

“Power for All”
Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:3-13 (NIV)
Pentecost Sunday
First Presbyterian Church, Marshfield, WI
May 24, 2026
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The Day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit must have been an incredible experience for the early church members. Prior to that, the disciples and some other members had the opportunity to encounter the Risen Lord on several occasions over a forty-day period. I’m sure they shared those experiences with others, so that as the word spread it strengthened believers and perhaps helped non-believers come to a testimony of the Risen Christ. But it seems to have been scattered encounters. But then Pentecost arrived, exactly 50 days after Passover. Many don’t realize that Pentecost was a Jewish holiday celebrating the giving of the Law to Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai.

The Festival of Pentecost was attended by Jewish people from all over the Mediterranean world, and more faithful Jews actually came to Jerusalem for Pentecost than came for the Passover. So, Jerusalem was flooded with Jewish people from countries all around the Mediterranean. It seems that the disciples must have been meeting together in a house when the sound of wind was first heard. It was apparently not a felt wind, but one that was heard and was very loud. Then, amazingly, miraculously, flames of fire appeared, and separated and rested on each of the disciples in the house. It was the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised would come to them and that he would send them, and amazingly, the Galileans began to speak in foreign languages.

Apparently, the Spirit led them outside and they began to tell the story of Jesus and his resurrection. The people were stunned to hear these uneducated, Galilean fishermen speaking their languages. However, one commentator suggested that they actually didn’t speak in multiple languages, since only two would have been needed, a position with which I completely disagree. He suggested that for the Jews from the area, Aramaic would have sufficed, and for Jews from the broader Mediterranean world, only Greek would have been needed, since it was the language of the business world. But this was no business transaction. It was deeply and profoundly personal.

Anyone for whom English is not your first language knows that there is something comforting about hearing your birth language spoken, no matter how well one knows their second language. It gives a sense of having come home. It is where one’s roots are. It is personal and familiar. When we look at the list of countries represented, it is clear that the Spirit was guiding the disciples to speak in languages they did not know, but which would bring a deep spiritual experience to those hearing them. It opened the people’s ears to the message of the

Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for many it was life changing. Others, however, did not have the ears to hear, and thus just mocked the disciples as drunken chatterers.

Peter saw the coming of the Spirit, however, as the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy that the Spirit would fall on both men and women, both young and old. But what is the role of the Spirit today? Most of us have not had tongues of fire rest on our heads. How do we know the Spirit is still here, and what are we to do with it if we have it? First, I think everybody here today knows that the Holy Spirit is profoundly real and a member of the Godhead. The Spirit is God calling us to join with the Father and the Son in what Richard Rohr calls the "Divine Dance." We are invited into the fellowship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We are invited to live with them and love them, so that the Spirit can work through even us, as imperfect as we are. We can be used, because God loves us and does not ask us to qualify to be used. He only asks that we turn to him and offer our lives, our hands, our feet, and our voices to him. Then the Spirit uses us.

My son had that experience when he was called on a mission to Brazil. After six whole weeks of Portuguese language training, he was asked to bear his witness of Jesus Christ in a Sunday meeting. When he sat down, his companion said that his grammar and pronunciation were perfect. That was a gift of tongues by the Spirit. His son went to the same mission, and had the same gift. Other grandsons have had similar experiences. One was called to Madagascar and had to learn Malagasy, while another was called to Oklahoma and had to learn Marshallese. A third was called to Peru where he had to learn Spanish. All experienced being given words that they didn't know they had. Oh, sure, they all had their struggles, but not like people who were trying to learn a language without the Spirit.

Last time I was here I shared with you how the Spirit led me into the ministry, while I was sometimes kicking against the pricks. I know from personal experience over a lifetime, that if we are willing to put our lives into the hands of Jesus Christ, the Spirit will guide and direct each of us. We can each have our own Pentecosts pretty much daily. The Spirit's job, in part, is to bring us ever closer to Jesus Christ and to the Father, for it is through the Spirit that we get to know them. Its role is to deepen our faith in Christ so that we may go out into the world and make him known to all we meet, usually with actions, but as one person said, if all else fails, use words. Our faith opens a channel for the Spirit to work through us, as well as on us. We should be like clay in his hands, following the promptings that we receive from that, Oh, so Holy Spirit.

