

## **The Spirit has Landed Acts 2:1-13**

Adapted from "Drawing On The Power Of God" Contributed by Kerry Haynes @ SermonCentral.com

Just a few days after Thanksgiving, 2015, Eric Heffelmire was working on his GMC truck at the family home in Vienna, Virginia when the truck fell, gasoline spilled, and a fire was ignited, all in an instant. Heffelmire recalls, "I was on my back, face up, and I was trying to get some corroded brake lines when apparently the jack slipped and fell down on me. It pinned me across right here on my shoulder." Then, there was an explosion. "I thought they'd be pulling out a dead body later in the evening,"

Fortunately, his 19-year-old daughter Charlotte was home from the US Air Force Academy on Thanksgiving break. She heard the noise and came flying into the garage, barefoot, five foot six, and all 120 pounds of her. She saw her dad and still can't fully explain what happened next. "I somehow lifted the truck...and pulled him out [to safety]."

Once her dad was out, she got into the truck, still on fire, threw it into drive, and drove it, on three wheels, out of the garage. Then she closed the garage doors to help contain the fire, and got everybody out of the house, starting with her sister's baby. She was standing there hosing the house down when the firemen arrived.

*"I just did what I had to do, so I don't feel like a big hero or anything,"* Charlotte said. She was later recognized with a Citizen Lifesaving Award by the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue and also received a \$10,000 check from Shutterfly on the Ellen show.

Every so often we hear a story like Charlotte's of superhuman power. In time of need, people somehow do the seemingly impossible, and they have no idea how they accomplish it.

### **What if a power like that were available to every Christian believer?**

It is! The Holy Spirit is our power source for when God wants to do the impossible through us.

It all began with a promise that Jesus gave his disciples right before He ascended into heaven. You'll find it in the chapter before today's reading, Acts 1: 4-8:

*But **you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; **and you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*  
*Acts 1:8*

*While staying with them, [Jesus] ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

*So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But **you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; **and you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

The word for "power" here is the Greek word "dunamis," from which we get our English word "dynamite." Notice it's not a power that the disciples have on their own. **They have to "receive" it when the Holy Spirit comes on them.** And that power, God's power, will enable them to be God's witnesses in several specific locations.

**First, Jesus starts with Jerusalem**, their current home. Jesus tells his disciples they will be his witnesses there first, right where they are. The same is still true for us today, wherever we go, we are to be Jesus' witnesses, right where we are, because God is always with us; His Holy Spirit is in us right here, right where we are. A wise proverb advises: "*Be where you are.*" For us Christians that should read **"Be a witness right where you are!"**

**But then Jesus extends their geographic coverage to include all Judea.** That would be all of Virginia for us. Judea was the home of those Jews who sought to keep their Jewish lineage pure; for us it would be working in the Bible Belt. Such an assignment must have felt overwhelming to these rural fishermen from "the wrong side of the tracks" in Galilee. First they were to start witnessing in the capital of Jewish faith, right where they were, but then they were to move out into their entire homeland... witnessing! For us that now enlarges our field to include family, friends, relatives, our religious neighbors, our non-religious neighbors, even our other-religious neighbors.

Some of the hardest people for us to share our faith with are those who think they already know us; for better or for worse, people don't know how to handle you when you change; remember Jesus was known as a miracle working preacher everywhere else, except to his family and in his hometown where both refused to give up their memories of Joe the carpenter's son.... "*He made some beautiful furniture, but now he's claiming*

*to be the Messiah, who does he think he is?!*" (I have always fantasized about going to the Holy Land not to find a piece of the original cross but rather a table that had been made by young Jesus the carpenter—wouldn't that make a nice communion table). But the Holy Spirit has the power to overturn all preconceptions; we now see sitting there, in that upper room, waiting for Pentecost with all his other disciples Mary, the mother of Jesus, his brothers, and probably some of his sisters.

