



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for the Feast of Pentecost**  
June 5, 2022

## Reaching God

### Acts 2:1–21

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. <sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and 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, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” <sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. <sup>15</sup> For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. <sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on 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 on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; <sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. <sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ”

Human arrogance knows no bounds. We like to believe that our potential is limitless, that nothing is beyond our grasp. We’re feeling pretty good about ourselves. We even pretend that we can be our own god and remake ourselves clear down to the very sexual identity in which we were created, mutilating our bodies in the process, if that’s what it takes to assert our own lordship over against the real Lord who fashioned us to be what we are. And we don’t even have to go that far to be guilty. Have you ever said – or thought – that *no one*, not even *God*, has the right to tell you what to do . . . or what to believe . . . or how to think or behave? When we do that, when we refuse to submit to



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authority, or *begrudgingly* obey authority, we're making ourselves our own god.

And, if we don't think we can *become* God, we believe that we can at least pull ourselves up to God's level. That's part of our fallen, sinful nature: either to want to *be* God or to bring ourselves *up* to God. It's *the* "original sin" and it's what got Adam and Eve into trouble in the Garden of Eden. How did the devil tempt them? "Eat this fruit; you'll be just like God!" "Well, that sounds great! Let's do it!" (It's like the t-shirt I saw once: "That's a terrible idea! What time do we start?") It didn't matter to Adam and Eve that God, who knows so much more than we do, told them not to eat it. They wanted it, so they took it. Any two-year-old will do the same thing. In today's Old Testament, the fools who decided to build the Tower of Babel were thinking the same way. "Let's build a tower to the heavens!" "Let's work our way up to God." Never mind that towers are easily toppled and that everything man can make returns to dust. Many in our day keep thinking: "We're going to make this a better world!" "Look, we've touched the stars!" "We've conquered diseases!" "We can do *anything!*" "Someday we'll establish world peace and everyone will live in together in harmony!" Yeah? Tell that to the people in Ukraine. Will we ever learn?

I don't think so. Why? Because we won't stop trying to be God. Because we're infected with sin. Sin, you see, renders us stupid, dumb, blind, and unintelligible. Look what happened at the Tower of Babel. Those descendants of Noah became proud and arrogant and thought *they* could do anything. God was forced to put the kabash on their whole ambitious building project. "No, you *can't* do whatever you want, and you certainly can't reach up into my heavens by your sadly misplaced effort." They had become their own gods, their own authority, and the Lord came and confused their language and scattered them over the face of the earth. That's what their sin of self-worship got them – they became a confused and divided mass, never again to work together in unity, but forever consigned to battle and strife and agony to this very day. No segment of our pitiful race will ever reach God, become God, create unity, or achieve any kind of real and lasting peace. At least not in the way we would choose.

Friends, there's only one way to reach God, and that's to be brought *to* Him. There's only one way to achieve unity between people, and that's for each of us to be united to God in faith. There's only one way to true and lasting peace, and that's to be subsumed into the Prince of Peace. None of these things can ever be achieved by our own effort, or by any "glory of humanity"-centered engineering. They're a gift given only through Jesus Christ, God Himself in human flesh – the God who died, was raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, so that by faith in Him, our own flesh may be raised from death to ascend to the Father. Christ took our human nature upon Himself in order to redeem it, to sanctify it, and to raise it up to the right hand of the Father. Humanity only reaches its full potential in Christ, and apart from Him all flesh is destined for everlasting death. Yet, we *do* reach our full potential in Christ, which means that, while we absolutely cannot elevate ourselves to God, in Jesus, God comes to us, lifts us out of the cesspool of sin and death, and raises us up to Himself.

This is the faith the Holy Spirit gave the disciples to preach when He descended



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*June 5, 2022*

upon them at Pentecost. The preaching of the Gospel was the one thing that was understandable to all that day, no matter what their native language. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the confusion of languages that persisted since the Tower of Babel was broken down *for the sake of proclaiming the Good News of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended to the right hand of the Father*. The Holy Spirit penetrated the barrier of Babel for the sake of the Gospel, just as He penetrates our stubborn, selfish, sin-calloused ears with God's Word in order to drive us to repentance and create faith in our hearts.

