

## **“Pentecost: Spirit Powered Ministry”**

*Acts 2:1-21*

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Our oldest son, Noah’s girlfriend, Shani is from Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia and is working for a second summer as a crew member onboard the Bluenose II. You’ve all seen the Bluenose on our Canadian dime—or maybe even on the Nova Scotia license plate. The Bluenose was launched in 1921 as a working schooner both for fishing and for racing on the open ocean—all powered by wind. It’s beautiful to see this grand ship in full sail—yet more remarkable still is when those sails unfurl to catch the wind which carries it on the open ocean at top speed. The Bluenose was nick-named the Queen of the North Atlantic because for twenty years it was the fastest. All powered by the sheer energy of harnessed wind.

The word for Spirit in both Hebrew and Greek means wind. In today’s Pentecost passage from Acts we have a picture of what happens when we unfurl our souls to catch the powerful wind of the Spirit—when we allow the Holy Spirit to blow through us, to breath on us, to propel us and compel us to do what God wants us to do with amazing power—because the Spirit is God’s immanent presence right here in our midst.

Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit—the comforter, the Paraclete, one who is called alongside, an advocate. Jesus promised that the disciples would not be alone after he left this earth and that the Spirit would guide them into all truth and that the Spirit would be like living water welling up inside of them. But not only this, the Holy Spirit would empower them to do the work of ministry; to be God’s people—God’s hands, God’s feet, God’s voice, to minister to each other, to reach out to others and to be God’s healing presence. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere.”

The Greek word here for “power” is *dunamus*, from which comes the word dynamite—it means power, ability, strength, miracle, but it can also mean mighty work or potential—through the power of the Spirit there is a new potential that can emerge in us.

Jesus ascends to heaven and the disciples are gathered together waiting—by this time there are 120 of them gathered in this large upper room. They meet here daily for prayer and just waiting for the Holy Spirit to come. They are nervous about speaking about Jesus to others, because Jesus himself was crucified only seven weeks before.

And when they meet on the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, suddenly a sound from heaven—like the howling of a fierce wind fills the entire house where they are gathered and they see what looks like tongues of fire that descend on each one of them. And they are filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

I love this amazing picture of God's people being filled with power for ministry that they couldn't contain, which then carries them out into the streets where they began to preach the good news of Jesus in languages that to that point they had never known.

The Spirit gives us power to be witnesses—to use our gifts to do something. Jesus ascends to heaven and leaves his ministry in the hands of his witnesses. And that's the same to this day—as people say, Christianity is just one generation away from extinction. It requires people who are willing to be Christ's witnesses. We are all called to be witnesses for Christ. And we receive the Spirit to empower you to do this.

Yet it seems like there's a power failure these days in North American Mainline Protestant Churches. While there continues to be exponential growth of the church in much of the world—there's tiredness afoot among Mainline Protestants. Churches that no longer breathe with the breath of the Holy Spirit no longer inspire, and soon expire. American religious researcher Martha Grace Reese asserts that “[m]any churches are slowing down because they are running on human steam.” Our efforts have replaced openness to God and God's Spirit for direction and empowerment. Lots of people love the church and its traditions more than they actually love God and God's purpose. Ministry writer, Graham Standish contends, “It's easy to be so consumed by what we are doing for God that we miss the experience of being with God—the experience not of needing to make everything happen, but the experience of being blessed. A healthy church grounded in relationship with God allows the Spirit of blessing to flow through it in abundance. What makes the difference is the extent to which the community is open to God at its core. Not only do we expect to experience God—we do experience God.

Standish asserts that it's, “Our faith, our surrendering trust in God, (that) turns on God's power much as turning on a lamp in a house fills the room with light.... When we act in faith, we trust that God will do something.... God does amazing things for those with faith.... God makes the impossible possible.” Pentecost is an illustration of this.

American Methodist preacher, Adam Hamilton reminds us that Pentecost can happen anywhere in our lives: in your home; when you're out for a walk; on a mountaintop. I've known the Spirit's presence and empowering in so many different ways and places during my life. But here in this story, the church is gathered together when the Spirit

comes. This sanctuary is our Upper Room, where we gather to invite the Spirit to empower us for ministry.

As the early church grew into this experience they soon recognized that individual people were given certain gifts (1 Cor. 7). We may have natural gifts in our lives, but the Holy Spirit either strengthens those gifts in our lives and empowers them in new ways or gives us new gifts that we can be in ministry to other people. We are called to witness and service every day—how can we be Christ's presence?

This week I got to meet Iona Gibbings who is a member of Oakridge Church. Iona was born in 1925—which makes her older than the queen. Iona misses being here, she is now in long-term care and coping with health issues, including near blindness—yet her spirit is strong. As she told me last week—she has a ministry. Although that ministry has needed to change over the years, Iona has ministry of prayer and generosity that she still conducts from her room. She has a ministry within the facility where she lives and she prays for the flourishing of ministry here at OPC. How about you? What is your ministry?

Not everyone has the same gifts. We have people with gifts of compassion and caring, hospitality and food, budgets and planning, generosity of financial resources, sharing good news, solving problems—so many gifts given for the common good. We are meant to give those gifts for the common good, to put the needs of others before ourselves. We are given a variety of gifts with which to serve God. What the Spirit does when we surrender is to take the gifts we have and to amplify and empower them for greater impact. The Spirit takes what I could have done on my own and raises it up to a whole new level.

Consider this power drill. If I decide not to use that power, I can get this screw turned in here—but it's not the way that this tool was meant to be used. Yet when I decide to tap into the power of this tool (turn on power)—that's how it's done.

It's like that in our own lives when we yield the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us—and offer them in service, inviting the Holy Spirit to empower us. We find that we can do more than we could have done on our own and we can do better.

George Muller was born in Prussia in 1805. As a rather wayward young man he had an experience of God through a group of Christians he met. It revolutionized his life. Eventually he moved to England, and became a pastor in Bristol. Muller decided to centre his ministry on Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." In faith, Muller decided to surrender

himself and rely on the Spirit's empowering and provision. Whenever Muller needed something, whether food, money, clothes, or medical care, he would pray - and God would provide. A man he barely knew might come up to him on the street and say, "I'm not sure why, but I feel that something is telling me to give you this," and he would give Muller exactly what Muller had been praying for. Muller learned that when he relied on God, *especially* in difficult times, God always provided.

Inspired by such provision, Muller started an orphanage that would be rooted in prayer and God's providence. They solicited no donations, practised financial accountability, focused always on the welfare of the children, and centred all decisions and actions in prayer. They never asked for money but coincidences, or providences, kept happening. People would come out of nowhere it seemed, to offer financial support, sometimes the exact amount needed. When the price of land was too high, the seller generously dropped the price into their range. When there was no food, they might all spend the morning praying for God to provide. And each time God came through, whether through a letter in the morning mail, which contained money, or the arrival of the town baker, who had felt a call to bake bread for the whole orphanage, or a milkman whose cart just happened to break down at the end of the driveway.

Over the course of Muller's life, the orphanage grew from one house with a few orphans to a 25-acre campus with over 2000 residents. During his life he cared for over 10,000 orphans, and established 117 schools which offered Christian education to over 120,000 children. Relying solely on faith and prayer Muller raised the equivalent of \$50 to \$80 million. Through the empowerment of the Spirit the impossible becomes possible!