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“The Holy Spirit: Source of Limitless Power”
(John 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-21)

Two Sundays ago, we celebrated Pentecost, including a tri-lingual communion service with the Church of Peace. Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian church, the day in which Jesus’ disciples received power from the Holy Spirit to follow His command to preach the Good News.

Pentecost is one of the annual Jewish festivals and is held in Jerusalem. This is one of the three annual festivals or celebrations that all Jewish men were required to attend. The three festivals are Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Passover is celebrated to remind the Jewish people how God set them free from Egyptian slavery. The Passover feast consists of unleavened bread, bitter herbs and lamb. The unleavened bread reminds them of the hasty departure. They had no time to wait for the bread to rise.

The bitter herbs are a grim reminder of the suffering they endured under Egyptian rule while the lamb reminds them of how they were saved by the blood of the lamb. The homes that had the sacrificial blood of the lamb on the doorpost were “passed over.”

In Old Testament times, Pentecost was an agricultural celebration whereby thanks were given for the “first fruits” of the spring harvest. The Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration occurring at the end of the harvest season in the fall of the year.

Pentecost occurs seven weeks and one day after Easter Sunday or the seventh Sunday after Easter. If Easter is counted as the first day, then Pentecost is 50 days later.

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So much for the brief background of Pentecost and Jewish history.

Let me read again some of the words which I read a moment ago: “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:37-39). And from Luke, the acknowledged writer of Acts, “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

What is power? How can it be used for the church? How are we using it for the church? The first thing that comes to mind is the electricity...we turn on the switch and the lights come on. Vanessa flips on the switch and the coffee maker starts to brew. I turn on the switch here at the microphone and the amplifier comes on. The light helps us to see. The microphone helps you to hear me. The coffee will help our fellowship time. All these manifestations of power, which we take for granted, are examples of harnessed power. This same power if unleashed can be devastating.

Let me give you an example of how unleashed power devastated a large area of Southern California. Electricity is generated and carried to the region by transmission lines. It is harnessed and brought to our homes and businesses. Several of the major wildfires in recent years were traced to power lines brought down by high winds setting the dry growth afire. Take the matter of gasoline for instance. The energy in ten gallons of gasoline can be released explosively by dropping a match in the can or it can be controlled through an engine to drive an automobile several

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hundred miles. Unleashed power may be spectacular but harnessed controlled power has staying effects.

The Holy Spirit works both ways. At Pentecost, it exploded on the scene; its presence was like “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3).

Thousands were affected by one burst of God’s power. But it also works through the church – the institution which God began to tap the Holy Spirit’s power for the long haul. Through worship, fellowship and service, Christians are provided with staying power.

The Holy Spirit was something that was promised the disciples. Jesus had spoken about the counselor that would come. Jesus promised that he would not leave them alone, but that they would have a constant companion to aid them in all their efforts for God (John 15:26-16:16). Acts Ch. 1 records that Jesus commanded the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for this wonderful gift. Jesus promises the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises these men “power” when the Holy Spirit is given to them and they will be power witnesses for Christ in Jerusalem and in the surrounding areas and in the entire world.

So, the disciples waited. It was the fiftieth day of these feasts and they were gathered together. It seems that for these Christians celebrating Pentecost together, the feast would take on a whole new meaning. The Day of Pentecost would soon have a new meaning to these people sitting there – they would be witnesses and participants to the birth of the Church. The Holy Spirit came so fantastically. We find that the Holy Spirit came in the wind. There they were enjoying a meal together when the whole house was filled with the sound of the rushing wind. The Holy Spirit has been associated with the wind before, hasn’t it? Jesus talked about the wind in John 3:8. The Holy Spirit is like the wind. It goes wherever it pleases and you cannot see it. The Spirit, like the wind, can and is a powerful force. You may not know anyone

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who's ever had a roof torn off or a building blown down, but I'm sure you've seen pictures of towns in the Midwest flattened by tornadoes, most recently the destruction in Joplin, MO. Even here in Los Angeles, we're not immune from tornadoes. Not too many years ago, the roof of the L.A. Convention Center was sheared off by a tornado. The wind is powerful. So is the Spirit. The Spirit came in power this day of Pentecost and everyone heard it.

