

Power from Above: God's Gift to All Believers

Acts 2:1-13

Forgotten God

Last week, after the Michigan Annual Conference, I visited a retired pastor from our conference and had a wonderful time sharing our thoughts on ministries. I asked the pastor, “You always have a smile on your face. What is the secret to your joy?” She responded, “**There are always people who need our help. I have tried to help people. Also, there are always people willing to help us. I just appreciate their kind hearts.**” That was wisdom from a pastor who dedicated her life to ministry. And then she added, “**Pastor Yum, Pentecost Sunday is one of my favorite Sundays. I hope that people can gain a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seems to be a forgotten aspect of our churches today.**”

Today is Pentecost Sunday —the birthday of the Church. Today’s scripture is about the beginning of the church. It’s about God’s special heart, especially His redemptive heart for the world. It’s about the power of the church, as it’s entrusted with the mission from God. It’s about a guidepost or roadmap for the church; even though its message might be challenged and lost in the course of history, it helps us to remain undaunted and return to the course we must take.

I’d like to share three things about our identity as God’s church that is in the power of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, we are the temples of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came to **the people** who believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” (Acts 2:1-3 NRSVUE)

Do you know where the disciples were when the Holy Spirit came upon them? It was the Temple. The disciples initially gathered in the Upper Room at Mark’s house, but later went to the temple, where they encountered the presence of the Holy Spirit. Why the Temple? The Temple in Jerusalem means the presence of God at the center of Israel’s religious life. To experience and remember God, to worship God, and to be forgiven and rebuild their relationship with God, they

must have come to the Temple in Jerusalem, where they could reconfirm their identity as God's missionary and ethical people.

On the day of Pentecost, as the disciples gathered together in the Temple, the Holy Spirit came down to each of the individuals who confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior and the King of the world. Now, the presence of God is not in the building of the Temple. It is in the hearts of those who confessed their sins and invited Jesus into their hearts as their Lord and Savior. Each person's heart has now become their own Temple. They are now in the Old Temple of Jerusalem to experience the new temple in their own hearts. That is why they had to be at the Temple.

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV)

Secondly, the Holy Spirit helps us focus on God's agenda.

As we are in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are never confused about what God has done and God's missionary agenda for the world. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, the very first change they experienced was that their tongues were totally controlled by the Holy Spirit, and they praised God for His mighty works.

"There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages ... we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!" (Acts 2:5-6, 11 CEB)

In Genesis 11, God came down to confuse the language of all the earth because of humanity's arrogant hearts. They sought to make a name for themselves by building the Tower of Babel. It was a kind of self-declaration of humanity that we don't need God, and we can be self-sufficient without God. They didn't care about God's command to spread out and take good care of the whole earth (Genesis 9:1; 11:4). So God confused their language and scattered them all over. But here in Acts chapter 2, the previously confused languages are now unanimously praising the mighty works of God (CEB, ESV), or, in the KJV, **the wonderful works of God**.

What are the mighty or wonderful works of God?

The life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the Gospel message, is the ultimate action of God's power and salvation for all humanity. They are the fulfillment of God's promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days, according to Joel 2. Lastly, they are God's work of redemption

throughout history. All these are related to God's power for the salvation of all nations.

That has to be the reason for our praise as God's worshiping community. That has to be the message we must proclaim as God's blessed community. That has to be the focus of our ministry and mission so that people can see and experience God's redemptive work in our community.

I have attended Concordia Theological Seminary to study missiology. In 2020, they celebrated their 175th anniversary and made the following scripture as the foundation for the seminary's anniversary theme: "Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!" (Psalm 105:1-2 ESV).

Lastly, the Holy Spirit is a barrier breaker.

As we are in the power of the Holy Spirit and follow the directions of the Holy Spirit, we transcend all the barriers of race, culture, ethnicity, generation, language, and territory.

"Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." (Acts 2:7-11 NRSVUE)

The Holy Spirit came upon not only Jews but also the Gentiles from all over the world who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the season of Pentecost. This reveals that God's plan for salvation is not limited to the Jews but also to all nations, indicating that the movement of the Holy Spirit is directed towards the end of the earth, embracing all ethnic and cultural groups.

If we follow the nudging of the Holy Spirit, the result will be freedom from all the bondages and barriers that confine our understanding to the customs and practices that we have been used to. We will fly with the power of the Holy Spirit, growing gradually and steadily to be more like Jesus Christ.

For that purpose, the Holy Spirit will lead you to where you have never been or tried before and where you might feel discomfort. That is the way you can reach the destination God has planned for you.

“The truth is that the Spirit of the living God is guaranteed to ask you to go somewhere or do something you wouldn’t normally want or choose to do. The Spirit will lead you to the way of the cross, as He led Jesus to the cross, and that is definitely not a safe or pretty or comfortable place to be. The Holy Spirit of God will mold you into the person you were made to be. This often incredibly painful process strips you of selfishness, pride, and fear.” Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (2009).

The last verse of today’s scripture says, “**But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”**” (Acts 2:13 NRSVUE). The work of the Holy Spirit can be easily misunderstood and even ridiculed, which means it will often invite confrontation and persecution. But the mystery is this. Even in our persecution, the Holy Spirit molds us into the image of Jesus Christ more maturely and perfectly.

“**And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,**” (Romans 5:3-4 NRSVUE)