

All (not each) of them were filled

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I learned many Bible stories by watching movies in Sunday school. They were those old-fashioned movies, shown on a reel-to-reel projector, that tried to portray the stories as some Cecil B. DeMille wannabe imagined they took place. They were seldom more than a few steps grander than the local Christmas pageant; most of the disciples basically wore fancy bathrobes.

The Pentecost movie was dramatic. They all had flames above their heads, and they closed their eyes as they mysteriously spoke in tongues. It was so exotic and a little scary.

However, the movie managed to portray the Pentecost story as an individual, private experience. The text says that “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” That’s “all,” not “each.” Pentecost was a communal experience. The Holy Spirit came upon them not for the sake of a private devotional experience but for the sake of the world.

Together, these disciples experienced the mighty wind, the shift in direction from fear to witness. Together, they understood the gospel in every language under the sun. Together, they became church. Without any one of them, it wouldn’t have been Pentecost.

Rather than imaging Pentecost as a dove descending like it did on Jesus at his baptism, maybe we should picture flocks of birds, swarming and ready to move, mysteriously drawn by winds and season, to travel to new places. If I were directing the Pentecost movie, I would show the disciples with eyes wide open, focused on the gathering crowds, their energy and their speech drawing them outward into the

world. I would try to portray the burning desire deep within them to find the explosive connection between Spirit, culture, language, and community, a movement that gathers until it reaches the ends of the earth.