

Acts 2:1-24

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷'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. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' ²²"You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— ²³this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

Music to Our Ears

(show video – link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vniBBT7nRJg>)

What you have just seen is a "flash mob" performance by the USAF Band in the Smithsonian Museum. The way a flash mob works is that a group of performers, in this case the Air Force Band, rehearse for a performance in a public place, then, on the day of the performance, they mingle in a larger crowd, and at a set time, begin performing to a surprised audience. Did you notice the look of surprise on so many faces? Have you ever been in a place where a flash mob performs? The first one on record was here in New York City at Macys in 2003. The idea has spread around the world, and has been used by many Christians as an evangelism technique.

Pentecost was a sort of flash mob, choreographed by none-other-than the Holy Spirit. This was the promise that Jesus spoke of, that the Father would send the Holy Spirit, in power, and the disciples would start really bearing witness to Jesus. Like a modern-day flash mob, the message was simple: Jesus, who was crucified, has been raised from the dead, and he is God's own Son, the Christ, the Savior. There were no Catholics and Greek Orthodox and Methodists and Lutherans and whatnot. There were no disputes over whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son, or whether it proceeded from the Father and the Son. Those are not irrelevant questions, but they are questions that too often become the focus of so many Christians and the reason for persecution and suspicion among Christians. There was none on that on Pentecost; only the good news that Christ is risen and Christ is Lord.

This was a unifying and appealing message, much like the music that the USAF Band played at their flash mob performance at the Smithsonian Museum. The Holy Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak to all the people gathered in Jerusalem in a language that they could understand, and that message was music to many people's ear. This Jesus, who had done so much good, healing and teaching and caring for the poor and needy, was Lord and Savior; that is indeed beautiful music, particularly to those who feel that their Lord is one who demands taxes from them and threatens them with death if they break his laws. Apparently Jesus *had* broken Rome's laws, *but he had been raised from the dead* because "it was impossible for him to be held in (death's) power."

That seems preposterous, doesn't it? To declare that this Jesus, this Galilean carpenter's son, rose from the dead and is now enthroned at the right hand of the Father. But it would be even more preposterous to make that kind of declaration if it were a lie. In fact, if Jesus were not risen, the disciples could never have found the courage to make that kind of declaration, a declaration that could and would cost them their lives. We could easily make a comparison between the original disciples and the earliest patriots, the Paul Reveres and the Sam Adams and the Patrick Henrys, and particularly the Nathan Hales who would end up giving their lives for their beliefs – as you know all but one of the disciples would be executed for the message they proclaimed, and thus it's appropriate that we can draw another comparison between Pentecost and Memorial Day. Pentecost was the day that gave birth to the Church, and there would be many through the ages who would lay down their lives for that Church.

And it all started with a simple flash mob, a group declaring that Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is risen. And despite the dangers of what they declared, and the dangers faced by all who would ally with them, over three thousand people joined in on the first day.

And there is no reason that the church can't grow that dramatically today, if we all spilled out of this building this afternoon and spoke to those who are looking for answers – and there are many. People need to know that Christ is alive and kicking, and working in us to build a kingdom of love and justice and peace. Hyesun and I went to Staten Island Mall on Monday and surveyed young adults, asking them what they needed most on Staten Island. The first answer we heard was "direction." They need to know that life is about more than shopping and texting and partying. It's about purpose. It's about trusting in God's grace, being freed from bondage to sin, to death, and to fear. It's being freed to love completely, and so standing in solidarity with those who suffer injustice, it's about speaking boldly for what is right, and acting boldly to fix what's broken in this world. If we are inspired and committed to building God's kingdom, others will no doubt join us.

Our message is simple, and it's music to the ear of the world: Christ is risen. Christ is Lord. We have work to do. Let us step out boldly and declare Christ's rule and the coming of his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.