

McCabe United Methodist Church

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Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost Power and Passion!

Pastor Art Scanson

Reader's Digest carried a story of a mother who was describing her family's visit as tourists to Wales. She was describing her six-year-old son's reaction the first time he heard the Welsh language being spoken. "Mom," he said, "it sounds like they're scribbling with their tongues." (*Hidden in Plain Sight* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2002)

"The wind blows wherever it pleases." said Jesus on one occasion. "You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. . ." Jn. 3:8

Today we are celebrating Pentecost—when the disciples were all together in one place and "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."

Can you imagine a scene more dramatic than that? Was it a tornado? Probably not, because there is no report of physical damage. It only says there was "the sound of a violent wind." So how do we explain the "tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them"? It is probably best not to try! This is not a normal experience. Luke was, no doubt, trying as best he could to describe the power that came upon the disciples on that day - 50 days after Christ's resurrection. These who were there experienced such power that, although uneducated, yet they were able to testify in foreign languages to pilgrims who had come from many lands to celebrate the festival.

Yes, it may have sounded like they were scribbling with their tongues when the Spirit came upon them. Yet it was in known languages that were heard.

Let's look at the account as Luke writes it. Read Acts 2:1-21.

Trying to explain the event, some present made fun of the disciples and accused them of being intoxicated. Suggesting that if the police had come by, they may have been sighted for "drunk and disorderly." However, we must notice that Peter stood up and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; . . . These men are not drunk. It is only nine in the morning! Rather, it was the prophet Joel who said: 'In the last days, Gods 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. . . And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Then Peter proceeded to tell them about Jesus. As they listened, about three thousand were added to the church on that one day.

What an event! We have a tendency in the church today to minimize the role of the Holy Spirit. You can be certain, no one is going to accuse us of being drunk and disorderly! We recoil at what we would call, "unbridled emotionalism of the so-called holy rollers." And we don't know what we would say or make of any violent wind to shake the foundations of our temple worship. WE are content to be refined, respectable, responsible, and, above all, rational.

While having just said that, I would contend that there is something missing in today's church. It's not sincerity! We are all sincere in our faith. It's not intellect. We have some of the best educated lay and clergy the world has known. Could it be power?

Today is Pentecost. Next Sunday is Trinity Sunday. We pray "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Yes, the Father and the Son, we are comfortable with, but that Holy Spirit—well, we aren't exactly sure where we stand on that.

Dr. Henry Van Dusen, in his book *Spirit, Son and Father*, says that the New Testament benediction was the reverse of today's formula. The first disciples prayed in the name of the "Spirit, Son and Father." Interesting isn't it?

Author Bruce Larson tells us, "This is because we have reversed the New Testament strategy in approaching people. We come to people first of all with the doctrine of God the Father, which is the most difficult of the Christian doctrines to comprehend. We then talk about the doctrine of the Son, which is more understandable, and finally, we save the Holy Spirit for those inside the church who are most mature. Van Dusen says this is wrong, that we should begin with the Holy Spirit first. The outsider can understand the Spirit of God loose in people. . .As people respond to the warmth of the Spirit in other people, they can then be taught about the Son, and finally, as they mature, grapple with the doctrine of God the Father." Bruce Larson, *Ask Me To Dance* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972)

It is interesting, in this "post-modern world" people, particularly young people, are most often turned off by a faith that is approached from the intellectual or rationalistic side. They are looking for a holistic presentation of the Gospel, one that grips the imagination and the emotions as well as the intellectual part of the brain. A faith that is expressed from the passionate side.

Christianity without an emphasis on the Holy Spirit is like faith on decaf. A faith that is without any trace of what is called "enthusiasm" is not a faith that empowers people to live out their faith.

George Knowles in his book *A World to Love* tells about a part of explores who found themselves perplexed by something they found in a remote African jungle. In a clearing they discovered 35 carefully laid fires that had never been lit. They had the appearance of 35 little tepees, with dry leaves surrounded by small, dry twigs, and finally larger pieces of wood arranged in good Boy Scout fashion.

Who built the fires? Why had not even one been lit? The mystery cleared up when the explorers saw dozens of chimpanzees watching from the trees. The chimps had watched campers and copied the art of fire building. But they had no fire. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990)

Might the same thing be said of the church today? We have been trained in fire building but we have no fire. Have we forgotten to express our faith with the head and the heart? This is probably true if we note that the 20th century showed a decline in an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. It also shows a steady decline in the membership of mainline churches.

It is the Holy Spirit that empowers us to do God's work in the world. Matthew 28 Jesus instructs his disciples that they are to take the Gospel to the whole world. How could they possibly fulfill his command? Because that band of believers at that time was only 120 people. But Jesus explains how in these words: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

That's it! Jesus would be with them in the power of the Holy Spirit!

My friends, we need the power of the Holy Spirit today too. Consider the enormous problems the world faces—terrorism, economic hard times, environmental devastation, water shortages, famine, to name a few. Do you think that we could make any dent in any of these problems with only our own power? If ever we needed the Holy Spirit working through us, it is true today. Can we here at McCabe see the importance of working on our Natural Church Development minimum factor of passionate spirituality?

Not only do we need the power of the Holy Spirit as a church, we need the power of the Spirit in our individual lives. How else do we live a life of integrity in a world where personal values are crumbling? How can we keep our commitments? How do we live a Christ-like life in a world that glorifies greed and materialism? Only one way, and that is to pray that Christ's Spirit will come into our lives and give us the courage and the conviction and the compassion to be the kind of person that honors Jesus.

Barry Merritt tells the following account of his life. Our Little League coach had a picnic for the team at the beginning of the season. After we ate hot dogs and hamburgers, he gave us a pep talk. "How many of you have a dream to one day play in the major leagues?" he asked.

Almost every hand shot up. Every kid believed he could do it; you could see it in his eyes. "If that is to happen, that dream begins now," Coach said. We were so inspired that we practiced hard and played hard and went undefeated for the next few years. All-Star teams from other leagues played us and lost.

Years later, when I became a coach, I brought my kids together to give them the same pep talk. But when I asked, "How many of you have a dream to one day play in the major leagues?" not one hand went up. Not one kid believed he could do it. I was speechless.

The rest of my talk was meaningless, so I said, "Really? Nobody? Well, get your gloves and let's throw."

I thought about that day for a long time. What had happened in the 25 years since I was a kid? What had come into their lives to steal their dreams? What had convinced them they would never be more than what they were? *(1001 Illustrations that Connect, Zondervan 2008)*

Those questions may be asked of us.

-What has come into our lives to steal our dreams of being God's people impacting this community and world?

-What has convinced us that we would never be more than what we are today?

Is it possible that it can be said of us—that we have the form of religion, but not its power? No fire?

We still bear the name of Jesus, but what is lacking in the power to be his people in our community and world. Oh, we are working on it but are we dreaming of greater things that we can be about? Things that are greater than we can do by ourselves without God's help. If so then our dreams are too small!

May each of us earnestly and desperately pray for the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit to come into our life and set us on fire to make McCabe the vibrant and effective church that God's Holy Spirit calls us to become!

Come Holy Spirit, Come upon us and empower us!