

For the full text, consult a Bible. The key verses are included here:

Acts 2:4 All of [the disciples] were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them... ¹¹[The crowd said,] “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

**GIFTS GIVEN. GIFTS USED.
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Dear Friends in Christ,

How long would you wait in line? Five minutes at McDonald’s waiting for someone to take your order? Fifteen minutes at the bank? Half an hour at the DMV for a drivers’ license? An hour at your favorite restaurant on Friday evening? Three days for a first release of another of the Star Wars saga? Ok, maybe you wouldn’t wait that long for a Star Wars movie, but you have been there waiting at McDonald’s, the DMV, the bank. One truth you learn standing in lines is that time flies when you are having fun, and it doesn’t when you’re not.

Waiting. In our reading there were 120 people waiting. Not in a line outside a theater, but 120 people waiting in an upper room. They had been waiting for ten days. Ten days. Jesus had told his closest, most persistent followers just before he ascended into heaven, *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised... John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 1:4-5).

I. Gifts Given

And so they waited. They must have been very patient people, because Jesus didn’t promise next-day delivery. He didn’t even give them an anticipated arrival: June 4th or June 14th. He just said “Wait.”

You once in a while hear stories like that. People who keep vigils, dogs that stay by gravesides or bedsides of the departed. It amazes us. Jesus said, “Wait!” And wait they would, however long that might take, full of faith and faithfulness. I imagine they were people who could have found something else to do than wait around for who-knows-what for who-knows-how-many days.

They could have been back at home, out in the field, on the lake in their father’s fishing business. But they waited. Faithful to Jesus’ word. They went back to Jerusalem and waited the rest of ascension day, and the next day and the next. A week passed and they still were there. These 120 people in an upper room waiting patiently put me to shame. Just on a promise of Jesus they put their lives on hold. I don’t know if they looked at their watches or calendars or complained to the wife. But I do know they waited.

Jesus had promised them something he mysteriously called *“the gift my Father promised.”* Oh, they probably knew it wouldn’t be piles of money. Jesus didn’t operate like that. But one does wonder what kind of gift these hundred and twenty were expecting. Jesus had healed the sick, given sight to the blind, raised the dead. Maybe the gift he promised would be something along those lines. Something along the lines of what we nowadays would call a superpower. That might get me to wait around a while.

Well, at the end of a week and a half – which doesn’t sound like that long when you are talking about something that happened two thousand years ago. But when you are standing in line at the DMV

it seems something a bit longer than eternity. At the end of a week and a half it came. And it came just like a gift from God should come. There was a sound like *“the blowing a violent wind”* and something that looked like *“tongues of fire that separated and come to rest on each of them.”* “Oh goody, I’m gonna get that wonderful present that Jesus promised! Can’t wait to try it out! Here I go.” Put yourself in their place. Expecting a superpower—and you start speaking gibberish. Well, you can understand your words, but you didn’t think you could understand them. Kind of neat, but “That’s my superpower?” What’s the point?

God was faithful. He sent the gift. And he has given you the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But we need to be clear about this.

There are two levels of gifts of the Holy Spirit. The first gift the Holy Spirit gives, a gift he must give before all other gifts, and a gift which is given to all Christians, is the gift of faith. First Corinthians 12:3 tells us, *“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* The Holy Spirit must work within a person to bring them to the conviction that Jesus is our Savior and our Lord. Without it, you are not a Christian. But with this gift of faith, heaven is yours, God is your Father, Jesus your brother. That first gift of the Spirit had been given to the disciples months and years *before* Pentecost.

So on one side we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, and one Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:5). On the other hand, we who believe are given different spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6ff). That’s what happened on Pentecost to the disciples.

We need to make this distinction between the Holy Spirit’s primary gift of faith, and His succeeding gifts of abilities. Otherwise we might have the impression that until this point the disciples were not saved. Or we might have the impression that unless something amazing like this first day of Pentecost happens to us, we are not real Christians.

Maybe we can think of it as the role of parents. Parents give life to their child. That is the initial gift, same for everyone. But there is also the ongoing care-giving and nurture that parents must do for young children which is different for each.