Notice, please, that the Holy Spirit caused the disciples to speak in real languages that people understood, not just mindless babbling. The Holy Spirit is a clear preacher of the truth to all whose ears He opens to hear. He also preaches the Word of God, and nothing apart from it. He will never preach anything other than God's Word; He will never give visions or utterances that *contradict* the clear words of Scripture. Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit "will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." We have the record of what the Holy Spirit caused the disciples to remember right in the apostolic Scriptures of the New Testament. If anyone ever tries to tell you that the Holy Spirit said this or that, or did this or that, and it doesn't line up with what Scripture says, don't believe it. The Holy Spirit only preaches the Word of God, He only preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is Himself the very Word incarnate, the Word made flesh. Any message that is not in harmony with Holy Scripture is not from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit does His work in the one, holy, Christian and apostolic church through the preaching of the Word and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, making Christ present *with us, for us, and in us*. As Jesus said in today's Gospel, He and the Father make their home with those who keep His Word. It's the Holy Spirit who works through the Word and Sacraments to make the Father and the Son present in the believer. The entire Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is present with every believer. Our God comes to us to raise us up to where He is. And all this is done through the simple and lowly means of words preached by a man, through water, and through a minuscule amount of bread and wine. The Lord comes to you and rescues you from your sin and death, indeed, from your self-idolatry, by these seemingly powerless things.

Beloved, you will never find salvation in yourself or in your own attempts to reach God, no matter how well intentioned your efforts might be. You *can't* go to Him; He comes to you, and that's what He did in the Incarnation of Christ. It's what He did at Pentecost. It's what He did for you, Braelyn, that day many years ago, when I held you in my arms at this very baptismal font. And it's what He does for each of us every time we gather to hear His Word and receive Him in His body and blood at this altar. You won't find God, or peace, or *life*, for that matter, in any words dreamed up by man. Mere words of men are babble compared to the glorious everlasting Word of God. Mere human words offer us no end of stupid, silly things – things like "all religions lead to heaven," "all beliefs are equal," "there's no such thing as sin," "do whatever makes you feel good," "the Bible is out of date," blah, blah, blah. Such drivel oozes out of people everywhere, but no matter how much you believe something, no matter how much you repeat it to yourself – if it's false, there's



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nothing you can do to make it true. Manmade religion is a dead-end road that leads to despair, death, and hell. Don't give it the time of day.

Rather than listening to human "wisdom" and philosophy, listen instead to the Words of the Spirit – words that are truth and life. The Lord is with all who hear and believe the words spoken by the Spirit. Those who do not believe the Word do not have Christ and stand condemned. As John tells us, the wrath of God abides on all who do not believe the Gospel (John 3:36).

Sadly, of course, we all, from time to time, believe in a false gospel. Whenever we sin by thought, word, or deed, we've set ourselves up as the god of our own little religion. When we subscribe to the wisdom of the world, give in to the unbelieving culture that surrounds us, or trust in our own thoughts and works, we create a false religion. But, my dear ones, we will never, ever, find peace and fulfillment in such things. Let us repent, then, of all our false notions, our false beliefs, and turn to Christ. Only by believing in Christ, by trusting in Him, by receiving the gifts He gives through the power of His Spirit, can true peace be found. Remember what Christ Himself said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." The peace that Christ gives comes through sins forgiven and through the eternal life that comes with it.

As our outward body is passing away, as we're racked by the disease and death that come to all sinful flesh, we're being inwardly renewed by the power of the Spirit. As you hear the Word preached and the word of absolution spoken, your sins are washed away and replaced by the righteousness, purity, and holiness of Christ. As you receive the very Body and Blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine, which you, Braelyn, will do for the first time today, the life of the Lord Himself is coursing through your veins as a medicine of immortality. Therefore, let us heed the words of Christ, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Our future is assured, beloved. Christ has ascended to the Father, and He will come again on the Last Day to raise up our human flesh to be with Him where He is. In the meantime, He has poured out His Spirit upon us with grace enough to forgive all sins, no matter how great or troubling. By the power of His Spirit, our Lord has come to us and made His home with us, so that we may be raised up to dwell with Him forever in heaven. In this let us have our peace. In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen