

Sermon Title: Suddenly  
Sermon Text: Acts 2:1-4

In the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus, now fully resurrected, assembles the newly titled Apostles and tells them to not depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise that is to come from God. He says that John baptized with water, but they shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, and all this would happen only in a few days. For forty days, he taught them speaking to them of the reign and the rule of God, which we have traditionally called the kingdom of God. Jesus is consistent: he starts with the reign and rule of God, the kingdom of God, and as they are coming to the end of his earthly ministry, he finishes with the reign and rule of God, the kingdom of God. In response, they turn to him and ask him, "Lord, at this time will you restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Now based upon the fact that we have 20/20 hindsight, we do not think that this is a very smart question. But this really is a fair question because the reign and rule of God, the kingdom, is the central crux of Jesus' message. According to Mark 1:14, Jesus came into Galilee, at the very beginning and inaugural point of ministry, preaching the good news of the **kingdom of God**. Luke 4:43 records: Jesus went through every city and every village preaching and demonstrating the good news of the **kingdom of God** and saying: "I must preach the good news of the **kingdom of God** to the other cities also, because this is why I was sent."

Matt 6:33: "But seek ye first the **kingdom** and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well;"

Mark 12:34: (One of my favorites) to one of the teachers of the law he said: "You are not far from the **kingdom of God**;"

Luke 12:32 Fear not little flock, it is the Father's pleasure to give you the things of the kingdom

Matthew 26:20 I will not eat or drink again until I come into the kingdom

Jesus talked about the **kingdom of God** more than he talked about anything else. They raised with him a fair question. But they still are off base because their concern was when will you restore Israel? When will you restore the political kingdom? When will you turn us from slaves to the Roman Empire to heirs of the promises of God?

But, Jesus is talking about God's reign, not over a country or a group of people, but over the whole of human history. What Jesus is talking about is not who is in charge like Jews, Blacks, Latinas, or the Whites because Jesus knows that when human beings are in charge, we lord it over each other. But the kingdom of God is God's active hand that affirms what is good, true, and just in every age, and it corrects what is misguided, unjust, and wrong no matter who is in charge. God's kingdom is not about a geographical country, nor a particular race or ethnicity. God's kingdom does not settle on boundaries that we make, such as a particular doctrinal version of the Christian faith that we endorse. The kingdom of God is not a national or a political kingdom, nor a doctrinal position statement, nor a covenanted creed. I heard someone say it this way that I shall never forget: *The kingdom of God is God's government set up in the human heart.* And when God's government is established in the human heart, then a new and more radical political and social agenda has entered the world.

I believe that the fulfillment of God's government in the human heart happens in Acts 2:1-2:

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole*

*house where they were sitting. They saw what appeared to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit enabled them.*

And they were all gathered together in one place and suddenly. They were locked in an upper room and suddenly. I was struck by the word “suddenly.” The kingdom comes suddenly -- it comes with suddenness – Bam! The kingdom has come upon us. It’s here. The kingdom may break out at any time and any place; the kingdom might break out right here and right now. It comes suddenly – It is like the wind. Bam! The kingdom is upon you; Suddenly, it is here. Oh I wish that I were preaching here tonight, but then “suddenly.” I wish that I were moving, taking my homiletical and exegetical flight, but then suddenly. I wish that we would all be gathered together on one accord, worshipping and listening to the word of God proclaimed and then “suddenly.”

I went to the dictionary and found out that suddenly meant -- happening without warning or in a short space of time; "a sudden storm"; "a sudden decision"; "a sudden cure;" happening unexpectedly -- without warning or preparation. Suddenly. I read this in a commentary and it made me want to shout – the commentary said, “Jesus is saying that people are the subjects, and not the timekeepers of God’s kingdom.” Did you miss that – you are not a timekeeper of the kingdom, you are a subject. You cannot predict the kingdom of God, all you can do is survey the effects of its visitation. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It is the smallest of plant but in its time it is the biggest plant of all; you do not see it’s growth, all you can do is measure it when its growth occurs. The kingdom does not come outside in, but it starts inside and then comes out. It lands from God directly in the human heart and then expands to affect the political and social landscape from there. This is going to offend somebody: The kingdom does not come

with the observance of ritual or rites as valuable as our rituals and rites are. We cannot predict the kingdom based upon our liturgy. Nobody will be able to say – “Here, it is” or “There it is” because the kingdom of God is within you. If I had some help, I think I would preach awhile.