So what *was* the secondary promised gift of the Holy Spirit the disciples got? The sound of rushing wind was not the gift of the Holy Spirit. The sight of fire-like apparitions was not. In fact, in a way, the ability to speak in other languages, in and of itself, was not the Holy Spirit’s gift. The Holy Spirit’s gift was the gift of declaring God’s marvelous deeds in those different languages.

II. Gifts Used

At first it may have seemed a strange, even weird gift. But within minutes, the disciples began to understand how great a gift it was. The gift wasn’t about them, it was about God.

One of the ugliest things in the world is to see a world-class athlete (and here it is not limited to athletes, but also entertainers, academics, artists, and yes factory workers and pastors) who are arrogant and proud in their abilities. Who forget that it is God who has given every gift. [Just as ugly, and a bit more ridiculous, is a star high school athlete, the small time entertainer, the local artist, the modest pastor who gets arrogant over gifts that might be notable in a small pond, but insignificant in the big lake.]

Our human nature loves to imagine that it is all about us. And every time we take it as such, we sin. We do not render the thanks and the glory to the One who has given us these gifts. And we forget that these gifts and abilities are given so that we can glorify God and help our neighbor. We sin once in our pride, and twice in our neglect.

What shall we do! Indeed, that was the cry of the crowd when they heard all of the Pentecost sermon, of which we have heard only the first third. And Peter, using the gift of the Holy Spirit that

day testified, ***“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”***

The disciples were given gifts, and they used them for God’s glory. This is an important thing in spiritual gifts. God gives gifts not so we can stand in front of a crowd of people, to received their congratulations and recognitions for an artistic, athletic, academic achievement. This Holy Spirit’s gifts are always about someone else.

With their Pentecost gift, the disciples *could* do amazing things. They *could* do things that would help people. They could help people more than giving them sight, or healing the lame, or giving them fresh drinking water, or vaccines, or anything else. It is only a shame that we do not tend to view the highest good a Christian can do is telling someone about their Savior. These Pentecost disciples were now uniquely able to speak the saving word of God to people who did not know their Savior.

It was a special gift appropriate to this day. This happened just ten days after Jesus’ ascension; 50 days after his resurrection! This was the first time the Gospel of Jesus Christ was ever spoken publicly! So God sent a special Holy Spirit gift, a sort of kick-start, for the new message. It got people’s attention. But if that were all it did, then it would have been nothing more than a Penn & Teller magic show—amusing for 60 minutes and forgotten.

This gift of the Spirit changed lives, forever. It conveyed knowledge, and more than knowledge. It imparted faith to the hearts of lost people. This is the work of Christ’s church on earth as our own mission statement tells us... *“It is our mission to seek the unchurched, to strive for spiritual growth, and to strengthen one another through the Word of God and his Sacraments.”* All of our spiritual gifts serve this end. Sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly.

The Holy Spirit gives such gifts *“to each one, just as he pleases”* (1 Corinthians 12:11). These gifts usually are not the sort that attract attention. Listen to how Romans 12 describes it: *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”* (Rom 12:6-8)

Each gift is given to give glory to our God and Savior. And I have seen these gifts. I have seen these gifts of the Spirit in this congregation. I have seen people with the gift of giving generously, gifts of leadership, gifts of showing mercy, gifts of encouraging and serving. Every one of you has been gifted by the Holy Spirit. How are you using those gifts?

When you use these gifts for the good of the Church and the glory of Christ, we all benefit, we are all uplifted.

That is why you have been given your gifts by the Holy Spirit. (And here I look in different directions not to single out or exclude anyone.) Your bubbly outgoing personality. Your attention to detail. Your ability to organize. Your willingness to spend time in prayer. Your desire to serve, even when people forget to thank you. Your ability to listen, to just listen. Your contagious enthusiasm. And there are more of the Holy Spirit’s gifts here in Christ’s church.

Here is a truth about human nature that is true about all people, believers or not: We are always at our best when we forget about ourselves, and serve others. How much more so when we serve not the well-being of people for a few months or years, but when we serve their eternal good.

Look at Pentecost. There we see gifts given, gifts used.

Look at yourself. Gifts given! Gifts used, question mark? Amen.