

PENTECOST POWER

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June 5, 2022

Scriptures (NKIV): John 7:37-39; John 20:19-22; Luke 4:14-21; Acts 4:24-31; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:7-8,11-12; Acts 2:14-21; Acts 2:11

Sermon in a sentence: God wants to activate the dynamic power of His Holy Spirit within us.

There are many abilities and powers bottled up inside each of us, and if we choose to use them, we can change our own lives and, in fact, change the trajectory of the whole world. Some have discovered the power they have with just their voice, to articulate thoughts and ideas that inspire others to act.

Winston Churchill, for example, galvanized his nation with the immortal words he spoke in May 1940 when he was appointed prime minister of England, just a few months after World War II had begun. On his third day in office, he gave a speech in the British parliament that included the now-famous statement: *"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."* Churchill had a rare gift for oratory, and he used his words on many occasions to give hope and strength to his countrymen.

A young senator from Chicago was asked to give the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in 2004. His words completely captivated his audience, and you may remember the most famous quote from his speech:

"There is not a liberal America and a conservative America - there is the United States of America. There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino

America and Asian America - there's the United States of America."

This was the speech that thrust Barack Obama into the public eye and set him on course to becoming the 44th president of the United States of America.

In 1925, one of the world's greatest jazz pianists was born in Montreal. His name was Oscar Peterson, and his talent was readily apparent from a very early age. But Oscar didn't rely on talent alone. From his adolescent years onward, he would practice four to six hours per day. He worked hard, dreamed big, gave it everything he had, and became the best in the business.

Here's the point. We all have a gifts and talents. We all have a voice. We all have power. In that respect, we're all on the same level. So, even if you *think* you're powerless, you're not. God has given each of us power we can harness to literally change the world!

Today is Pentecost Sunday; the day we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on 120 of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago. This was a phenomenal day that continues to impact lives around the world. And as we begin our celebration of this day, let me give you a little historical background.

Three of the New Testament gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke were written (in that order) in the late 50's and early 60's of the 1st century. These books are called "synoptic gospels," and they give a synopsis of the timeline and main events of Jesus' life. The Gospel of John, however, was written about 25-30 years later in the late 80's or early 90's, with a very different focus than the others. John's

purpose was to have people consider the “signs” Jesus gave to validate His claim to divinity, which should have caused people everywhere to believe in Him (John 20:30-31). Therefore, John’s gospel reads quite differently than the synoptics, and there are specific things he records that no one else does.

In John 3:5, for example, he spoke of the fact that believers in Jesus must be “born again” of water and Spirit. These are crucial elements of our conversion experience. From this we understand that as we *begin* our walk with Christ, we are baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit.¹

Then, in John 7 we read:

John 7:37-39 On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Using this symbolic analogy, Jesus spoke about people receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, which would be available to them after He was glorified. This act of

¹ Our Christian life *begins* when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). Therefore, there is no such thing as a Christian who has not received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-11). Without His Spirit, we don’t belong to Christ. Through water baptism, a believer vicariously participates in the death (repentance), burial (immersion in water), and resurrection (emerging from the water) of Jesus Christ. Resurrection takes place when the Holy Spirit enters an individual to begin their Christian life (Gal. 3:2-5). This is the only element of our conversion/initiation to Christianity that gives LIFE! If Jesus hadn’t filled us with His Spirit at our conversion, we would still be “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1,5).

glorification took place after His crucifixion when He was raised from death by the power of God! And on the very same day of His resurrection, He met with His disciples, breathed on them, and imparted the Holy Spirit to them. Here is John's account of this interaction:

John 20:19-22 ... the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." ²⁰ When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

As it had happened on other occasions, the disciples didn't understand the incredible importance of what Jesus had just done. But from that moment on, the indwelling and infilling of the Holy Spirit became a reality for His disciples, and available to everyone else who would believe in Him!

But, as we know, receiving new spiritual life through the infilling of the Holy Spirit isn't the end of the story. It is just the beginning. The Lord is not just interested in giving us His Spirit for our own personal salvation and blessing. He always has an outward view. He always wants to share. He always wants to give. He always wants us to move beyond simply receiving His Spirit to living in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Many have referred to the fact that the word translated "power" in Acts 1:8 is the same Greek root of our modern English word "dynamite." As Jesus was preparing to return to Heaven, He told His disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the dynamite power of the Holy Spirit to fill

them and enable them to fulfill the mission He had given them. In Mark 16:15, He had told them to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” And He knew this was only possible as He empowered them *by* and *through* the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself had had a similar experience at the Jordan River. As He was praying after His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and sat on Him. This was a divine sign to John that he had now met the One who would soon begin baptizing believers in the Holy Spirit (see Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34).

We know that Jesus was conceived and given life through the Holy Spirit that lived inside Him, but even for Him, He received a special anointing and empowering of the Spirit so that He could fulfill His Messianic calling. Jesus recognized this and acknowledged it as He gave His inaugural address in Luke 4:

Luke 4:14-21 ... Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. ¹⁵ And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. ¹⁶ So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”* ²⁰ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

These were the words of a man who had now stepped into a whole new dimension of power and anointing. And this is precisely what He desires for all of His followers; that we would live continually in the *power* of the Holy Spirit.

