

Spirit Power

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. That's how Luke begins his account of the wondrous events that took place in Jerusalem fifty days after the resurrection. The followers of Jesus were all together in one place. Just like us! This morning, we're all together in this place, we who are [Monticello] [Bethel] United Methodist Church.

But how do you suppose we got here? What I mean is, how do you suppose we all ended up here together on this beautiful spring Sunday? Even if many of us come from the same neck of the woods—even if we grew up in the same family—we are the products of different combinations of genetic material and varied life experiences. We're different from one another. We're individuals with various circumstances and characteristics and personalities that make us unique. But you and I have been brought to this place by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have been baptized by water and the Spirit.

Maybe, in one sense, it's been a long journey for us to get where we are today. It seems to me that getting to the place

where today we see the first disciples has been a long journey for them, too.

You know, the gospels don't exactly depict these twelve in the most flattering light. Can they cast out even *one* measly unclean spirit? No way! They bumble and stumble along after Jesus, who patiently teaches them the same things over and over. Even after they've been with him for years, they're jockeying for position. Seeking the kind of power that the world covets. Angling for authority and prestige in what they think will be the Jesus administration. They just don't get the nature of his kingdom. And they're fearful. When the chips are down, they desert. Abandon. Scatter. The gospels portray these Galileans as, well, *weak*.

But just before the risen One departs from them, just before his ascension, he instructs them to stay in Jerusalem. To wait till they're equipped with power from on high. To await the promise of the Father.

So. It's been more than a week. And here they still are, these followers of Jesus, with his mother and his brothers. In an upper room. Waiting. Praying. They've received the promise of

the Holy Spirit. But could any of them have expected how the Spirit will come?

The Baptizer foretold the coming of One who would baptize with fire. And Jesus himself said that he's come to bring fire to the earth. And bring it he does! At Pentecost: the fiery presence of the Holy Spirit.

You've witnessed the great power of fire. Power to warm. To cheer. To comfort. To energize. To enkindle. God's Spirit descends with the power of fire and the power of a mighty wind. You've seen the awesome power of wind. In the languages of the Bible, the word for *spirit* also means *breath* or *wind*.

At the dawn of creation, God's wind, God's Spirit sweeps powerfully over the face of the deep.

Spirit power breathes life into the worn-out, dried-up exiles of Israel. Re-creating them. Making of them a joyful people returning to their homeland and to their Lord.

Spirit power overshadows young Mary of Nazareth, and she conceives in her womb One who will be called great, the Son of the Most High.

Spirit power—at his baptism—anoints that very Son as the Messiah, the Christ of God.

And on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes with power. Upon a city filled with an assortment, a conglomeration, a multitude of ordinary people—diverse as they can be—from every corner of the Empire. They don't look like one another. They don't dress like one another. They don't talk like one another. They speak many different languages. But the Holy Spirit comes with power to transform them into Christ's church.

Into a church that's apostolic. An apostle is one who is sent. Spirit power sends these disciples—these apostles—out and fills them with a boldness that they've never had. Weak no longer but radically changed, they leave that upstairs room. And they spill out into the streets. And they dare to proclaim the great good news of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem and throughout the nation and to the very ends of the earth!

One of these apostles is Peter. In the gospels, the big guy more often than not opens his mouth and inserts his foot. He has a knack for saying the wrong thing. He usually fails to understand what Jesus wants him to understand. And then, when Jesus is on trial for his life, Peter denies even knowing his Lord. Not just once, but *three* times—so afraid is he of meeting the

same fate as Jesus. You and I identify with Peter because, in him, we see a reflection of our own human frailty.

But—after the Holy Spirit gets hold of him—we see an entirely different Peter. We see a man who stands up. Who interprets the Scriptures. Who fearlessly lifts his voice. Who preaches to that huge Pentecost throng, declaring God’s mighty works. Spirit power takes an ordinary fisherman and makes him the rock on which the church is built. Spirit power transforms people into church—a church built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, laid by his apostles.

Spirit power transforms people into church. Into a church that’s holy. Into a church that is Christ’s kingdom on earth. Into a church called to show the world that it is the world, so that the church can be *for* the world the body of Christ.

Spirit power transforms people into church. Into a church that’s one. Undivided. United. *There is no longer Jew or Greek...there is no longer male or female. For all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* One body. One Lord. One faith. One baptism.

Spirit power transforms people into church. Into a church that’s universal. Into a church that invites and welcomes and embraces people of all ages, nations, and races, and includes all

who follow Jesus all around the world. The Holy Spirit is poured out not on a select few only, but on *all flesh*.

When God's Spirit is poured out, unexpected things begin to happen. Young dreamers begin to see visions. Elderly visionaries begin to dream dreams. Children pause in their play. Servants break their silence. Sons and daughters, too, prophesy. Outside-the-box kinds of things take place.

Just like the Pentecost crowd who heard the message in their own languages—heard Galileans speaking in languages they'd never studied—just like them, we're astonished. Stunned!

For the Holy Spirit overturns all our expectations, including those imposed on us by a culture that encourages us to crave a different kind of power. A culture that would have us believe we're seemingly deserving of it and somehow entitled to it. We live in a world that attempts to teach us to hunger for this illusory power and to lust after it. And sometimes we delude ourselves into thinking that we do possess it. It's not always easy to let go of the need to be in control. Which is what we have to do before we can give ourselves over to the only true power: the power of God's Spirit.

The apostle Paul reminds us that when we're Spirit-led, when we surrender ourselves to Spirit power, then in humility we confess our participation in a relationship of deep dependency and intimacy. A relationship that's not unlike the bond between parent and child. Then the Holy Spirit affirms us as God's own children—children who are heirs to the promise of salvation. The promise that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*.

The promise remembered at Pentecost. At Pentecost, Spirit power birthed the church. And that same Spirit is still active, still at work today. Not so very many years ago, Spirit power took an ordinary woman by surprise. Spirit power placed a claim on her life. Called her to a new vocation. Gave her courage. A preacher is given a word to say only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The creative energy of God's Spirit—on *this* day of Pentecost—is in this church! The Spirit breezes into your life with measureless grace. Sanctifying grace. Renewing within you the image of God in which you have been created. The Spirit unleashes all kinds of wonders, filling you with power to accomplish works you couldn't have done on your own. Spirit

power reveals God-given gifts and sparks in you the willingness and the confidence to joyfully use them and share them to build up the body of Christ. And to serve the least of these who are members of his family.

Like his first followers two thousand years ago in Jerusalem, you are Pentecost people. Like them, you wait. Like them, you pray. You don't know how or when the Spirit will come upon you in a powerful way. It could be today. It could be this week, this month, or this year. But of one thing you can be absolutely sure: The amazing power of God's Spirit will change your life. And you will never be the same!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the blessed Holy Spirit. Amen.