

AMAZED AND ASTONISHED: THE LYRICS OF THE SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-13

May 24, 2026

Let us pray. O God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable unto you, O Lord, our rock and redeemer. Amen.

"I was just trying to have fun."

"Yes, I know, but we have to get home."

"I was just trying to have fun."

"Yes, I know, but we have to get home, to eat dinner, to get bathed, to get to bed, to be ready for tomorrow."

"I was just trying to have fun."

"Yes, I know, but I just want you all to listen. There's no time for fun."

But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Does anyone else find it wildly unsatisfying, supremely disappointing, deeply frustrating, perhaps, maddening even, that the author of Acts didn't include and record what was actually being said on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit made this dramatic entrance?

It has got all the elements of a great story! There's the loud and violent rush of wind filling the entire house! There are divided tongues as of fire! Multiple languages are not only being spoken, but they're being heard and understood. A wonderfully multiethnic community has commenced!

There's just one glaring omission – the *actual* dialogue! Why didn't Luke give us at least a few quotes? Surely, Luke, if you can tell us that the wind was violent, that the tongues were wildly flickering with flames, and you can offer us an extensive list of the beautiful ethnic diversity being represented, then, surely, you can spare us a few lines of dialogue.

Well, as you know, we are left wanting. We simply learn this, "in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power!"

Sure, we can use our imaginations! Taking our cue from Peter's soon-to-come Pentecost sermon, it may have sounded something like this:

"It is just like Jesus said, we've been baptized with the Holy Spirit!"

"It is just like Jesus said, we have received power now that the Holy Spirit has come upon us!"

"We are filled with the Holy Spirit!"

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses!"

"God is good, all the time! All the time, God is good!"

And yet, we are, in some ways, left unsatisfied. Or, at least, I am! On what is often described as the "birthday of the church," it is as if we've lit the birthday candles and then forgotten to sing happy birthday!

At this moment of heightened Holy Spirit drama, what we get is this: *But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."*

And so, rather than hearing directly from those who have been slain by the Holy Spirit, we get to hear from those slain by Holy Snark. Initially, when encountering this narrative once again, I led with my customary interpretative lens, an impulse towards indignation and dismissal to those sneering onlookers.

But then, this year, I found myself returning to that line repeatedly. I could not and would not dismiss them. I could not and would not look away.

"They are filled with new wine."

And I began imagining and encountering this scene in a different way. I imagined myself amongst the crowd—on one side is the enthusiastic First Congregation of the Holy Spirit and on the other, is the less-than-thrilled First Congregation of Holy Sass.

This feels less like a birthday party and more like a middle school dance—the lines have been drawn, the dividing wall is distinct.

We have one congregation that in just a single verse has gone from bewilderment to amazed and astonished. And another congregation that has gone from bewilderment to skepticism and mockery, perhaps even frustration and anger.

And as I sat there, straddling between these two congregations, I found myself slowly tip toeing towards our sneering friends, and then, to my surprise, the tip toeing turned to sprinting and I found myself loudly and boldly proclaiming,

"They are filled with new wine!"

The sneering and the snarling—it felt good. That's the kind of Pentecost I want to celebrate this year! The kind of Pentecost the stares a hole right into the Holy Spirit and simply says, "I have no need of you."

After all, we already made it to the Easter finish line, right? We waved the palms. We shouted our hosannas! Lamented and wept at the cross. Rejoiced over the mystery of the empty tomb. And boldly confessed, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

No, this Pentecost, I want to be just like Joshua running with haste to Moses shouting, "We have got to shut them down!"

Not too long ago, I was on one such tirade. I was speaking with a dear friend and mentor, well, it was less speaking and more sneering. I was sneering about all the things that were frustrating me, all the things that were bothering me, all the things that were annoying me.

Me. Me. Me.

"They are filled with new wine!"

Finally, wise and patient teacher that she is, she interrupted my litany of languishing and simply asked, "Tom, is there anything you do at home, that you consistently do, that you know you do, that you know frustrates and annoys Abbie, but you keep doing it anyway?"