Maybe I am being a little selfish, but I wish that in the middle of our business meeting – while we are voting the officers and the budget –somebody will look up and say “Suddenly.” Right in the middle of our organizational sponsored meals, while I am handing over my meal ticket – suddenly. While we are going through resolutions and our business docket with our impressive display of organizational structure and orderly fiscal procedure and policy – I want to hear somebody say, “Suddenly.” With our great leadership lay and clergy – with our awesome music -- with all of our preachers, pastors, prophets, pulpiteers, officers, moderators, leaders, diakonate, and elders – if we could all say “Suddenly.”

I am ready for Suddenly. I want it to be suddenly. I have a heightened expectation of being re-born and renewed by the power of God’s spirit. That’s why I came – that’s why I gathered in this upper room waiting for the promise of God to this General Assembly. That’s why I came hoping and praying that something like the blowing of a mighty rushing wind – hoping to see tongues of fire separating and coming to rest on each of us -- Hoping that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit and would speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave us utterance – hoping that somebody outside this building would hear the mighty sound and different people would come in and hear in their own language. Forgive me, but I want revival. I know this is how other religious groups and bodies talk, but I want revival. When I go home, somebody will ask me what

happened and I will be able to say, “Suddenly.” Who was elected Moderator?

“Suddenly.” Was the budget passed? “Suddenly.” Did this or that resolution pass – all I can say is Suddenly. Suddenly is when God does God’s best work. I heard a preacher says it this way:

Moses is a shepherd tending his father in law’s sheep when, suddenly, he hears from God through a burning bush.

Joseph is serving time in prison when, suddenly, he gets a call from Pharaoh to interpret his dreams.

The Jews are backed up to the sea and wondered how long it will take for God or Moses to deliver them. Then, suddenly, the waters part.

Elisha and his servant appear to be surrounded by the enemy but, suddenly, God opens their eyes to see the myriad of hosts in heaven.

The remnant of God’s people wonder how long it will be before the Messiah comes and, suddenly, an angel appears to Mary, an angel appears to Joseph, and nine months later, angels suddenly appear, speaking and singing to frightened shepherds.

Dozens if not hundreds are caught up in human misery of one form or another when, suddenly, Jesus touches them and heals them.

The prodigal’s father waits and waits for his son’s return (if ever) when, suddenly, down the road his son appears.

The women and other disciples are despondent about losing Jesus when, suddenly, he speaks to them in the garden, then appears to them in the upper room.

Stephen wonders how long he will have to endure stoning when, suddenly, he is ushered into his Savior’s presence.

Paul and his companions are locked in prison when, suddenly, the prison doors swing open. And so it goes...

Let me make this last point and I will not bother you any further. I was in Wales of the United Kingdom, and a preacher I was visiting had on his desk a book that studied Revivals. It listed the ten greatest revivals. I will not list all ten of them because of time. It said

Pentecost was the first great revival – when tongues of fire descended in our text. The second great revival was *The Protestant Reformation—1517* – when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door of Wittenburg Castle, Germany in 1517, it was the most significant religious event of the church from Pentecost to the present day. Luther began the Protestant Reformation that separated forever Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. Then there was *The First Great Awakening—1727-1750*. Early in the Eighteenth Century, revival so impacted the church that the movement simply became known as the Great Awakening – Suddenly. Then there was *The Second Great Awakening—1780-1810*. The author said – *God poured* God's Spirit in a quiet way that shaped the lives of those it touched for a generation. Then there was the Azusa Street Revival when a historic Pentecostal revival meeting started by a black man, William Seymour, ran from April 14, 1906 to somewhere around 1915. There was evidence of speaking in tongues, dramatic worship services, and miracles of miracles at the time – inter-racial mingling. It was the catalyst for the spread of Pentecostalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Now I know that these are not all of the revivals because we have not mentioned God at work in Africa or Asia or South America. We have just mentioned Europe and America. God at work suddenly. But has anyone heard of a 21<sup>st</sup> century revival. Well, if

not now, then when – if not us then who. I want it to be revival. I want revival to break out.

Suddenly stumbling and bumbling disciples become bold soldiers and courageous warriors for God;

Suddenly God pours out God's spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your old men shall see visions and your young men shall dream dreams;

Suddenly the word of God is preached with power, conviction and boldness and 3,000 people are cut to the heart and ask what we must do;

Suddenly repentance is proclaimed and nobody is ashamed to repent;

Suddenly preachers speak in other tongues and people hear in their own language;

Suddenly charismatics become contemplatives and contemplatives become charismatics;

Suddenly comes there is neither Jew nor gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, all are one in Christ

Suddenly comes "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creature, the old has passed away and all things have become new.

And when you go home from this General Assembly – you can say that the officers were elected and this or that motion or referendum was passed but above all of that I hope that you will just say "Suddenly"