

Pentecost Sunday  
“On Finding Pentecostal Power”  
Acts 2:17-21

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Lord, as of old at Pentecost  
Thou dost thy power display,  
With cleansing, purifying flame  
Descend on us today.

Power, Power, the world is full of power - military power, political power, economic power, industrial power. Our children's Power Rangers protect our planet from evil forces. Power plants dam up our rivers in order to send us electricity. The world is full of power.

But do you have the spiritual power to become all that you are created to be, and to do all that God wants you to do? That is what I want to talk about today.

It is Pentecost. It is time for flying doves, blowing wind, and flames of fire. It is Pentecost. It is time to feel the fresh wind of the Spirit and experience the strong surge of energy from on high. God never says you ought, without providing the power that says you can.

**THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO SPEAK THE TRUTH**

The prophet Joel put it this way, *“Your sons and daughters will prophecy” (v.17).*

The Holy Spirit helps us see the truth about ourselves. There are two mistakes we humans make about our lot in life. We narcissistically think we can do everything, or we ashamedly assume we can do nothing.

Remember when life had no limits, no restraints, no negatives, no confinement? Remember when you could fly like a bird, soar like a plane, and manipulate your parents into giving you everything? Get over it! Life is not a fairy tale told by Peter Pan.

There are some things I cannot do. I cannot play the piano. I will not be a country music singer. I cannot make a living playing golf. Even though you live in Brentwood, you do not have to do everything, go everywhere, or keep up with everybody. Just relax.

Of course, the opposite is, likewise, deceiving and false. I can't do anything; I fail at everything. My life is one big pain after another. Get over it! When I announced as a senior in high school that I intended to spend my life in the ministry, my farmer father said, "He might as well be a preacher; he's too lazy to do anything else." My father was wrong. I am a minister today not by default, but by the will of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. God will give you the power to become exactly what he wants you to be.

The Holy Spirit helps us speak the truth about the world.

A man from Washington D.C. was in my office this week. He was seeking help from this congregation to solve a growing problem in America. The problem is human trafficking, modern slavery, forced labor, and teenage prostitution. Naively, I said, "You need to be in Detroit, Miami, or San Francisco. Why Middle Tennessee?" The man responded, "We just busted a brothel filled with teenage girls from Mexico less than 15 miles from your church. We need your help. Friends in Washington said BUMC would get involved."

Jeremiah was just a kid when God called him to be a prophet. He had no training in public speaking and swore to God that no one would listen to him because of his youth. But God would have none of it. "Get yourself ready," the Lord demanded. "Stand up and say whatever I command you - for the politicians

and the priests are satisfied to cry peace, peace, when there is no peace.”

Dare we ignore the cries of children, harden our hearts to the homeless, and forget our men and women fighting in war while we pursue our materialistic dreams? We could use some prophets today!

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO RAISE HOPES**

*“... young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams” (v.17b).*

Hope is more than positive thinking. I have had about as much of the Pollyanna religion as I can take. God has more important things to do than find you a parking place on a crowded street or an upgraded seat on an airplane. What kind of egotistical maniacs are we to even ask the Almighty for it?

God has not designed a personal improvement plan guaranteed to make you “healthy, wealthy and wise.” Bill sat quietly in his small group as long as he could. He listened to one glowing story after another of God’s blessings on believers. Group members were making money, being favored, finding success, and living the fullness of asking and having it given. When it came time for Bill to speak, he said, “I’ve been a Christian for six months. During this time I have lost my job, gone through a divorce, and discovered I have heart trouble. Being a Christian has almost ruined me.”

It seems that Peter was more than a positive thinker. Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela, and Oscar Ramero were all hopeful people, but they were hardly Pollyanna thinkers. Luther threw ink wells at the devils in his office. Bonhoeffer called Christians to come and die. Bishop Ramero never understood why he should be the one to stand up against injustice in South America.

Hope is more than strategic planning. I have been downtown this week trying to learn the art of preaching. Some of you think it is about time. Bishop Will

Willimon was telling us about sending one of his pastors to Florida to learn how to plant new churches. When the young minister returned, Will asked him what he had learned. "What are the strategies essential for success?" The pastor replied, "I learned there is absolutely no way to successfully start new churches. Over 80% of new churches fail. Most others plateau with a few hundred members. They said if you want to start a new church, all you could hope to do is pray - maybe God would have mercy on you."

If you want renewal, maybe Zachariah was right. *"Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord.* Believe me; I am talking about hope now. I believe in hope. I believe in the deep rivers of hope that flow through the soul.

As the hymn goes, "Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. We dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." I intend to proclaim that as long as life and thought and being lasts, or immortality endures.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO BE SAVED**

*"And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (v.21).*

Theologian Walter Bruggman says all who desire to be saved must live through the vulnerability of Good Friday, the despair of Black Saturday, and the surprise of Easter Sunday.

Peter says the same thing, only a little plainer, this Jesus whom you were stupid enough to crucify, is ordained by God to be the Savior of the world. *"So repent, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call" (v.38-39).*

You want to be saved? Then be crucified with Christ and raised by the Holy Spirit into new life. Repent of you sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and

receive the Holy Spirit.

We are not saved to just sit here basking in our personal salvation. We are saved to partner with the Holy Spirit in changing the world. “For God so loved the world.”

All of us need to come out of our denial and start cleaning up the environment before we choke to death. Pollution is not a political problem, it is a moral problem.

A teenager came through our youth group, sang in our choirs, went on our mission trips, graduated from high school and went to college. She decided God wanted her to become a public school teacher in Title 1, poverty-gripped, schools. This fall she will start doing that.

One of our high school seniors made a speech the other day at the Chamber of Commerce who awarded her a scholarship. I went up to Rachael after the meeting and said, “I hope I am still alive to see you become president of the United States.” She is one woman who could handle the job.

Somebody here needs to find a cure for cancer. Somebody here needs to solve our health care problem. Somebody here needs to take a stand for justice. Somebody here needs to help end this war. God loves the world. He wants us to love it, too. But do not try it on your own. Let the Holy Spirit come and take control, sending a great revival into our souls.

For when the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will be saved.  
Amen.