

“The Power of the Holy Spirit”

[Acts 2:1-13](#)

A Christian couple decided to adopt a dog and went to a pet shop to look for one. They saw a sign which said, “We have Christian puppies.” So, they asked the shop owner, “How do you know they are Christian puppies?” “Watch,” said the owner, as he took out one of the dogs. He said to the dog, “Fetch the Bible.” The dog ran over to the desk and grabbed the Bible in his mouth and returned. Putting the Bible on the floor, the owner said, “Find Psalm 23.” The dog opened the Bible and began to flip the pages. When she reached the right page, she stopped. Amazed and delighted, the couple purchased the dog and went home.

That evening, they invited their friends and neighbors to show them their new dog’s tricks. Very impressed, one of the guests asked, “Does she know regular commands, too?” The husband replied, “Gee, I don’t know. We haven’t asked. But, we can try now.” Turning to the dog, he said, “Sit,” and the dog sat. He said, “Lie down,” and the dog lay down. He said, “Roll over,” and the dog rolled over. He said, “Heel.” The dog ran over to him, jumped up on his lap, put both paws on his forehead, and bowed her head. The wife exclaimed, “Look, our dog is Pentecostal.”

Many people believe the word Pentecost or pentecostal belongs only to the Christian denomination called the Pentecostal Church, and the images that come to our minds when we think of that particular denominational church are not that positive. They worship God with shouting, praying aloud, speaking in tongues, and laying of hands to perform miracles of healing.

But, actually, those words Pentecost and pentecostal don’t just belong to Pentecostal Churches but to all Christian churches, regardless of their denominational affiliation. Along with Christmas and Easter, Pentecost is a major festival of the church. It’s a day of remembrance and celebration of the day when the early church received the Holy Spirit for the first time.

The book of Genesis records that, in the beginning of the world, God created Adam, the first human being from the dust of the ground. But, he did not become a living being until God breathed into him the *ruah*, translated, the breath of life, the wind, the spirit. In other words, Adam became alive through the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Jesus Christ created a new community of believers through his ministry and sacrifice. But, it did not become alive until the day of Pentecost. That day, the spirit of the living God, the Holy Spirit came to breathe into the first followers of Jesus. When they received the Holy Spirit, they became a living organism, the church. So, we celebrate this day as the birthday of the church.

The word Pentecost literally means 50th or 50th day, and today marks 50 days after Easter. Red is the liturgical color for Pentecost. On the banners in our sanctuary, we see the color red and other colors representing the tongues of flame which rested above the disciples. And many of us are wearing red today to symbolize the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us and the presence of God among us.

Pentecost is a Greek name for *Shavuot*, one of the three major Jewish holidays. The other two major Jewish holidays are Tabernacles and Passover. Celebrated 50 days after the observance of Passover, *Shavuot*, or Pentecost in Greek, or the Feast of Weeks in English, has a double significance. Originally, it was an agricultural festival. People would go to the Jerusalem Temple with the first fruit of their labor in the fields as an offering to give thanks to God. Later, the concept of the ancient grain harvest festival was expanded to include the celebration of the anniversary of the day when God gave the Torah, the Law to the Israelites on Mount Sinai.

So, for both Jewish believers and Christians believers, Pentecost is a day on which we celebrate receiving God's gift. For the Israelites, the divine gift was the Torah, and for the early church, it was the Holy Spirit.

What happened when the community of the first Christian believers received the Holy Spirit for the first time? As we heard from today's scripture reading, they began to talk about the wonders of God in many different languages. The power of the Holy Spirit enabled them to testify to the diverse group of Jews who had traveled from near and far to Jerusalem for *Shavuot*. The power of the Holy Spirit helped them overcome the language barriers standing in the way of them articulating and sharing their faith with others.

The book of Acts records that the Jewish agricultural festival resulted in a great harvest of 3,000 new believers for the first Christian community. The great harvest of converts happened after the power of the Holy Spirit was on full display in the community of believers. We have to remember that only several weeks prior to this happening, Jesus' disciples had run away and were hiding in fear when their Rabbi was arrested and crucified. Peter, the head disciple even denied Jesus three times! But, on the day of Pentecost, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they all boldly testified to God's mighty deeds in Jesus Christ.

How did the disciples go from cowardly to courageous, from frightened to fearless in such a short span of time? How did Peter go from denying Jesus to a lowly servant woman to declaring him as the Messiah before a crowd of devout Jews? It was not because they did anything. There was no dramatic change they had to achieve for themselves. Rather, they had to wait to receive. They had to wait for what Jesus had promised them before leaving them. They had to receive the Holy Spirit. It was the power of the Holy Spirit that changed them forever. It was the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through them that changed the world forever.

Today, we need the same power of the Holy Spirit. We need the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit by which we were baptized, at work in our lives. We need the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we too can be bold witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world.

Then, how can we receive the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to the disciples, a promise we inherit as the body of Christ? I think the answer to this question is found in the very beginning of the story of Pentecost recorded in the Book of Acts. It reads, "On the day of Pentecost, all the Lord's followers were together in one place." (Acts 2:1) Before the Holy Spirit came to the first followers of Jesus, they were gathered together in one place. Why were they together? It was because Jesus had asked them to do so. He had asked them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). So, they did. They

gathered together and engaged themselves in prayer as well as in the business of their life as a community. Together, they were about one hundred twenty persons (Acts 1:15).

Do you hear it? Do you see it? The first appearance of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament was not to individuals, not limited to a selective group of people, like the 12 disciples or the women who never abandoned Jesus but followed him all the way to the cross and the grave. Instead, the Holy Spirit descended upon the whole body of the followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit showed up for Jesus' followers when they were together in worship and prayer. The coming of the Holy Spirit was not an individual experience, but a communal one.

And, what the Holy Spirit did was to help them. The Helper, or the *Paraclete* in Greek, descended upon the whole community of Jesus' followers, and they became bold in their witnessing. As a result of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives, the community grew in number. This is the story of the birth of the church.

So, how do you know that a Christian believer is filled with the Holy Spirit? How do you know that the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of a Christian believer? He is strongly connected to his church. She is fully connected to her church. It is the Holy Spirit that draws you into the church. It is the Holy Spirit that helps you stay connected to the church where you worship. It is the Holy Spirit that helps you be involved in the ministries of your church with a joyful generosity and endurance. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts you to be a bold witness for Jesus Christ and helps you draw others to church, simply by testifying to God's mighty deeds at work in you and through you. It is the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Campbell Church family, especially, the 2019 class of Confirmands, on this day of celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit on the community of the first Christian believers, I pray that the Holy Spirit will come upon you, too. Filled with the Holy Spirit, may we too all be bold witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world! May the power of the Holy Spirit increase our faith and help us live it out with conviction! Amen.