

**A NEW ERA****Acts 2:14-18**

**Intro:** TJ wanted to talk. But that is way down in this story. Let me give some history:

TJ was one of my best friends from high school. He come from Catholic School after he finished 8th grade there. He was wildly funny, always had a joke (none of them clean) and he was a very faithful friend. He also was a very good drummer and played in several bands doing covers, especially of Chicago and other 1960s and '70s music. In other words, back when music was good.

When it came to religion, TJ's was the theology of despair. He believed that his eternal destination was hell – he had told me so. It always fascinated me that he had no hope for eternal life. As I've reflected it over many years. I decided it was because of his Catholic background. You see, when he left Catholic School he essentially left the Church and any kind of faith he might have had, and from that point on he felt that he was literally damned.

Over the years we kept in contact. We attended one another's weddings exactly two weeks apart exactly 45 years ago. I was the officiating minister for funerals, first for his mother, and then for his father. Once again, there was no connection with a church and I was the only minister TJ knew and his brother Tim, knew. I noticed over that time that there was a sadness about him. Now, mind you, those who have suffered loss as he and his family did, will be quite sober at a funeral. But I thought that there even a deeper sadness than that – the kind that comes from having no hope.

Over the years, usually on either his birthday or my birthday, we would talk on the phone for an hour or so. He had been married several times, and for the past, probably 20 years he has been single and would stay that way. From time to time TJ would send me a recording or a video of his band in concert somewhere. He was still very good.

Almost two years ago, I got a text from TJ, asking me if I had time for a phone call that night. I did and I told him so, but I was wondering what this mysterious phone call was going to be about. I didn't think that he was going to get married again, although since I had done his parents' funerals, maybe I would be the first one he'd think of to do a wedding for him. I really hoped that he hadn't become an Amway salesman, because I did know that they mysteriously make an appointment with their victims/future sales associates. And I really didn't think, but I really hoped it would be true, that he had found Jesus.

It was a Tuesday evening. I remember because it's what Matt Lewis always referred to as episodic memory. The kind of experience that you never forget. I knew that it was going to be a long phone call, simply because TJ and I never had short phone calls. So, at about 8:00 PM as I went up the steps. I told Kathy that I thought that maybe it would be long enough that I should say good night and get my good night kiss.

I called TJ. We exchanged niceties, catching each other up on the kids, and how we were doing. And then he said to me, *"I'm playing in a Christian band."*

You could have knocked me over with a feather. I was hoping that he would have found Jesus, and here it was! He proceeded to tell me that one of his friends who was a bass player was playing in a band fronted by two young men in their late twenties who wrote and performed Christian rock music. TJ went to one of their rehearsals and he was blown away by the power of the lyrics of the songs. You see, for TJ, lyrics have always had so much meaning, that even if it was a good tune, he would not play it if it did not have meaningful lyrics. He was also impressed with the quality of the musicianship of the composers, and also the other musicians in the band. Band. He was also completely amazed by the spirit of their rehearsals. Whereas before, for his entire life, in every band he'd worked for, there had been arguments and outright fights over what songs would be played and who would perform them. But, in this Christian band, there was cooperation and kindness and he felt that it was because each rehearsal time began and ended with prayer. They really loved each other. He watched them for months as they practiced and coalesced as a tight music group. They were genuine and Jesus was really real to them. Finally, Jesus got a hold of TJ one night and he turned his life, every part of it, over to Jesus. He's a completely different man. It's a new era for TJ. I will see him at my high school reunion next week which is celebrating 50 years since we graduated. I can't wait to give him a big hug.

My brother-in-law, **Allen**, and I were best friends before we became brothers-in-law. In fact, he and I were carried to church as infants, and we lived just three houses apart on College Avenue. We were so close and he spent so much of his life at our house, that our nieces and nephews actually thought that he was one of the

uncles. Short story long, he married Kathy's sister in 1978, and that's how I met Kathy and that's how he became my brother-in-law and that's a story that you've heard a thousand times.

