

Sunday, May 31, 2020 – Acts 2:1-13

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,^[b] ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

And this is the word of God, for the people of God. And all God's people said, Amen.

Pentecost. I can remember, oh my gosh, being in worship, many, many years ago, at the Salvation Army in Waterloo, Iowa. It was a tiny little church, and they got a new pastor. Oh my gosh, he's passed on now and is enjoying his time with the Lord and so is his wife, but they had gotten a new pastor about 10 years before maybe 15. And we went there. And the first Sunday we walked in the door you knew something was different about this church. There weren't the usual doldrums. They weren't dragging themselves in at the last minute and it was as if they could not wait to get there. It was as if they could not wait to see each other and share with each other everything that had happened during the week, and the conversation seemed to always start with, “Let me tell you what God did for me this week.” And it was amazing.

In the time that I was there, I thought to myself, something different is going on in this church. Well, the pastoral couple was older. And I had heard them speak in Bible studies, at camp, and things like that. And they always just drew you in, with not just their knowledge of the Bible, but the fact that they actually knew who God was. It was an amazing relationship that both of them have with God.

And then he invited us to come for prayer meeting. Prayer meeting was at 6:00am on Tuesday morning. Not many people came. But we do know that there was a crowd that used to get up and pour themselves coffee and pray over coffee while the prayer meeting was going on at the church.

And I would walk in and he said to me one day, are you going to be shocked if I lapse into a prayer language? Are you going to be shocked if the spirit moves me and I get up and dance? Well I've never really seen that but if it's with God, I guess I'm game. And I sat through those prayer meetings. And I tell you that when that man prayed, it was almost as if the ground shook. His prayers were that powerful.

And I watched him over the course of another year and a half. I watched her. I watched how they loved people, really loved people. Even the most unlovable people. The ones that would come into the building and attack them for what they believed. They loved them. I watched her work with volunteers during preparation for their daily meal program, which served 900 people, Monday through Friday. 900 people. I watched those people come in off the streets that had no homes, smelly, and dirty. And I watched her wrap her arms around them.

I watched him pray with the most desperate families. I watched him shelter children whose families were abusive and keep them overnight and then take them into social services the next morning. And I watched him as he tried to get those children placed with families in the church because he knew they would be safe. And they were, many of them were placed. I watched people, be healed when they were prayed for. There was a power in that church that I had never, ever seen before.

And he used to invite us to their house and we'd have dinner and then we sit on the floor and watch TV with her. And kind of tried to pry her off the floor when we were done, but I was a little bit older too so that was a humorous occasion in itself. We enjoyed each other. I saw, at home, that they were just the same as they were in church. It was an amazing season of life. And I said to him one day, "What is going on in this church?" And he said to me, "That's the Holy Spirit."

Well, you know, I was in seminary later, and I remember talking about him, and talking about her, and they sent me to read an author's book. And this author had a series of books all on the Holy Spirit and his work in the life of believers. Nothing fancy, no long words. Just the love for God reflected in the pages. And then I got to read the notes in the edge of the author's Bible. I used to sneak over to the museum at the seminary, in the storms late at night, and sit with a flashlight and read the notes on that Bible. It was an amazing thing that these men, and these women, truly knew the Holy Spirit, as much as they knew the father, as much as they knew Jesus.

There was a power plant in Cleveland for Joel's, almost Joel's whole life. The Delta steam electric plant. It was operated by MPL, and it was a landmark on highway 61 north. Some of the family friends had worked there. It served Cleveland for over 50 years. But back in January of 2018, it imploded. Explosives were strategically placed around the entire complex. Nine explosions echoed through the air on that cold morning and within seconds the power plant was reduced to a huge pile of rubble. It had outlived its usefulness. It was obsolete. There was better technology, more efficient ways to produce power, they thought.

How do we produce power? Where does our power come from? I used to tell my kids that if you take a vacuum cleaner and you run it over the floor, sometimes it's not going to pick up anything. And the reason it doesn't pick up anything is because it's not sucking anything up off the floor. And the reason it's not sucking anything above the floor is because you forgot to plug it into the outlet.

We as human beings need to be plugged into an outlet because we need power to live every day. We all hate it when the power goes out. We grab our generators for a temporary fix and if we don't have a generator, we bring out the candles and light the candles. Or we hunt for the flashlight, or maybe we have a couple of oil lamps in the house, I do. And we wait until the power comes back on. When Hurricane Katrina happened, a cheer went up from the community when the power crews showed up to get the power turned back on.