**And next Jesus adds Samaria**, an area to the north of Jerusalem, sandwiched between Judea and Galilee, where, the conquering Assyrians, having earlier exiled the locals, transplanted non-Jews who then intermarried with the few remaining Jews. Judeans despised these northern "half-Jews" worse than any non-Jew. The centuries had built much prejudice and hate between these two groups. Huge walls would have to fall for the gospel to travel to Samaria. But, the Spirit has the amazing power to break down walls:

- Witness Jesus simply asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water and a whole town comes into the faith.
- Later, the deacon Philip will intentionally travel to Samaria to bring about a great revival among those people.
- Witness Paul and Silas, beaten and thrown in jail, just sitting there singing hymns in the night, when the Holy Spirit literally opens doors for them to be pulled out and cared for in the home of their Roman jailor. After he had washed their physical wounds, they washed his spiritual wounds and the rest of his household as well; that's POWER to move beyond prejudice.

Just like those first disciples, Jesus still calls upon us today to use the power of the Holy Spirit to break down walls of prejudice and hatred, to witness even to our enemies, to extend His love to them, to pray for them, and yes to feed and clothe even them—in the name of Christ.

**Finally, Jesus told his disciples they would also be his witnesses "to the very ends of the earth."** How the disciples must have struggled to imagine that! Yet for the Holy Spirit getting their message to the ends of the earth was surprisingly easy!! At Pentecost, He just brought the ends of the earth right to their front door.

Pentecost, the harvest festival, was one of the big three feasts of the Jewish year, along with Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. As with the other two great feasts, Pentecost would have drawn international Jews from all over the known world to Jerusalem to worship together during this sacred time, to give thanks to God with the first fruits of the grain harvest.

That is why God chose this day to send his Holy Spirit into the lives of the 120 men and women believers gathered together in that Upper Room. God was bringing about a

different kind of harvest. Following Peter's first sermon delivered that same day, 3,000 new believers came into the Christian family overnight, thus commemorating the birth of the church.

Here is an interesting side note, if you drew a line from Jerusalem to each one of the cities listed in verses 9-11, all together they would look like the spokes of a wagon wheel, reaching out to what is now modern day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Italy. Literally, God fulfilled Jesus' promise in one day, as the gospel spread to the pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem, they would take it home to the very ends of the earth. And of course God then added another layer to the fulfillment as he allowed persecution to disperse the Jerusalem church, thus spreading the gospel even further.

In one sense, Pentecost basically reversed what happened at the tower of Babel in Genesis. At Babel, God confused their common language and scattered humanity across the world in order to keep their evil from multiplying. At Pentecost God brought people from across the world together in Jerusalem. There once again, confusion reigned. But this time it was not because of their inability to understand each other, but because they could; each one heard the good news of Jesus in his own unique language. How could this be possible, especially since the speakers were uneducated Galileans? Real miraculous Holy Spirit power!

In next weeks' portion of Scripture, we will read about how cowardly Peter—who in a crisis had even denied knowing Jesus—is now filled with the Spirit, preaching with boldness to thousands, and 3,000 people turn their lives over to Jesus. **"Before Pentecost the disciples found it hard to do easy things; after Pentecost they found it easy to do hard things."** (quoted from A.J. Gordon,)

The impossible became possible because the disciples were filled with Holy Spirit power. Jesus' promise was fulfilled. God's power was there. God's power did the impossible. It overcame barriers of prejudice and doubt. It accomplished what could not be accomplished by human strength.

God's power can spread the gospel across the known world in a single day. But he has specifically left that task to us his followers--**you will be my witnesses!** Friends it's long past time that we tapped into that power once again; we desperately need it to be doing the witnessing that God has called us to do.

I heard about an Air Force pastor once who was getting frustrated with the lack of spiritual life in the church. So he stood up at Communion Sunday and announced, "Today we will be having prune juice for Holy Communion." When asked why, he replied, "If the Holy Spirit won't move you, the prune juice will!"