But spiritually Allen was on hold – or more likely he was not spiritual at all. His entire childhood was like mine – if the doors were open at church he was there. His father was our music leader and our deacon and my dad's best friend and so we had gone to church together our entire life. We even went to Kenbrook Bible Camp together when we were 11 years old. We were both so homesick that we cried ourselves to sleep every night, sharing the same box of Kleenexes. Then, on the last night of camp, at the Saturday night campfire in June in the year 1968, we both gave our lives to Jesus. We were such good friends that we even got saved together. Three months later we were baptized. Sometime after that we became members of Perkiomen Valley Brethren in Christ Church. In the next ten years my faith grew by fits and starts, but it did grow. Allen's faith, by all indications, did not flourish spiritually.

Needless to say, over the years we saw each other a lot. That's what happens with brothers-in-law, and it happens even more when you're both best friends and brothers-in-law. Over those years I noticed a sadness about Allen. There was an edge to him and his marriage fell apart.

Then about six years ago, Allen began attending his daughter's church, which was Byerland Mennonite Church near Willow Street, Pennsylvania. You have to understand that, over the previous 40 years he had practically never darkened the door of a church, and now he wasn't missing a service. Then Allen began going to a Bible study. Then he began to go to Sunday school. Then he began going to Bible School classes. Then those Bible School classes that turned into pastoral preparation certificate program that when by the name of STEP or Study and Training for Effective Pastoral Ministry. As Allen progressed through these and as his faith blossomed and flourished he would share each one and all of his new learning with a joy and enthusiasm that he had NEVER displayed. I was so blown away that I was almost jealous. Two years ago he graduated with a certificate in STEP Ministry from Eastern Mennonite University. Then Allen joined the staff of Byerland Mennonite Church.

This has been a very quick account of what has happened over the past six years for Allen. But he went from a life of emptiness, to a life of joy and service as a very thoughtful pastor and preacher. And for me, this lifelong best friend, who had become my brother in law, was not also my colleague in ministry.

It's a new era for Allen

Both of these experiences gave me new hope and restored my own joy. The Lord transformed two people who seemed so far from Jesus to vital relationship with that very same Jesus. I learned that there are no impossibilities for redemption as long as a person has breath.

And that's what happened on the first day of Pentecost. Oh yes, Pentecost had been a festival in the Jewish tradition for many years as a feast of harvest. But for Christ Followers, it became the powerful moment when the Holy Spirit came and the Church was essentially born. This happened as disciples who had been rough fishermen and tax collectors and revolutionaries were transformed into preaching powerhouses and it was only possible by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2 is a familiar passage for you and for that reason I choose not to read the first 13 verses to you because I want to concentrate, in the little bit of time we have left, on the 5 verses I will read to you in a bit.

First, let me give you a very quick background:

The twelve disciples and another 110 or so people were gathered in an upper room. They were waiting obediently for what the Lord had promised to send.

And as you read those first verses (and I urge you to when you get a chance), you see that the Holy Spirit came with a sound of rushing wind and something like tongues of fire that descended on 120 expectant Jesus Followers in that room. It was a palpable sensory experience. But, most of all, it was a powerful spiritual experience. These people began speaking in all the languages of all the lands of all the Pentecost pilgrims surrounding them. Even though they all knew Greek and they all knew Aramaic which were the two languages that everyone there in Jerusalem would have spoken – people were hearing their own language. They were hearing their own language no matter if they were from Northern Africa, or Spain, or Macedonia. No matter where you had traveled from to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem, you were hearing the language of your home. The Holy Spirit was making the people of God speak in tongues. It was a powerful experience. In fact it tells

us this, *And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."* Acts 2:12-13.

