# Mind bombs

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Acts 2

Church of the Sojourners, San Francisco, California

June 6, 2015

## Introduction

I’m not sure when I first heard the expression “mind-bomb.” By “mind-bomb,” I think people usually mean something that’s mind-blowing, something that causes a big, immediate reaction, like a mind-blowing concert or movie or something you’d see at Burning Man.

When these Jewish men, gathered from all over the known world, were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate a harvest festival, offering their first fruits to God, their mind was blown by hearing their own languages spoken by rustic Galileans. As surprising as if you were right here people started speaking Arabic and Iranian and Phrygian and Elamite. And then there was the appearance of flames over peoples’ heads. A mind-bomb.

## The pivot of history

Peter addresses the crowd and interprets these strange events for them. And he has another mind-bomb. He declares that they are living at the very pivot of history, the fulfilment of ancient prophecies. Not only were they at the pivot, but (in some sense) they were partly the cause of it, but not in a good way. Roughly fifty days earlier, Jesus of Nazareth, who himself was accompanied by signs and wonders, was crucified in their midst.

But this same Jesus, though crucified, was not left to rot in the grave. He it was of whom it was said, “God has not abandoned him to the grave, nor let his flesh experience corruption.” Even their great hero and king, David, had died and been left to return to the ground. But God raised Jesus, a mind-bomb for the disciples, who actually saw him in flesh and saw him ascend to sit at God’s own right hand to await the fulfillment of all things.

And the things the crowd saw – the tongues of flames, the speaking of foreign tongues – was further witness to that being the turn of history, the fulfillment of all their expectations. Perhaps some of them remembered the strange portents that had occurred seven weeks previously. But all of them saw, and some of them understood, that the pivot of history had arrived.

No wonder they were cut to the heart! No wonder they were abashed! No wonder they didn’t know what to do!

But Peter – himself so recently abashed and ashamed by his own behavior; Peter, who had sworn with curses that he wasn’t a follower of the one whom he had been following — Peter knew what they needed to do, just what he need to do: to turn and return to Jesus.

Everything was so clear, and they knew what they needed to do. The scriptures tell us that three thousand people joined the new movement; which, if you think about it, brought the total number of people in the Way of Jesus to just over three thousand people.

We could dedicate a whole sermon or two to the life of these early Christians, believers so early in the movement they are not even yet called Christians. We see their early rituals: baptism as a sign of their entrance into the movement, and breaking the bread in remembrance of the dying and risen Jesus. We see their early practices: witnessing to the risen Lord, gathering to hear their leaders teach, eating together in their homes, going to temple. We see their early generosity, selling their things to help one another out, and anyone in need. We see their early joy, at least I get the sense that they lived in delightful times of signs and wonders, their delight in fellowship, their delight to see the kingdom of Jesus appearing in their midst.

And I will leave it to others to discern what parts of this story we should expect to be our story as well. Especially: What are the place of signs and wonders in the church today? Especially: To what extent are we called to sell our things for those in needs? Frankly, in my experience, the answers to these questions are a lot more subtle than one might get from a Pentecostal or communal reading of this passage. But still: Holy Spirit, come. And still: Love one another as yourself.

## The ticking mind bombs

There are two kinds of mind bombs. One goes off right away. The crowd’s collective mind was blown by the signs and wonders and the preaching of Peter. But there’s another kind of mind bomb that gets inserted in your mind, and waits– tick, tick, tick – and waits – tick, tick, tick – and then explodes.

There’s a whole series of ticking bombs set off in Peter’s sermon, especially in verses 17-21:

**17**‘In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
    and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
    and your old men shall dream dreams.  
**18**Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
    in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
        and they shall prophesy.  
**19**And I will show portents in the heaven above  
    and signs on the earth below,  
        blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
**20**The sun shall be turned to darkness  
    and the moon to blood,  
        before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.  
**21**Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Ironically, these bombs were set ticking hundreds of years previously by the prophet Joel, whose vision of the last days are quoted by Peter (Joel 2:28-32). Peter says this prophesy was coming true before their eyes. And indeed it was, but not in its fullness.

Peter quotes Joel as saying the Spirit would be poured out on *all flesh*. For Joel, and probably for Peter at this point, this probably meant *all Jews*. But this is the first bomb that gets set. It starts ticking, and before long it explodes, and the good news and the Spirit begins to spill out to surprising people. First it extends to Samaritans and a black Ethiopian God-fearer. Then Peter himself has a vision that leads him to understand that “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” And what God has called clean are people who are, by no stretch of the imagination, Jews. The Spirit comes on Gentiles as well as Jews, and the great dividing wall begins to be dismantled. And as a Gentile Christians, I am sure I are very glad of this.

Another time bomb: “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” The Spirit is to come not only to men, but women too, equally fully. There are intimations of this in the Old Testament (for example, the prophet Hulda), but in the new era, women too receive the Spirit. In Acts 21, we meet four sisters who are prophets in the church. And elsewhere in the book of Acts and the letters we see an active role for women in the church. This bomb has been ticking for a long time, and it still blows some people’s minds that women are full participants in the work of the church.

Another time bomb: “Even upon my slaves, both men and women, … will I pour out my Spirit.” This bomb starts ticking, and we get surprising, for the times, in the New Testament that slave owners need to treat their enslaved people as brothers and sisters, even in some sense as equals, for we are also enslaved by Christ equally. This time bomb doesn’t really go off for centuries, as the church slowly and painfully come to the understanding that you really can’t enslave someone who is your equal before God, and who is your brother or sister in Christ.

I am so grateful for these mind bombs. What would it be like to miss out on the gifts of Gentiles, of women, of those whose ancestors were slaves? We ourselves would be outside the promise; but the circle has widened, and we are inside. Back in Kalamazoo the teaching this morning is being led a young woman, Kelly Heistand, who joined our church at Easter, having been raised in a church that taught that women were not allowed to exercise authority or to teach men. And it was really good!

Oh, and that’s another ticking mind bomb: the Spirit comes to the young as well as the old.

## What’s ticking for you?

I wonder, what’s ticking for you? That is, how is the Spirit flowing out in new ways on the individuals and classes of people *you* belong to? Are there ways you can praise God for the vivid dreams and visions God has granted you? What portents do you see that indicate God is doing something new, or reinvigorating something old?

Who do you see calling on the name of Lord to be saved that surprises you?

Can I get a witness?