



“That’s What I Used to Think”

Acts 2:1-4, 13-21, 37-39

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Coffee is coffee right? Before I drank coffee, that’s what I thought. Whatever was cheapest on the shelf at the grocery store is what I bought for the occasional house guest. Then right across the street from my church, a local coffee shop opened. They served coffee that still remembered the plant it had clung to a few weeks before. Coffee hauled in sacks directly from small farmers in places like Costa Rica and Nicaragua, coffee that was ground on the spot, and given to me in a real mug, no styrofoam. Coffee is coffee, right? That’s what I used think, until I drank some real coffee.

That’s certainly not the only way I’ve changed my mind over the years. What about you? Here’s a big one for me.

At one point in my life I thought girls aren’t supposed to be preachers, not really. I mean, I could be a minister, but not a preacher. There were certain roles for men, and certain roles for women, and that’s the way my family had always done it, and my church too, so who was I to change that up? That’s what I used to think. Then I met a woman who is a preacher. She seemed so clear, so sure, that God had called her to step into that pulpit. And when she preached I was sure God had called her too. Whoa, I thought, maybe I need to re-think what I ***used to think.****

Now when I meet someone who is convinced that God has certain roles for men and certain roles for women in the church that shouldn’t be challenged, I can smile and spiritually pat their hand and say, “I know, dear. That’s what I ***used to think.***”

[Insert your own shocking old belief that you rethought instead of my story!]

There’s a lot of rethinking happening in the Pentecost story of chapter 2 in Acts.

To start with, part of the crowd gathered that Pentecost day thought Jesus’ disciples were drunk. They just had never seen anything like this before, you know, and that seemed a likely explanation. After all, these seeming drunks were “speaking about God’s mighty works” in a plethora of languages while flames of fire danced on their heads.

I don’t know about you, at one time I used to think that weird things like this wouldn’t happen to me as a follower of Jesus. I thought unusual things like this only happened in overly emotional, well, Pentecostal, churches who were drunk on religious sensationalism. Then I found tears coming to my own eyes and words springing out of my own lips as I prayed with people I never met before in the grocery store’s produce department one day. The Spirit moved me to speak to this young couple about their beautiful baby with the

oxygen tube in her tiny nose. “What a precious baby,” I said. And all of a sudden I found myself praying with strangers in the grocery store aisle. By the apples and pears. So, that the Spirit couldn’t make me act like I’m drunk, well yeah. That’s what I **used to think**.

The disciples on that Pentecost day are doing some rethinking too. They are all still figuring out how they are going to be followers of Jesus. They all failed him before he died, you know. They denied him and ran away. But now Jesus has promised that he’d send his spirit to them, and here it is. The disciples might’ve once thought they wouldn’t be good enough to serve Jesus in any big way. I mean, especially Peter. Peter really messed things up with Jesus with all that bragging about how he was going to stick with Jesus no matter what and then falling down on the job. Surely Peter thought he would be demoted to the bottom rung in the kingdom of God.

But anything Peter or any of the disciples might have thought about how God would or wouldn’t use them went out the window when the Spirit came upon them. Peter stood up and preached his heart out, lifting up Jesus like never before. Preachers are only perfect people? That’s what they **used to think**.

When Peter starts preaching, the “used to thinks” keep right on falling. He quotes from the prophet Joel and dares to speak right there in the Roman-emperor-occupied streets of Jerusalem that the Spirit comes **democratically**—to male and female, young and old, slave and free, even to the creation itself which no one can control. God’s power only comes to the whitest and malest? Oh, Lord, that has to be what we **used to think**.

We are told in the Scripture that the crowd was convicted by Peter’s message and the church burst on the scene with thousands of new believers. Doesn’t that sound marvelous! But I’ve been thinking lately that all this happened long ago and was wonderful then, but now the church is dying. God isn’t creating new believers in Christ like God did back then. The church is in decline. It’s been a loooong time since Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. Right? Right?

Hold on just a minute before we go there. I’ve learned that the global church is booming in Latin America and Africa and Asia, and what’s more, would you believe? Our own little Disciples of Christ movement has sprouted 850 new churches in the last 16 years and we now speak 28 languages in our churches. We’ve introduced 60,000 people to Christ in the last decade. So the sad, gloomy, inevitable demise of the Church?

That’s what I **used to think**.

There’s a lot of changing of minds happening around this Pentecost story. Peter preached to the crowds about who Jesus is. He tells them that Jesus came to show them God’s love but they rejected Jesus. He tells them that it is not too late, that they can still have him as their Savior, still receive his grace. And when the crowds heard the gospel’s good news proclaimed to them, in their own languages, they were ready to become Gospel people. They asked one question. They asked, “What must we do?”

And Peter answered, “Repent.” How about that—repent—“metanoia” in the Greek. Now this literally means, wait for it, it literally means:

Change. Your. Mind.

Peter tells them that having a long list of “that’s what I used to think” is what’s required of a follower of Jesus Christ.

When we change our minds for the sake of the Gospel, **whoooosh!** Listen to the Spirit’s wind and feel the flames of God’s powerful presence, poured out for you.

*It may be effective in your congregation to encourage your folks to say this line along with you when it comes up—pausing before it like this, “That’s what I——**used to think**.”