

“The Power of the Spirit”

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Texts: Acts 2: 1-21 and Numbers 11:24-30

William Willimon, in his commentary on the Acts passage, relates, “Who could have predicted who now speaks? We have heard Peter speak before in Acts 1 (16-22). But then, because of our still lingering memory of how Peter himself had proved quite capable of repeated betrayal when the going got rough (Luke 22:31-34, 54-62). It was Peter who followed at a distance (when Jesus was crucified), Peter whom the maid drove to utter the terrible words, ‘Woman, I do not know him!’ (Luke 22:57). We left him weeping in the courtyard, a disciple tested and found wanting.” Yet it was Peter in Acts 1 who wanted to condemn and then replace Judas. Judas was hardly alone in his treason.

Here we are, now in Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit (in Luke’s version) arrives. “Yet here, before the half inquiring, half mocking crowd, Peter is the first, the very first to lift up his voice and proclaim openly the word that only a few weeks before he could not speak, even to a serving woman at midnight.”

We have been those people. People who at one time have betrayed Jesus and worked counter to his directives contained primarily in the Beatitudes. We, too, have protected ourselves and committed horrible acts. Sometimes we’ve said terrible things—in Jesus’ name—and after we realized it, our guilt kept us from ever speaking again about such things. Fear has held us back. Hope has been fleeting. Our faith has wavered more

than once. And yet, the Bible tells us over and over again about people just like us who have been exactly the people God chose to share God's message of love and redemption in the world.

In Genesis 2:7 the Spirit of God breathed life into dust and created a human being. In Genesis 1, the Spirit of God moved over the waters of the deep and created order and life out of chaos. "In Acts 2: 1-4 the Spirit has breathed life into a once cowardly disciple and created a new man who now has the gift of bold speech."

The point here is that God can give the gift of newness to anyone and can also give us the gift of bold speech. The Spirit did not just fall on Peter in our story for today...it descended on all who were there. All kinds of things happened that seemed impossible, but the most important thing that occurred regardless of your belief about the specific chain of events is that the Bible tells us that God gave to those who "had no 'tongue' to speak of the 'mighty works of God' to now preach. Today we recognize the presence of the Spirit in these two young women—but also in us—to speak of the joy that comes from being people of the Way of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, we do still miss the point of this scripture. Many in the church today regard the Spirit as an "exotic phenomenon of mainly interior and purely personal significance, the story of the Spirit's descent at Pentecost offers a rebuke. Luke goes to great pains to insist that this outpouring of the Spirit is anything but interior. Everything is by wind and fire, loud talk, buzzing confusion, and public debate. The Spirit is the power which enables the church to go public with its good news, to attract a crowd and, [if we were to

continue in the story from the book of Acts], to say something worth hearing.” We live in a world where the news coming out of much of the church is anything but good. The Spirit enables us individually and collectively to share good news with a world bombarded with bad news.

In the words of Will Willimon, “A new wind is set loose upon the earth [at Pentecost], provoking a storm of wrath and confusion for some, a fresh breath of hope and empowerment for others.” I would encourage you to see and hear this story as a story that brings a fresh breath of hope and empowerment to you—and to us!

Peter began to speak. Peter, whom many (perhaps even himself) thought not only had nothing to say, but that what he said was suspect. That will be true for us if we claim the Holy Spirit. It will change us. The Spirit will lead us to do things we cannot imagine. The spirit claims us, calls us, empowers us, and leads us to be good news in a world desperately in need. The question is, will we accept the call?

In the many blessed names of God. Amen.