As Paul tells us, the Spirit works in many ways, and is manifest in many instances. One way is through the healing of people's ills. The Spirit begins with people who have dedicated their lives to learning how to make people well through medical and nursing schools. It uses their skills and knowledge to make people better, but most times we don't credit the Spirit

sufficiently in these healings. I would suggest that doctors need the help of Spirit to be really effective, and those who have faith Jesus Christ recognize that they are guided and directed by the healing Spirit of God.

But there comes a time when all the medical knowledge in the world is insufficient to right what is wrong with a person. It is then, when the family falls back on prayer, and maybe fasting, that amazing things can take place. People are sometimes brought back from the edge of death through their faith and that of their loved ones. This is the Holy Spirit at work. There is simply no other explanation. God responds to our faith out of his love for us. However, those prayers and sacrifices always have to be accompanied by the words, “Your will be done, not mine.” Why does he help in one case and not another? I have absolutely no idea, but from the day we are born until the day we die, we are constantly in his hands. Sometimes those hands protect us, and at other times those same hands take us home to him. Either way, his love keeps us safe.

Paul mentions prophecy as a gift of the Spirit. Does he mean that we can foretell the future and tell people what will be happening? No, I don’t think that is what he has in mind. More likely, we have the eyes to see what is happening around us and see the potential consequences of our behavior. This is a Matthew 25 church, which means that our mission is based on the separation of the sheep and the goats recorded in Matthew 25. There Jesus comes to people, all of whom call him “Lord.” He tells some of them that when he was hungry, they fed him. When he was thirsty, they gave him a drink. When he was a stranger, they invited him in. When he was without clothes, they provided for him. When he was sick, they took care of him, and when he was imprisoned, they visited him.

Both groups, the sheep and the goats, asked when they had ever seen him in such states. Notice that both groups call him Lord. Both groups think they are living the Christian life. But then comes the surprise. The Christian life is not just words or professions of faith. It is actions, to help the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. One group, the sheep, had stopped and helped their neighbors when they found them in need. The other group did not, and they seem to have no idea that they had let themselves and the Lord down. They were totally surprised when the Lord excluded them and sent them to the left. One group had the prophetic eyes of the Holy Spirit, and the other group did not.

If we have the Spirit in our lives, we will see what Jesus would see were he walking down a street with us. Prophetic eyes see what God sees, and would not think twice about reaching out to help any of the people that the goats overlooked while saying all the right words. When we read scriptures like this, the Spirit will lead us to a self-examination of our own behavior and motives. Where do I stand when I see need? I have to admit at my age that most of my compassion has to be carried out in monetary ways. I cannot lift the things I used to. I can’t

help people move anymore. For us older folks the QCD, Qualified Charitable Deduction, is a blessing. Not only does it get money to organizations to which I can no longer give physical help, but whatever I give cuts the amount of Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) that I have to report every year that is subject to income tax. It is a win/win situation.

I can give to any number of organizations now that I am retired, more so than I could when I was working. I have simply tried to follow the Spirit and see with prophetic eyes the needs of people near and far. I can never do as much as I would like to do, but the Lord has enabled me to share with people in need, not only monetarily, but also in time. It is a blessing for me to be able to come here and share Jesus Christ and the Spirit with you, as well as with other congregations in the area. We each need to look for the lost, the lonely, the underserved, and ask the Lord how we may be the most help to them. One thing I am sure of is that the answer we receive to that question will be different for each one of us. What the Spirit leads me to do, will be different from what the Spirit leads you to do.

But together we are all the body of Christ. The Church is now Christ incarnate on the earth. We together are Christ. He guides his body by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us all. We have no right to judge one another's commitments to Christ. We just need to rejoice that we are in this together and that each of us is doing as well as he or she can. The Holy Spirit is the nerve center of Christ's incarnate body on earth today. We are all his, and so, on this Pentecost Sunday, let us recommit ourselves to Christ and to one another that we may listen to the wind blowing in the trees and recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit to each of us.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.