It's not hard for us to understand the shock and perplexity of the people of Jerusalem as they heard approximately 120 apostles and disciples speaking fluently in languages they had never learned. It was the most amazing phenomenon one can imagine. God gave them the power to do the impossible so people would have their ears wide open to hear the gospel. In this instance, He didn't even wait for the Word to be preached to confirm it with signs following. He *preceded* the Word with the miraculous signs of tongues and prophecy, through which approximately 3,000 people received salvation that day! These were God-fearing people who had come from all over Europe, Africa, and the Middle East to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, in obedience to OT law. And as it was with them, so it is with us. The Lord still desires to take good, God-fearing people beyond religious observances and good works to living in the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit!

God has not changed. Just as He did in Jerusalem, He desires to save multiplied thousands of people right here in the City of Toronto. I believe that with all my heart. So, as we gather today on Pentecost Sunday, let us pray for Pentecost Power to be poured out upon us to take the gospel to our city. This was the content of the apostles' prayer in Acts 4 after they had been arrested, brought before the council, threatened by the chief priests and elders, and told not to preach any longer in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:24-31 ... they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: "*Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things?*" ²⁶ *The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.*" ²⁷ "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

This was an intelligent and pointed prayer. They acknowledged God as the sovereign Creator, the One who controls all things and performs miracles, and the only One who could give them the spiritual power they would need to go forward and preach His Word.

As a church, let's put this prayer into our mouths. We need the 'right now' anointing and empowering of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His will. Let's pray for the Lord to shake our spirits, shake our building, shake our civic leaders, and shake whatever else He has to shake so that Pentecost Power will be manifested through us in our city!

I will never forget my own personal call into pastoral ministry as a couple of folks in our congregation utilized

the gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues to reveal God's will to me. The Lord knew the precise question I needed to have answered before I would say "yes" to Him, and He answered me clearly and specifically to give me the courage to obey. And although I am nowhere close to being a great pastor or preacher, the Lord has still seen fit to use me to point people to Christ and see their lives changed as they receive salvation from sin. This is a high honour and privilege, made possible through those who were willing to use the gifts God had given them.

Now, just for clarity, please don't think you have to do everything the apostles did in the Book of Acts to have Pentecost Power working in your life. In the case of the apostle Paul, Acts 19:11 tells us that God performed "special miracles" through him. He raised the dead to life, cast out demons, healed the sick, survived a poisonous snakebite, exercised the gift of prophesy and the gift of apostleship, just to name a few. God absolutely worked special miracles through him, as He also did through Peter, Stephen, Philip, and many others. However, this doesn't mean it must happen the same way with every individual.

I often think of some of you here who have been faithful for so many years in using the gifts God has given you, even though they don't seem to be as spectacular as the ones I just listed for Paul. However, you have come to realize that there are many other gifts of the Spirit the Lord has blessed His church with. So, let's take a moment to read through a few verses from Romans 12. And for those of you who haven't yet started to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, I wouldn't be surprised if you find yourself somewhere in these verses. You may suddenly realize that the Lord has already blessed you with one or more of these gifts and you just need to confidently move forward in faith to use them.

Romans 12:6-8 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if **prophecy**, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or **ministry**, *let us use it in our ministering*; he who **teaches**, in teaching; ⁸ he who **exhorts**, in exhortation; he who **gives**, with liberality; he who **leads**, with diligence; he who shows **mercy**, with cheerfulness.

Paul is saying: 'We have gifts, and we ought to use them'. Showing mercy may not seem as spectacular as healing and miracles, but it is every bit a gift of the Spirit as the more spectacular ones. Therefore, we need to celebrate and use every gift God has given us for the benefit of Christ's body - the Church, and the world around us.

And still, there's more. In Eph. 4, Paul provides another list of ministry gifts God has blessed the Church with:

Ephesians 4:7-8,11-12 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore He says: "*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.*" ¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be **apostles**, some **prophets**, some **evangelists**, and some **pastors** and **teachers**, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

So, where do we begin, and how do we get into having a display of Pentecost Power in our lives? We get a big clue from the original outpouring on the Day of Pentecost. When the crowd in Jerusalem was searching for the meaning of what they were seeing and hearing,

Acts 2:14-21 ... Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵ For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But **this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel**:

17 “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.

18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.

21 And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’

This is the perfect beginning for all of us. From Joel 2, to Acts 2 & 19, to Romans 12, to 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, and to Ephesians 4, the gift of prophecy appears in every list. And lest anyone think that prophecy is relegated to foretelling the future or preaching the word of God, Acts 2:11 tells us that the visitors to Jerusalem said:

Acts 2:11 ... we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”

We might be tempted to call the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost a massive praise and testimony service. A testimony service that was miraculously facilitated by the Holy Spirit to be understood by all the foreigners present in Jerusalem. As they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, the 120 weren't preaching the gospel. That was left to Peter, the man with the “keys” to the Kingdom of God. They were simply speaking “the wonderful works of God,” which is no different than the wonderful works of God we can testify to in our own lives.

As Peter began to explain what was happening, he identified these praises as prophetic, prophecy fulfilling

utterances, made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as Churchill or Obama used their voices and words to inspire nations, the Lord can put words of praise, adoration, and acknowledgment of His majesty on our tongues. He can use *our* words to inspire unbelievers to pay full attention to the gospel message.

On a few occasions, the Lord has given me words to say that revealed the hearts, thinking and actions of people visiting our church; things I could never have known about. In some cases, people accused their church friends of telling me their secrets, only to have me broadcast them from the pulpit. But that has never been the case. It was just a prophetic word from God into their life and situation. God is still at work through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I would like you to join me in prayer that the Lord will help us open ourselves up to receive Pentecost Power, to receive any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit He chooses to bestow upon us, and then to go forward in the power of His Spirit to change our world and turn hearts to Christ.