

We've Got the POWER

Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39

Pentecost 2011

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John 7:37-39

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Acts 2:1-21

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 seemed 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.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs -- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Our Scripture lessons today, of course, are about Pentecost. Today is the birthday of the Christian Church ... the church that was established and had its true beginning on the Day of Pentecost.

The gospel lesson from John that Mary read to us this morning has it's setting at the temple during the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. Part of the symbolism of the feast was a reminder of the water given to the ancestors from the rock in the desert in their time of need.

On each of the seven days of the festival a full golden pitcher was carried in the procession to the temple. On the last day, perhaps as the waters were being poured and running down the steps of the temple, Jesus proclaims, "If anyone thirsts, 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.'"

"He who believes in me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." It is good to keep in mind these words of Jesus as we move on to look at the story in Acts.

It was the Day of Pentecost ... originally known as the Feast of Weeks, the time to bring the first of the harvest as an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord. Later, it was combined with the remembrance of when God gave Moses the Law up on Mt. Sinai ... all those commandments to live by ... and it became also known as The Day of Pentecost. Jews from all over the surrounding nations, as well as from Jerusalem, came to this great celebration.

It was fairly early in the morning ... about 9:00 ... when the promise that Jesus said would come suddenly did. Luke, the author of Acts, says that all the disciples were together in unity. (By the way, if we read from the King James Version we hear a clue in that tells us what kind of car the disciples drove around in. It was a Honda! Luke says "they were all together in one accord!")

As they began to preach the good news about Jesus and his death and resurrection ... the message of salvation ... there suddenly came a loud rushing of the wind and what looked like tongues of fire came and settled on each of their heads and they began to talk in different languages. As the people who had gathered there ... hundreds of them from all different countries ... they heard the message in their own language and they were amazed. "Aren't these all Galileans?" they asked. "How is it that we hear the declaration of all God's wonders in our own native tongue?"

But of course, some were skeptical ... as I imagine some of us would be ... "They must be drunk on new wine" was their explanation. But Peter said to them, "we are not drunk ... it's only 9 in the morning." What is happening here is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

Many people became believers that day and the church came alive as the gospel was spread throughout the world. The Holy Spirit was the gift of God to the church that all of the believers might be empowered to carry on what Christ began. Think of it ... it has been well over 2000 years ... and the church, regardless of the problems it experiences ... is still alive! Think of the millions of Christian believers there are and have been since that amazing Day of Pentecost!

As we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit for the church on Pentecost we must ask ourselves that question that is always before us ... “what difference does it make to us today ... as the church? And what difference does it make to us individually as we seek to be disciples in today’s world?” What difference could it possibly make to young people who are graduating, heading off to find success and adventure?

Gordon MacDonald, in the book, “Ordering Your Private World,” talks about being grounded in who we are, about working from the center of our person. His focus is on how we can work “in the world” ... in different cultures of people ... and not become so influenced by it all that we lose ourselves, that we become weak and develop a sense of total chaos inside us. In other words, we lost our sense of direction, of being connected with our Creator and our own authenticity as His creation.

MacDonald tells about Mohandas Gandhi, the great leader in India, who sparked the flame of independence for his country. Some have called him “India’s George Washington.” Gandhi was highly respected and loved as a leader ... among the common and poor people, but also in the palaces and high places with the very wealthy leaders in the world.

How did he keep his inner serenity? How did he continue to be authentically who he was and not become influenced by those he came in contact with, particularly those wealthy, powerful people?

McDonald says that each night Gandhi would go home, sit on the floor, and spin wool on the spinning wheel for his own clothes to be made. It seems this simple, common act helped him to be grounded ... to remember who he was, to stay in touch with the common people of his time and with the real, authentic person inside him ... the person who continued to care and work for the good of all.

Jesus said, *“Those who believe in me, out of their hearts will flow rivers of living waters.”*

The Holy Spirit lives in each of our hearts, yet if we do not know our hearts, if we do not take the time to be grounded, to be centered, to recognize the Spirit dwelling in us. How can we experience those rivers flowing out to care for others, to know others, to work with all people for Jesus’ sake ... and not get sucked in to that world in our culture that drains the life, the living water right out of us?

This message is for you graduates as you start a new beginning in your life ... but it is a message that is so important for all of us. So many people today are so caught up in the outer world of busyness and of trying to make a living and keeping up with their neighbors, that there is not really time to even know themselves, let alone know their neighbors or love them, as Jesus commanded.

You see there is a river flowing inside you, ... the living water that is called the Holy Spirit. It sustains you, it empowers you, it guides you along the path of righteousness and joy in living for Christ and in being whom God created you to be. Pentecost was not a one time event!

The Holy Spirit did not come and then leave forever. You may not experience it today as the disciples did on that day, with tongues of fire on your head or speaking in unknown

languages. That happened for a very necessary purpose. But you do have a source of power and energy inside you if you remember to go there, to not get so caught up in the activities of life that you forget.

Go to that place often, that center of your being, and spin wool, not necessarily in a literal way, but I'm saying to be in touch with the common places that are with part of who we all are. Be familiar with the Holy Spirit inside you.

And for the church ... we have not even begun to allow the full power of the Spirit to come upon us! There are many people in our churches know so little about that river of living water inside them that they haven't yet figured out that when God chose them to be His, and when they were baptized, they were also given a gift to be used for the complete wholeness of the church.

Paul promises us that all the gifts that are needed to be the church, are given to the people. The Holy Spirit is at work, keeping, guiding, protecting the church, empowering us to do ministry.

As we begin this new beginning ... you who are graduating and moving into your future ... and we all, as we celebrate the birthday of the worldwide church, beginning another year of being the Body of Christ ...our prayer is that all of us would open ourselves to allow the river of life to flow freely within us and to find those places where we can become centered ... in order to be strong in the world, to truly be the new creation that God created us to be and that God empowers us to be.

Happy Birthday, Church! We are the fruits of Gods great Harvest. We've got the POWER to be all that God wants us to be!

Thanks be to God for the Church that continues the ministry of the living, risen Lord. And thanks be to God for the power of the Holy Spirit that is with still today! Amen.