

The Day Everything Changed

Perry Engle

In the history of the Christian Church – maybe in the history of the world - it was the day everything changed.

Pentecost is described in the first verses of Acts 2 as the event where the Early Church experienced the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It's hard not to be impressed with the spectacular signs that accompanied this event: The sound of a violent wind from heaven, flames of fire that rested on those gathered, people empowered to proclaim the wonders of God in languages they didn't know, three thousand that placed their faith in Jesus for the very first time. What a remarkable accounting of the mighty work of God!

Yet as Peter begins to speak, he draws the attention of those assembled not to the spectacular, but to the substance of what has taken place. "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel [Joel 2:28-32]: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy'" (Acts 2:16-18).

Certainly we can't help but be amazed by the signs and wonders that accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit. But even more remarkable, according to Peter, was that the Spirit had been poured out on ALL people – on sons *and* daughters, young *and* old, on *all* of God's servants, both men *and* women – all were simultaneously empowered to prophesy – that is, to proclaim the Word of God - in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel given eight centuries before.

As I recently read this familiar passage again, for me it was like that day that everything changed. I had been invited (along with former bishop Pauline Peifer and Kerry Hoke) to a Women in Ministry Congress of the Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy in Atlanta, GA, as a representative of the BIC U.S. Leadership Council. I have to admit that I felt strangely out of place, wondering just how long it would be before I would say something completely insensitive and totally inappropriate, and have myself branded as a stereotypical...MAN.

But as we gathered and discussed, prayed and worshiped, and as I heard the stories of many of my sisters in Christ and their callings to ministry, I came to realize that there were a few things that needed to change in *me*.

First, I need to begin to ACT as if the account of Pentecost in the New Testament is true. If the Holy Spirit really was poured out on all believers, women and men equally, regardless of gender – who am I to stand in the way of what God's Word has announced as being fully ACCOMPLISHED?

Second, I need to move beyond being just a passive supporter of women in ministry leadership to being an ADVOCATE for women who are called to pastoral ministry. I need to become more vocal in challenging the broader Church to embrace the wide variety of leadership gifts that God has poured out on our sisters in Christ.

Finally, I need to be AVAILABLE as a coach, mentor, and encourager to my sisters just as readily as I am to their male counterparts in ministry. In the past I have found myself (unintentionally) keeping my

sisters at arm's length, letting them fend for themselves in ministry and the Church, and hoping and praying that God would open the right doors for them in God's own time. When in reality, I was one of those guys who while smiling, flashing the thumbs-up sign, and saying, "I affirm you sister!", was at the same time using my passivity as a doorstop to keep women from walking through the entryway of full inclusion in to the life and leadership of the church.

Pentecost in Jerusalem was the day everything changed for the Early Church, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on ALL people, both women and men alike. Similarly, everything changed for me when I found myself in the midst of a cohort of brave and resilient women gathered together in Atlanta, when I realized anew that the repercussions of the outpouring of the Spirit continue to this day, compelling our daughters and sons, old and young, all of God's servants, both women and men, to utilize the full gifting with which God has gifted them all.

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