And that is where our text begins. Listen:

**(Read Acts 2:14-18)**

Peter straightened them out very quickly. They were not drunk – it was only 9 AM – NO! These people were full of the Holy Spirit. Back in the old days prophets were the main mouthpiece for God through the Holy Spirit, but now the old is gone and the new has come. IT WAS A NEW ERA!

This is how Pastor Tyler Staton puts it (part of this is on the front of your worship folder), *"Put simply, there is no era of biblical history without the prophetic. Apart from prophecy, the biblical story is one that can't be told." In the Old Testament the gift of prophecy was given by the Spirit to particular people for specific purposes. But at Pentecost, "all the Lord's people started acting like prophets. . . And Peter connected this astounding new development to what the prophet Joel had long ago said was coming: 'I will pour out my spirit on all people...'" A new era where every follower of Jesus is able to hear the voice of God by the help of the Spirit had begun.*" (End Quote)

Did you hear that? *"... every follower of Jesus is able to hear the voice of God"* Every JFollower!

F. B. Myer sounds similar: *"In pre-Christian times, the Spirit was given to mountaintop saints, but from Pentecost onward sons and daughters, old and young servants and handmaidens were to participate in his gracious influences. It is for the democracy of the church, for the whosoever who call in the name of the Lord, for the valleys as well as the hills."* (End Quote)

Everyone!

The entire event was an example of what we've just seen. Think about it . . .

**PETER STOOD UP AND PREACHED! (Acts 2:14)**

Just 53 days before Peter has infamously denied his Lord three times as Jesus was tried by a false court and taken away for a vicious execution. Now here he was preaching a powerful message. It was the power of the Holy Spirit. Albert Winn writes, *"Peter's sermon, no less than the tongues, is the Spirit's work."* The Holy Spirit caused people to speak in tongues not their own and Peter was preaching like no rowdy and profane fisherman ever could have imagined.

For a scripture text, Peter referred to the only Bible they had and to the Prophet Joel. He referenced Joel 2:28-32 and he preached a new era.

The Spirit would be poured out on ALL FLESH. Not just a few select people.

Sons and daughters shall prophesy. Yes, that's right DAUGHTERS TOO!

Young men will see visions. This is happening now. Back in April the latest Barna study entitled The State of the Church 2025 initiative shows (Quote) *"a groundswell of commitment to Jesus over the last four years."* And it shows a *"12-percentage-point increase since 2021, when commitment levels reached their lowest in more than three decades of Barna tracking"* Then they go on to say that this increase is fueled by young people. In their words, *"Among the biggest drivers of the Jesus resurgence are younger generations—particularly Gen Z and Millennials. This is a significant change from previous Barna tracking, which showed Elders and Boomers as more committed Christians than younger generations."* Young men and young women will be prophets. We need them to step up. They are called.

But old people aren't off the hook. It says here, old men will dream dreams. Old men will prophesy. And then it says the people least expected to be prophets are participants. Listen, . . . *even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.* Acts 2:18.

It's a new era ABC! Don't let anyone tell you that because of what the conservative Christians are doing by their lack of compassion or what liberal Christians are doing by their abandonment of biblical truth is causing the Church to go to hell in a handbasket. That prediction in itself is straight from the pit of hell. The Church cannot fall. The Church cannot fail. The Church is God's people filled with the Holy Spirit and only interested in preaching the goodness of God and his plan for salvation for all humanity. The Church is sons and daughters, young men and young women, old men and old women. The church is all who call upon the name of Jesus.

It was a new era on that first Day of Pentecost when the Spirit fell with a mighty rushing wind and it is newer today. We have the privilege of keeping it going.

Let me close with this prayer from Pete Grieg:

*Holy Spirit, I yield willingly today to whatever work you're calling me to do – the glamorous and the thankless, the adventurous and the monotonous, more scary or more of the same. Whatever you have for me in this season of life, I say – “Count me in!” Wherever you are sending me in this season of life, I say – “Okay, let's go!” However inadequate I feel in this season of life, I say “When I am weak, then I am strong!” Amen.*