Startled—bewildered and perplexed—amazed and astonished even by the directness and violent rush of such a pivot in the conversation, I sat with it for a moment and I pondered all the annoying and obnoxious things I do at home and then it came to me!

Dirty socks!

It was as if I had been consumed by the Holy Spirit! A violent rush of joy and playfulness came over me and as if I had a tongue as of fire, I excitedly and gleefully shared about my gross habit of leaving my dirty socks everywhere throughout our house!

"I leave them on the floor; I leave them by the door. I leave on them stairs, I just don't care!"

And then, again, wise teacher and tender friend that she is, she simply said, "Tom, we've all got our dirty socks. And we all know we do and we all know what they are. It isn't your job to continually point them out. Your job is to love them, dirty socks and all."

We all sneer. We all snarl. We all, at one time or another, make every effort to snuff out the Spirit—to extinguish the flames and to shut the door on the rushing winds.

"They are filled with new wine."

It is easy, tempting even, to dismiss and disregard these particular members of this early Pentecost congregation. They're sneering. They're snarling. They're the antagonist in the plotline. They're villains who must be defeated.

And yet, again, this year, this Pentecost, I just couldn't look away. I couldn't not sneer alongside them.

"They are filled with new wine."

There was something about this line, this seemingly odd and very specific quote that came rushing in like a violent wind, the flames of curiosity taking hold of me.

I know, from a literary perspective, these skeptical naysayers offer us an important turning point in the Pentecost story. They're the pivot, the moment when the high drama of Peter's Pentecost sermon can begin.

But, this morning, I want to suggest that something deeper is happening, something more tender. Something only the Holy Spirit could accomplish.

To be sure, the Holy Spirit made a magnificent entrance on that day of Pentecost. Loud and violent winds. Tongues as of fire. A marvelously multi-lingual and multi-ethnic community of faith was born! It was the miraculous manifestation of the coming of Holy Spirit that Jesus had been promising.

But let us not forget that the Spirit has been with us all along. It was the Spirit hovering over creation. It was the Spirit filling the lungs of those first humans with divine breath.

The Spirit was there with Moses and Joshua, with the seventy elders, and with Eldad and Medad.

This is not new for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has seen some dirty socks. And the Holy Spirit was with those sneering that Pentecost morning.

You see, Peter and the others who had been overcome and filled with the Holy Spirit could have simply and sternly said, "Get out. If you want to sneer at us, you can leave."

But they don't. Instead, taking their sneering accusations seriously, they take their pain and their hurting and their worrying seriously, and they step across the dividing line offering the lyrics of the

Spirit—the melody of amazement and the harmony of astonishment.

I can almost hear the chuckle coming from Peter. "Oh, no, my friends! This isn't just a big party with some enthusiastic day drinkers. No, no friends, these are followers of The Way—disciples of Jesus Christ who are full of gladness in the presence of the Lord, whose hearts are glad, whose tongues are rejoicing, and whose flesh is living in hope. This was a promise made and a promise kept, the Holy Spirit poured out among us and for us all, so that we would know with certainty that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah."

Now when they heard these words, we are told that those overcome with sneering, "were *cut to the heart*."¹ What then follows is a time for communal and individual confession, baptisms, and a commitment to the "apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."²

The sneering was soothed and smoothed by the promise of a Savior who, as the Presbyterian poet Ann Weems writes, "turned things upside down and inside out."³

This is what Richard Foster calls the "incendiary fellowship" of the Holy Spirit.⁴

The promise of the Holy Spirit is realized in the violent, rushing winds and in a fiery litany of languages. But Pentecost happened in the subtle and subversive song of the Holy Spirit that invaded and infiltrated the hearts of our faithful, sneering friends.

John Calvin says it this way, the Holy Spirit is our "inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears."⁵

Thus, in this way, the gospel becomes the earworm of our life—the lyrics of the Spirit playing on repeat—amazed and astonished.