But the truth is, is that any other power, other than the Holy Spirit's power, is temporary. It can't be depended upon. We all too often look for ways to supplement our experience of God, to build on our experience of God by trusting in temporary fixes. If we're feeling down, we have our friends pray for us, which is good. But it's only a temporary fix. If we feel like we don't know what we need to know about God we may gloss over something in Google, because we can Google everything, rather than go to the Bible. But what we find is only a temporary fix because we're not getting the power that we need out of the relationship, that is the most important one will ever have.

The Holy Spirit's power never outlives its usefulness. His power never becomes obsolete. His power could never be replaced by better technology. His power will never be usurped, and there will never be more efficient ways to produce spiritual power. And that's what we need. It's the power that we want, because it's the power that we need. But it's also the power we have, we just need to plug in. The Holy Spirit is our power plant.

In Acts 2 we see the fulfillment of one of Jesus's most important promises when the Holy Spirit comes. But let's go back to Ezekiel for a minute. Ezekiel sees this valley of dry bones. This valley that represents everything that has fallen apart. Spiritually, in the nation of Israel. Wow, what an appropriate time to read Ezekiel. We look around us and there's so much. The things we pray for and the things that we fear, the things that we question, that are falling apart, in our nation and in the world around us. And we come to realize very fast that we have no other power to trust on.

You know we look at our government and our government is struggling. A lot of us don't have a lot of faith, right now, in our leadership. And I'm not going to criticize them because to be perfectly honest, no matter where you look there's a lot of questions. We worry about what's going on in the lives of our nation. We pray that there's a solution. But nowhere is there a great prophet like we've had of old, who will stand up. No one's coming out and addressing what's wrong, without fault finding and nitpicking. No one's taking a stand. We are powerless.

We look at what's going on in our world and we see the same thing, everywhere. People who are questioning what's going on in their leadership, people who are questioning what's going on with this virus thing that we've now been dealing with for months on end. We still have no answers. The answers we get go back and forth, all the time. Wear a mask, don't wear a mask, wear a mask, don't wear a mask. We hear it over and over until everyone is so sick of it, they don't even want to see a mask laying on the table. Stay home. Oh, you can go out. But if you go out, maybe you ought not to go out for too long. Watch where you go. No, you should stay at home. Well no, you can go out. No, you should stay home, or you can't go out and you can't do this, and your kids can't go to school, they can't do this buy you can go out and buy liquor. Everybody, everybody is confused. We're wondering. We're lost.

Well, in the church, we have divisions. Not local churches usually. But in denominations and one denomination against another denomination, there are constant divisions. It's as though we cannot focus on the major issues and forget the minor issues. Yes, we're different there's a reason, God only knows. And by that, I mean, God **only** knows.

But he's called us each to do something for him. He's called us each to reach people for him. And yet, here we are. You don't look like me, you don't worship like me, you immerse, you sprinkle, you use bread and wine, you use bread and juice, oh that stuff you use looks like bread but it really isn't bread,

are you sure that's what you should be using. We are majoring on the minors, and we are powerless. And we need power.

Those Dry Bones, they represented everything that was powerless, everything that was lifeless that people placed their hope in. That we hinge our lives upon. Something dead and dying, instead of focusing on the life that Christ brought us when he sent the spirit into our lives. So, we look around us, can these dry bones live. Can the church become everything that the church worldwide was meant to be? Can we become faithful stewards of everything that we were given? Can we stand up and right the wrongs that we see around us? Can we snatch people out of Satan's grip? Can we walk with them towards holiness? Can we build a world where Christ is honored and where wrong is set aright? Can We? Not without the Holy Spirit.

The apostles had obediently gathered in Jerusalem. They didn't like being there but Jesus had commanded them to gather. They had stayed in their homes. They weren't too sure they knew what was going to happen and they weren't sure they wanted to know what was going to happen. All they knew at that point was that Jesus had taught them about the Holy Spirit and that he had given them direction in order to keep them in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. And then, it happened.

What a moment. Imagine, thousands of people, and then we see this. When he came, by the way, he. His name is not it. There are many denominations that say pray till you get it. Well if you get it, you know that it's not an it, it's a him. So, his activity was obvious. First there was the sound and the feel, the mighty rushing wind. The same word that they heard in Greek and in Hebrew, was wind. They heard the spirit's activity. In Hebrew the word is Ruah and it really means breath. It is the breath of life.

