him," the Hebrew literature says again and again. It was the Spirit that changed ordinary events to extraordinary deeds in the ministry of Jesus: "If I by the Spirit of God cast out Satan," he said, "then the kingdom of God has come." It is the Spirit that transforms you and me from sinner to saint. Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia with these words, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control." God is in the life-changing, attitude-changing, career-changing, history-changing, world-changing, church-changing business.

I see some things around here at Rosemont I would like to change. That is the advantage of being a newcomer. I see things in a fresh way and things you have become accustomed to jump out at me. My first Sunday I lost my sense of tact and said there were way too many plastic flowers in this building. That needs to change. Wednesday night we had a healthy discussion about pew pads. Do they need to change? Is yours in need of retirement, of being shipped out to that great pew-pad dump in the sky? Our web-site needs to change. I am going to write more about some other things that need to change.

What else needs to change around here? What would Jesus want to change if he came to this church today? What would he want to change in your life and your attitude and your habits? What would the Spirit of God like to blow out of this church? Or blow out of your heart? What needs to change in your life? Are you in need of a change?

I went car shopping last night. My 1995 Camry has 340,890 miles on the odometer and I think it is about time to change cars. What do you think? Sometimes changing things helps—the paint in a room, the flowers in the yard, or the sweaters in the closet: simply making a change can be good.

But sometimes more important things need to change: a new job or even a new career. Six weeks ago I announced my resignation after serving for eleven years as Dean of the Chapel at Georgetown College. I had no other job or position in mind; I knew I needed to make a change. Then along came Rosemont Baptist Church!

You may need to change majors in college or roommates. You may need to change churches or cities. You may need to give up some old ideas and values and prejudices.

The Spirit of God is the spirit of change. The Spirit can sweep through your life in a whirlwind of trouble and tragedy, death and danger. It may force you to change. Every time the levies flood along the Mississippi, whole communities are forced to change, to move, to relocate. When Katrina hit New Orleans many residents left and never went back. Sometimes it takes a traumatic event to force us to change. In the winter of 1973, I had a terrible car accident while on my way to take an exam at Asbury Seminary. I quit the course, bought two tickets to Israel, packed up my wife, and left the country. It was the best thing that ever happened to us and it was prompted by a near-death experience.

The two most profound changes in the world-wide Christian movement in the 20th century were connected to this story of Pentecost. **In 1906, in a store front church in Los Angeles**, the tongues-speaking, faith-healing, gospel-believing Pentecostal movement was born. Today, a half billion people classify themselves as Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians. **In 1962, an old man who happened to get elected pope** sent out this word: we are going to throw open the windows of the church and let the Spirit of God blow through and cause a rebirth of the church. The Italian word is *aggiornamento*. It means renewal. He wanted to renew the Roman Catholic Church. He wanted a fresh blowing of the winds of the Spirit. “God is able, by the power that is at work within us, to do far more than we ask, or think, or even imagine”; so Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus. Out of that effort, known as the Second Vatican Council, great changes came to the Catholic church: the language was changed from Latin to English; the Bible was translated into the language of the people; the priest now turns his face toward the people when he leads the service; we Protestants are called, for the first time, “separated brethren in the Lord,” and the church embraced the new Pentecostal winds that were blowing around the world.

We need the wind of God to blow through our church, don't we?

It takes a humble, open, even desperate spirit. Each Wednesday afternoon for the last four weeks I have attended an AA meeting at Eastern State Hospital. Fifteen men circle up in a room and talk to one another. All of them are coming out of desperate situations. They are working the Twelve Steps to recovery, to change, to transformation. Step one is simple: My life is in chaos and has become unmanageable. That confession is the foundation for change. “God hates the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Let us humble ourselves before God and confess our need and turn from our self-centered ways and trust that God will send his soul-shaking, church-reviving, world-changing Spirit to us today.