¹ Acts 2:37, NRSVue.

² Acts 2:42, NRSVue.

³ Ann Weems, *Searching for Shalom: Resources for Creative Worship*, 66.

⁴ Richard Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World*, 55-59.

⁵ Donald McKim, ed., *Calvin's Institutes: Abridged Edition*, 66.

And so, if this Pentecost, this week, this month, this year you need to sneer, then, please, my dear friends, sneer away.

Pepper this sanctuary floor with your dirty socks. And then simply wait—the rushing winds and fiery flames will overwhelm and consume us in ways that only the Holy Spirit can accomplish.

We will be cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

You'll be sitting at a table with four middle school girls—overwhelmed and consumed by the wind and flames and cackles of laughter while spilling salsa and enjoying way too much queso.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

You'll be sitting in a Sunday school class when the traditional image of the dove as a representation of the Holy Spirit is swapped out with the image of a dancing cockatoo.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

You'll have a friend pop their head into your office and ask, "Are you okay?" and recognizing that you're not okay, will simply sit with you in silence, while holding your hand.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

You'll be in a moment of bewilderment, consumed by a rush of anger, flames of fury spewing out all kinds of sneering and a friend won't try and explain it away, won't try calm you down, they'll simply sit with you and your anger, giving you the space you need and then they'll say "would you like to take a walk together?"

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

You'll be sitting in these pews or watching online two weeks ago, and learn that our endless striving, our ceaseless hustling, our anxious toiling, and our piling up of accolades and titles and treasures is literally and metaphorically killing us and that Jesus invites us to loosen our grips and to let go of our need for control.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

When a youth sitting in these pews last Sunday or watching the service online, heard from this very pulpit that their bodies, their very being, and who they love is no barrier to belonging, no barrier to participation and leadership in the church, no barrier to the abundant love of God.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

When a heart, shattered into pieces was sitting in the pews or watching online last week and was met with the balm of hymns that soothed the soul and started the process towards healing and wholeness, broken pieces slowly being mended.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

Fearful that the church, that this church might be dying a slow and painful death, you'll watch as a wild wind of children come rushing into the sanctuary to celebrate the call of a wildly talented pastor.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

Overwhelmed by grief, by loss, by shame, by a life that has not turned out the way we had hoped and planned, we get that text, that phone call, that letter in the mail, that Tupperware full of homemade soup, or that extra big hug.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

Feeling like a relationship with a family member, a friend, a partner, or a spouse is beginning to fray and fall apart you both cancel all your plans, you call in "sick" to work and simply make time for each other, time you've desperately needed and you assure one other, "I'm sorry I've been distant. Of course, I still love you."

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

After another night of frantic fast-food dinners and being pushed to and fro by the violent winds of endless evening commitments, you say, no more. You skip the practices and have dinner together as a family.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

When, overwhelmed by the fiery tongues of divisive political and theological rhetoric, we put our screens away and make our way to Handel's—it's an ice cream for dinner kind of night!

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

Lonely and isolated living in a retirement community or an assisted living facility, a friend or family member stops by unannounced, and you enjoy lunch together, followed by a scoop of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

When overwhelmed by the gale force winds of fear and anxiety or consumed by the flames of depression or addiction, your therapist equips you with the simple courage to repeat this refrain, "What if I'm actually okay?"

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

When our daughters and sons are deployed for war and we find ourselves caught between feelings of immense pride and deep anger at the realities of war, and then we get the email, "I'm doing okay. We're safe. I love you."

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

You'll be sitting in a car with a 10-year-old and after a sneering tirade of anxiousness and overwhelm, she will gently, yet boldly, with a tongue as of fire say to you, "I was just trying to have fun. I thought it would be fun for all of us to watch the *Mighty Ducks* together."

Cut to the heart. Amazed and astonished.

"Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put [the Lord's] spirit on them!"

The bewildered. The perplexed. The amazed. The astonished. The sneering. All of us.

May it be so. Amen.