And then they say his activity. There were visible tongues of fire over the disciples' head. Not something that we will ever see again, but it was a witness. It got their attention. And then, the real miracle. They were filled with the spirit and they began to speak in other tongues. It's called Glossolalia and it happens in multiple ways. Either the people you are speaking with hear what you are speaking in your own language, in theirs. Or somehow miraculously, God allows you to speak their language that you have not studied. They were not unknown tongues at that time although we know that that happens as well.

They experienced the activity by hearing the gospel in their own language. And they become bewildered, confused, confounded. They were shaken, they were stupefied/. They were astounded. They started to tremble. This was not normal. They were at a loss and they started to question. What can this mean?

Now there's always going to be skeptics, isn't there. There's always going to be somebody that says if you do something good for them it's because you have an ulterior motive. There's always going to be somebody that doesn't really believe that Jesus really is the king of this world or that he was just a profit and a teacher. He couldn't be any more. Even though the scriptures reveal that the profit and the teacher and the king and the priest was coming.

They would be skeptical they want to throw cold water on the heat of the Holy Spirit's fire and we see them now. Anything that's slightly different. Oh my gosh. Did you see that it? It was slightly different! Gasp. The church is called to be different. We are called to be different. Not loopy, not to heavenly minded that we're not of earthly good, not frantically displaying behaviors that drive people away from the Gospel. But we are called to be different.

There'll be skeptics all over the place. Don't worry about the skeptics. Jesus had them, Peter and the disciples had them, the Holy Spirit certainly had them. But every Christian has the opportunity to not just have the spirit in them, but to have the spirit empower them. We all have the same power plant. He gives us the power to communicate the gospel. The Bible is abundantly clear that we're supposed to witness and share the gospel, but it's a fearful thing. It's not easy to go out and to open your mouth and tell somebody about this Jesus that they don't believe in. It's not easy, always, to share a testimony.

But we can be equipped to do that through the power of the Spirit. We can be intentional when the Spirit directs us to someone to go out and share what the Spirit calls us to share. We can look for opportunities, but we will always be successful, if we rely on the power of the Spirit when we witness. Success doesn't mean we win every person to Christ that moment. Success means we rely on the spirit's power, obey Jesus' command, and leave the outcome to God.

He gives us the power to understand biblical truths. Ever look at a page in the Bible and read it. And then read it over and over, and then realize you have not got the vaguest clue what it's saying? And suddenly you pray, and suddenly the words begin to come off the page in such a way that our lives and hearts are touched. The spirit illuminates our minds and allows us to understand the things of God. There are a lot of false teachers in this world. We as the church need to be able to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that we don't fall prey to false teaching. We need to know what truth is. We need to know what error is.

Remember what Jesus says, "when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth." Keep studying the truth of the Word and pray and ask the spirit to enlighten you. Keep asking the Spirit to guide you into truth and keep believing that he will. He gives us the power to live a Christ honoring life. We can walk by the Spirit and avoid those things that are so harmful to us. The hatreds, the lust, the confusion the unforgiveness, all those things. We can instead embody the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness gentleness, faithfulness, self-control.

If we live by the Spirit. We can keep in step with the Spirit. He gives us the power to be the church. If there's anything that we've discovered it is that this, is not the church. This is the home, where the church meets. And we love it. And we miss it. And we want to be back inside it, because it holds so many precious memories and we feel the presence of God among us when we gather. But this is not the church. So, don't be discouraged. You are the church. I am the church. We are the church together. Amen. We've discovered that it's not just going to church live it's important. It's not all there is to the Christian life, we miss it, but it's not all there is to the Christian life. Because the church is breathing and living and active. We are the church.

So, this morning, feel powerless? Wonder if anything will ever get back to normal? Feel unable to cope with some of the things we cope with? Feel like it's impossible to reach out and touch lives and actually see results? That's what the enemy wants us to see. It's what he wants us to believe. He uses circumstances. It's the way the disciples felt.

Until the morning of Pentecost, when that mighty rushing wind blew through that place, and filled them, and took 11 shaky frightened, totally out of their element men and made them bold enough to preach the gospel to everybody that surrounded them. And when they preach the gospel, thousands, thousands, were saved. Talk about success. We don't need just a power boost. We need the power plant to continue to fill us constantly. That's what we need.

And we're going to pray for that. And we're going to do so by singing, this just beautiful hymn Breathe on Me Breath of God. It's a prayer to the Holy Spirit to come to come and fill us again and to continue to full us and empower us and embolden us so that we can be all we're called to be. Let this be the prayer of your heart. Amen.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.