

6/9/2019

## “Empowered by a Loving God”

**Scripture: Acts 2:1-21**

### **Pentecost**

**Theme: We can live faith-filled lives, empowered by the Holy Spirit, given to us to witness and share the good news of Jesus!**

Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.”*

*All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”*

*But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:*

*‘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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ”*

Today we celebrate **Pentecost**, as described in our worship bulletin and shared earlier. As the United Methodist Official Program Calendar says, **“To celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the gift of Christian Unity.”** And even though Christians

today may not be united in every way or on every matter, including the understanding or expression of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we all acknowledge God's saving grace through Jesus Christ (his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on his followers on that very special day. We also acknowledge and affirm the power given to those first followers, and even to us today, by God, in and through the Holy Spirit.

I remember growing up, my mother used to always say, "Turn off the lights when you leave a room. We don't have shares in the electric company." ☺ Well, I may now have shares that I'm not aware of in an electric company. But it's still good advice to conserve electricity. In our ever-increasing demand for power to run our homes -- for everything from refrigerators, toasters, microwaves, washers & dryers, not to mention all the entertainment and electronic devices we've gotten dependent on -- our power supply may come up short.

Likewise, with all that we do on a regular basis or are challenged by in life -- from school or work, recreation, housework and administration, to so many things that take time and energy, giving us stress and fatigue, we may come up short on our personal supply of "power" as well.

The reality is . . .

† **There are still many people in our world wanting and waiting for power.**

That need for power, or to be empowered, may be to address one or more issues just mentioned, or it may be for other reasons. We want to feel that we have control over our lives. We want to feel we can take charge of our destinies. We want to know we can follow the dreams of our hearts.

But many people feel powerless. On a personal level, some may feel they are held back by lack of initiative. For others, it may be to overcome bad habits or addictions.

Beyond oneself, some may seek empowerment to overcome prejudice or discrimination. It may be the power needed to have equality in the workplace or overcome barriers in society or within institutions. It may be power to battle or change corruption.

Some may feel powerless, even trapped, in a relationship. They may want power needed to end abuse from another person or persons. We know that even the institution of the church, or those claiming to represent Jesus, are subject to abuses of power. And even those with less or no power of their own within the church, its walls or its ministry may be

objects of abuse of power. This is one reason we have and follow a Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

The earliest followers of Jesus were living in danger of their very lives being subject to earthly powers, both religious and civil. And so it is even today for some who would share the message of the gospel with others in foreign lands.

You see, I believe the reality is that we all have a certain will, desire or even need for power. And some may not be satisfied with using that power for the benefit of others so far as possible. Some may use that power only for themselves or for others with similar thoughts, appearances, or other characteristics. There is an inherent danger with the desire for power or empowerment.

Perhaps some of you picked up on it as I was speaking. That is, the focus can easily become self-centered. We can easily think that power is something to be grasped, grabbed for, or even taken from others to meet not only our needs, but the extent of our desires. The gospels point out that even Jesus' closest disciples of Jesus were prone to the temptation.

The reality is then, that there are still many people in our world wanting and waiting for power.

So, what kind of power do we need the most? What kind of power does the world really need? And how can we have that power?

**† God offers and gives us power that is most needed, most fulfilling, and most beneficial to all!**

If we go back to the Day of Pentecost, the day the church was born, we will see that God gave the church what was needed -- not only for life itself, but to share the good news of that life with others. And as we can see from later in the life of the church, it was to share the very life and love of God in Jesus Christ!

The ambitions, fears, and lives of those first disciples were forever changed on that first Pentecost Day!

Remember how as John recorded (John 14:8-14), that Jesus told his disciples (and us) that our faith in him will give us the power we need to do all that he did and more!

Remember, as the Apostle Paul later said (Phil. 4:13), ***“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”***

Back to that day, when the disciples gathered in that place were so filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to declare the gospel in other “tongues” or languages they most likely didn’t even know. The crowd that gathered around them upon hearing the sound of a mighty wind and the those speaking in various languages.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language . . . we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.”

All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” It is statements like these which show that it is easy to judge others when we don’t really know or understand what God is actually doing in and through them or what is actually happening.

So, Peter bravely stood and affirmed that this phenomenon was not the result of drunkenness as some asserted, but rather of God’s Spirit . . .

As in the last days, spoken of through the prophet Joel:

*‘ . . . 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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. ’ ”*

God’s Holy Spirit, empowering all, so that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved! That’s being **empowered by a loving God!**

Last week, our youth, along with Todd Harvey, gave a wonderful message of “Time to Suite Up”, with the whole armor of God. The verse just before the passage they used reads from Paul (Ephesians 6:10), ***“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.”***

Remember, God offers and gives us power that is most needed, most fulfilling, and most beneficial to all! And God's Spirit and power is used to speak the truth of God's loving plan, so that all may understand it!

Finally . . .

† **Remember to take time, to invite and share the power and witness of the Holy Spirit!**

As Paul wrote to the believers in Rome (8:14-17), salvation is the beginning of our life in faith, not the end. He said, *“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”*

The Holy Spirit gives us daily power for living as God's children, disciples or followers of Jesus, even as apostles who are sent forth to share his word and love. And yes, sometimes it will mean that we suffer with him because of it. But there is an even greater blessing and reward to come.

Let me share this one powerful witness, from today's devotional reading of the Upper Room (6/9/19). It's titled “UNITY AND HARMONY.”

The devotion is by Steven Paul Simmons of Texas, USA. He quotes Psalm 133:1 (NIV). *“How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!”*

He writes . . . “in our prison we have two choirs. One sings in English and the other in Spanish. I am in the English choir. On the months that have a fifth Sunday, we celebrate what we call “Super Sunday.” On Super Sundays, the English and Spanish choirs join together to sing every song in both languages.

“Our first Super Sunday became a powerful experience when we all sang together in harmony. During the altar call, both choirs surrounded the congregation while singing “We Give You All” or “Recibe.” Those who felt called to pray did so. I got down on my knees, put my face to the ground, and felt the Holy Spirit surround me as I prayed. When I finished praying, I stood and looked across the congregation. What I saw amazed me. As I looked from person to person, I knew Jesus was smiling and loving his church.

“In the scripture quoted above, the psalmist says it is good and pleasant when God's people live in unity. When believers come together in love and worship, the connection

and unity that occur are powerful, Jesus' love unifies believers and creates harmony. Whether we are at church, work, home, or even in prison, we can be encouraged by the power of worshiping as one."

Having attended the Pen-Del Annual Conference last week with our Lay Members from CCUMC, I would say the same thing of our worship, and even other experiences there.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, though we may not all think alike, we may love alike, as Jesus did, to share the good news of new and everlasting life . . . **empowered by a loving God!**

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**Questions for Reflection:**

**Have you traveled or been where you did not understand or speak the language? How did you feel? What happened?**

**Have you every listened to and trusted God, waiting upon God for the moment of fulfilling God's purpose and plan for you? How?**

**How have you experienced, received or felt the power of the Holy Spirit come into your life? How have shared or witnessed that with others?**