Now it wasn't the Holy Spirit that was the new thing at Pentecost. God's Spirit was very active in Old Testament times. Leaders like David, Samson, Elijah, and Samuel were all "filled with the Spirit" and did mighty things for God. Yet, **what changed at Pentecost was that now the Holy Spirit comes into EVERY believer and comes to stay.** Back then He came to a specific person for a specific mission. That's why in his repentant psalm, David prays, "*don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*" (Psalm 51:11). Beginning with Pentecost, Jesus' gift was that the Holy Spirit would now come to reside permanently in each and every new believer at the moment of their salvation.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,  
with which **you were marked with a seal**  
for the day of redemption.  
Ephesians 4:30

The story today is all about God's power, dynamite power, which He can give to anyone waiting to be filled with the Spirit. But let's be very clear here; every believer already has God's Spirit within him or her. The Spirit is God's seal on our lives, our guarantee that He will bring us home to live with Him in eternity. **Every one of us has all the Holy Spirit we are ever going to get... the question is how much of ourselves are we going to let the Holy Spirit get.** After Pentecost, when the New Testament speaks of "*being filled with the Holy Spirit*" it means that the Holy Spirit had taken full control of that life.

- Filled with the Spirit, the disciples weren't speaking in private prayer tongues; they were sharing the gospel in known languages understood by those who were hearing them.
- Filled with the Spirit Peter and John pulled a lame man to his feet—and got their second chance to preach to the crowds. It also got them arrested, but it brought another 5,000 into the faith.
- Just before his death, filled with the Spirit, Stephen looked into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
- Filled with the Spirit Philip first brought about a huge revival to Samaria. Then he was led by the Spirit down to a lonely stretch of desert road just to witness to and baptize one man: a passing Ethiopian official, sending him homeward rejoicing and thus bringing the Gospel into Africa (Acts 8:4 and following).

Following the lead of the Holy Spirit, Bradley and Jessica Long from Pulaski, Virginia, are headed to Central Asia with the Gospel. If you let the spirit take control, who knows where the Holy Spirit might take you? As bumper sticker wisdom declares: ***If God is your co-pilot, you had better trade seats!***

**So the question now is, "Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you, to lead you?"** The Bible says we can "quench" or "grieve" the Spirit of God when we do not listen to him, when we go our own way. Yet, when we yield to God's way, we open ourselves to an outpouring or filling of God's Spirit.

In today's story, believers were filled with the Holy Spirit to be "witnesses;" they were given the courage and the ability to share what they had experienced with Jesus with people very different from them. Whether it was language, handicap, or prejudice, walls were demolished by the dynamite of the Holy Spirit working through them.

In the early church, Pentecost became such an important holiday that it ranked second only to Easter. These early Christians understood the importance of the Holy Spirit filling them for service.

What about today?

### **What if Pentecost were more important to us than Christmas?**

Can you imagine that kind of priority, to want desperately for God to fill us so we can witness effectively with everyone we meet; showing what Jesus has done in our lives? Think of it! God wants to use us for his work! Is there any greater honor than that?

And so it now comes back to us. Here, once again on Pentecost Sunday, we may not get to baptize thousands—but we will do a few today—and as we pray for them let us also pray for ourselves, that God would fill us again with His Spirit so that we will have the right words at the right time and the right place to share with a neighbor or a family member or a friend, to talk of Jesus' love, God's forgiveness, the Spirit's guidance, and of hope and peace that comes from Christ now living in us. That's what the Holy Spirit does when He makes us a witness.

Let us pray about this

*Lord, help us again to take up the Pentecost promise that Jesus left for all his disciples to be about. Open us again to the Holy Spirit's power to be your witnesses, in our home, with our family, in our neighborhoods, to our enemies, and perhaps even to the ends of the earth. Help us to be ready to share, to be always filled with and led by your Spirit, in the name of Jesus, our Lord, we pray, amen.*