We also find that the Holy Spirit came in the fire. Not only did they hear the Spirit come but they saw it as well. They saw fire appear and a little flame came to each of them and rested on them. The fire meant something very important. We find in Exodus 3, that when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush – it meant that Moses was in the presence of God. It means the same thing here. The very Spirit of God was among them and was about to take residence in their hearts. They actually saw the fire come to each of them. They saw that God was there and was about to anoint them to do the work of the church. The Spirit came in power this Day of Pentecost and everyone saw it.

We find that the Spirit came and allowed those who were there to speak in tongues. What an amazing miracle for the beginning of the church! And really, if you think about it – the Holy Spirit was providing exactly what the apostles and others needed to proclaim the Gospel. The rest of the passage after verse 5 tells us there were Jews from 14 different nations around the world. That's at least 14 different languages that had to be learned so the Gospel could be preached. Through the power of God, these apostles were given the gift to speak and be heard by everyone in their native language. All the thousands and thousands of Jews who were in Jerusalem would be able to hear the Gospel and understand it. Amazing and wonderful! The Holy Spirit came in power this Day of Pentecost and everyone saw it demonstrated.

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So the church was born. The Holy Spirit had now come to rest on the followers of Jesus and they could now go out and do as He had asked them to do – spread the Good News. Troy Burst, in his writing, “What’s So Important about Pentecost?,” tells this story about “What is the church?”

Russ Blowers is a minister who is active in his local Indianapolis Rotary Club. At club meetings each week a member gives a brief statement about his job. When it was his turn, Russ said, “I’m with a global enterprise. We have branches in every country in the world. We have representatives in nearly every parliament and boardroom on earth. We’re into motivation and behavior alteration. We run hospitals, feeding stations, crisis pregnancy centers, universities, publishing houses, and nursing homes. We care for our clients from birth to death.

“We are into life insurance and fire insurance. We perform spiritual heart transplants. Our original Organizer owns all the real estate on earth plus an assortment of galaxies and constellations. He knows everything and lives everywhere. Our product is free for the asking. (There’s not enough money to buy it.)

Our CEO was born in a hick town, worked as a carpenter, didn’t own a home, was misunderstood by his family, hated by enemies, walked on water, was condemned to death without a trial, and arose from the dead...I talk with Him everyday.”

Though the Book of Acts is ordinarily titled “The Acts of the Apostles” I feel it should more appropriately be titled “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” Without the power of the Holy Spirit, none of the events recorded would have happened. Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, was killed for his faith. Philip, like Stephen a man of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, brought the Good News to the Ethiopian along the side of the road. Peter and John,

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uneducated common men but filled with the Holy Spirit preached and healed with power. The Book of Acts records Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit as Peter was speaking in the house of a man named Cornelius.

Without the Holy Spirit's leading and power, none of the missionary journeys would have even been started or made possible. Everywhere the Apostles went, the Holy Spirit went ahead of them to prepare the way and soften hearts and open doors. It was the Holy Spirit that allowed them to see what towns to go to and which to avoid. The record shows that the Holy Spirit selected Barnabas and Paul as missionaries and guided them in the way they should go (Acts 13). The Holy Spirit strategically planned the travels of Paul and Silas and it was the guidance of the Holy Spirit that got them through (Acts 16). Paul was warned by the Holy Spirit of the dangers he would face and prepared him for the difficult missionary journey (Acts 20).

Why is the Holy Spirit important to you and me in the 21st Century? If the rush of wind and the fire on the day of Pentecost were merely natural events, none of the other events that took place on that day would have happened. It was the Holy Spirit that transformed what otherwise would be a natural activity into a supernatural one. Without it, none of the events that took place in the days, months and years following the Day of Pentecost would have happened. Without the Holy Spirit, the Church would have not been born and you and I would not be here today in this chapel. The gift of the Holy Spirit has been permanently given to followers of Christ. The mission of the church began and continues to this day to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is ours, for you and me, to answer that call to share the Good News here and the far corners of the earth.

To God be the glory! Amen.

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References: 060309, 052610; Adapted, Troy Borst, “What’s So Important About Pentecost?”; Matthew Potter, “The Power of Pentecost”; Bill Butsko, “Touched by the Spirit”; Tim HBC, “A Harvesting Church”; Kenneth Sauer, “The Church Goes Public”; “John, The Abington Bible Commentary,” Alfred E. Garvie; “Acts of the Apostles, The Abington Bible Commentary,” Ernest W. Burch; “All the Holy Days,” Herbert Lockyer.