**The Church in the Power of the Spirit**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

**The Day of Pentecost**

**May 20, 2018**

The thing that always amazes me about the story of Pentecost is the speed with which Peter assessed the situation and preached an awesome sermon. His *first* sermon! Without notes!! Peter: uneducated fisherman, impetuous to a fault, prone to error. But this time, he got it right.

It’s as if he’s expecting something big to happen, and he’s ready. Like a batter waiting for a particular pitch: he’s studied this pitcher, he knows that pitch is coming sooner or later. And when it does: ***BAM!*** He drives it out of the park.

In fact, Peter *was* looking for something big. Let’s back-up a bit and get a running start into the story of Pentecost. The prequel is the 24th chapter of Luke’s gospel. Remember that Luke and Acts are really a 2 volume work, and Luke is the author of both. In that last chapter of Luke, the Risen Christ is getting ready to leave the disciples via the Ascension, and he says to them, “I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

What God promised was the Holy Spirit. The disciples were waiting for it, they prayed in the Temple as they prepared for it, and when the Spirit came, with great power, on Pentecost, they were ready for it.

First there was the *promise* of the Spirit. The promise was given to the Church even before there *was* a Church! The promise said that the Church would never be left alone by God. The promise said that the Church had an amazing future that God had already prepared. The promise said that each and every one of the first disciples, and each and every one of those 3,000 folks who would be baptized on Pentecost, and each and every one of us who have been saved by grace, baptized in water, and grafted into the body of Christ ever since: the promise said that each of us and all of us would be equipped by the Spirit to help the Church move into that future that God has prepared for it.

Peter was ready because he believed the promise, and he had prepared for the promise’s fulfillment. And with the fulfillment of the promise on Pentecost, Peter rejoiced as the Spirit filled him, and filled all those around him, with the wisdom to say and do just the right thing at just the right time. It wasn’t always there. I’m sure there were still days when Peter reverted to his problematic impetuosity. But on that day, and on many days yet to come, Peter was on his game, Peter was in the groove, and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Spirit was with him and the Spirit was doing great things through him and through the Church.

Which is to say that the coming of the Spirit was not only a matter of promise but also a matter of *power*. I mean, you don’t preach the kind of sermon that Peter preached that day without an incredible power from beyond yourself coming upon yourself and giving you just the right words. And I share that with you from my own experience. There have been times over the years, either while I’ve been preaching or while I’ve been preparing a sermon, when the words actually seem to be coming from someplace – or Someone – beyond me. It’s like my lips are moving, or my fingers are typing, but Someone else is feeding me the words. It’s like a power that is not mine fills my body and helps me to do stuff that I didn’t think I was capable of doing.

But it’s not only me, and it’s not only preaching. It’s listening to someone who’s hurting, or bringing food to someone who’s hungry, or creating a work of art, or whatever your gift may be. Perhaps, at least once in your life, you’ve had that experience. A Power beyond yourself gets a hold of you, and amazing things happen. And if that’s never happened to you, be prepared. It can happen. If you expect it, and you prayerfully prepare for it, it will happen. Because, what we’re talking about here, is the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Risen Christ promised that the Spirit’s power would come upon the Church. It has. And it will. And we all have been, and will be, on the receiving end of that gift.

First there was the *promise* of the Spirit, and then there was the *power* of the Spirit. And these gifts were received in part because of *the prayers and promises of the Church*. I mean, the Holy Spirit was coming regardless of what the embryonic Church did or didn’t do. It came as God’s gift to the Church; and through the Church, to the world. And a gift depends solely on the generosity of the Giver. But if you’re not prepared to receive that gift, then it might go on a shelf, unappreciated and unused.

But Peter and the disciples were prepared. Through prayer, they were prepared. Through the patient teaching of Jesus, they were prepared. Through the promise that they had made to follow him, they were prepared. They we’re prepared to receive the power and the promise of God. And when it came – when the Spirit came – it was kind of like…***shazam***! And the body of Christ, with its rich variety of gifts and rich variety of people and rich endowment of love, the body of Christ was born.

Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. And everyone, please keep listening because I’m speaking to all you all; but now I’m especially speaking to those whom we’ve just baptized, those who are about to join the church. You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. You have been blessed with the power and the gifts of the Spirit. And, like Peter, there will be days when you will be fully aware of that blessing, and other days when the going will be pretty tough. On the good days, don’t be bashful about using the amazing gifts that God has given you; using those gifts for the care of Christ’s body and the mission of the Church in the world. Jesus said, “Don’t hide your light under a bushel, but let it shine before others so that they can see your good works and give glory to God” (Mt. 5:15-16). Dr. Harold Fey, a great Disciple teacher and editor, once told a young preacher, “When in doubt, ere on the side of boldness.” So prayerfully serve God with all of the power that the Holy Spirit has given you. On those good days, it’s going to be easy and it’s going to be fun.

But, there are going to be some other days. There will be days when you will doubt. There will be days when you will hurt. There will be days when it seems like nothing is going right. Remember, on those days especially, that *this* day is a day of promise. Remember not only the promise that you are making to God this day, remember also the promise that God has made to you; a promise that God made to you even before the day that you were born. That promise says, “You are not alone.” That promise says, “I will be with you.” That promise says, “I have clothed you with power from on high.” On those rough days, trust that promise. Trust the Spirit as it has been poured out upon you and upon all those who are gathered around you; all of those who are part of this community of faith: who have surrounded you with their love throughout the years leading up to this day, and whose numbers you now officially join. Remember the promise, remember the power, and be prepared to receive it over and over again through this body of believers; through this body of Christ; through the Church; where we have been touched by a love that never ends. Amen.