Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:1-12

“Holy Spirit Power”

You know last week was the last week that we could say: He is Risen, He is Risen indeed. With Pentecost begins a whole new season. Nothing from here on out until Advent is upon us. But what a celebration Pentecost ought to be. Traditionally it is seen as the birth date of the Christian Church. The giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples which then gave them the power to go out and plant churches in Jesus’ name has to be significant.

But it is also pretty much a strictly church related event. We wear red while the rest of the country sees this as memorial day weekend and wears red/white/blue. But unlike Christmas with Santa Klaus and Easter with the Easter Bunny there is no kid-friendly figure that appeals to the masses. Jimmy the burning tongue I don’t think is real marketable. But there are no decorations in the store related to Pentecost. It’s just about us, the community, the church. Only we care about this event.

But our challenge is to understand how important it is that the world experience the power behind the Holy Spirit, not in a marketable sense, but in a way that the power of the Holy Spirit given to the church can have an affect upon everyone with whom we come into contact.

**READ**

In order to understand what happens here in chapter 2 we have to go back to chapter 1 vs.8. Acts of the Apostles, I know it isn’t John so you are a bit out of your element and a bit out of sync, Acts is telling of the life of the disciples of Jesus Christ after Jesus dies. It speaks of how they planted churches, brought thousands to a saving knowledge of Jesus, but none of that could happen until chapter 2 when they receive the Holy Spirit power to go out and do it.

At the beginning of Acts we find Jesus after he is resurrected and before he was ascended. Ascension day, that was pretty neat for us, this being our first time experience Lancaster county Ascension day. Someone who actually celebrates ascension day. But Jesus gives a promise to his disciples on Ascension day before he rises up and that can be seen in Acts 1:8. He states: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

You will receive power is Jesus’ promise to us. Now, that’s a promise and it is a promise directed right at his disciples. In fact, when Jesus ascends into heaven an angel comes down and says what are you waiting for, why are you standing around? Go receive that power in Jerusalem that he promised. And today, in just the next chapter, we find them huddled together on the day of Pentecost. Today, they receive that power. Today, the church received that power.

Let’s set the stage for our reading. Did you notice that in all of the major events in the life of Christ there is a crowd around. In Bethlehem there were so many people around that he had to be born in a manger. At his death the crowds are all gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover so they greet him as he enters Jerusalem and jeer him as he dies on the cross. This Scripture begins, it was the day of Pentecost which is one of the main Jewish holidays that required a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

In fact we read in vs. 5 that there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven in Jerusalem at that time. So here we find in the midst of this sea of humanity the disciples huddled together knowing that something big is about to happen because Jesus said that it would happen soon. The windows were all open because it was a hot day and the sound of the crowds below drifted up as they were praying. There was a type of electricity in the air in that room that comes when you know you’re doing God’s work and God is going to break through at any moment.

You know that feeling of excitement, the feeling that anything is possible. These past few weeks as a group of us have gathered to plan the food program there has been a real palpable sense of excitement as a group from your church realizes that it can do something significant and that anything is possible when you walk through doors that God is swinging wide open. AS those gathering to plan the coffeeshop meet there is a sense of excitement and enthusiasm and I hear the words of I Thessalonians 5:19 that tell us: “Do not quench the Spirit”, because, I would argue, it is powerful, that Spirit is. As those gathering to plan a year long lecture series making First Presbyterian a destination point for all there is an excitement and potential that makes us giddy, as those about to go to Russia gather and plan.

Well, I think we understand the feeling of those disciples as maybe they were planning but what comes next they couldn’t plan for and what we have done, as exciting as it may be, pales in comparison because what happens next with those disciples was God initiated and carried out by the Holy Spirit.

The sounds drifting up from the street below are all of a sudden drowned out by the sound of a violent rushing wind. It filled the entire house, the sound did. Then divided tongues, and they looked like fire, settled on the heads of them. That would have been weird enough, but then the disciples, you know, this group of fishermen and hard blue collar workers, began speaking in different languages, I mean real languages that the people on the street below could understand. You know what is funny to watch, is a first time traveler speaking to someone in a foreign country in English and just assuming they understand. When it becomes obvious they don’t understand then they slow down and speak louder hoping that would help. What if I said really slowly to you: “Come ti chiami?” would you understand? No, of course not, how about now?

What we find happening in these verses is not the disciples speaking in louder and slower Hebrew or Aramaic, but rather fulfilling the promise of Jesus in 1:8 by them being able to speak to the people in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world in their own languages. They come down from the house and waste no time in addressing the crowd that was there with power. Verse 11 tells us that they then went down and spoke about God’s deeds and power. The Holy Spirit power gives you the ability to do God’s deeds and to access God’s power.

We read that eventually as a result of this in vs.41 that 3,000 people were saved after the first Christian sermon given by Peter in these verses in between. But at first they were amazed, astonished, and when something powerful happens around you and you don’t quite get it or feel left out and feel that there is an “in” group and an “out” group then the natural thing to do is discredit what has happened because you don’t understand it.

In verse 13 the criticism comes about those speaking in the new languages even if they were fishermen from Galilee was that they were drunk, filled with new wine at 9am. That’s how the rumor starts. The reason they can speak these various languages is because they are drunk. The last time I went to a bar and got drunk I came home speaking Swedish, sure, it happens to all of us. Who needs Rosetta stone when you can just use a bottle of whiskey. Rumors have their foundation in ludicrous accusations, but over time they become believable.

So what did happen that day if they weren’t drunk? What happened on the day of Pentecost? This power handed on to the church, where does it find its origin and where does it find its purpose? Peter actually answers that question. In vs. 16 Peter states to all gathered that what they witnessed was what Joel had predicted long ago. What just happened was promised to us all hundreds of years ago. Jesus reminded us that it would happen, even now it does.

What did Joel say? Turn there now if you will. Then afterward, it begins. After what? After the day that the Lord God comes upon the earth. Did that happen? Yes, absolutely. You see why you have to know the Bible because it all goes together here. Then afterward, after the Lord God comes on this earth, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

Last week I had a mixed reaction to my sermon, but I had a reaction which is always promising. There were those of you who cheered the fact that the grace of God was an act of God alone and not our doing. It lifted a load off your shoulder of legalism and just trying to be good enough and placed it back on God’s shoulders.

But there were those who felt I spoke one sided because the Gospel is more than grace, there has to be a response to it and without that response then we are lost. The objection isn’t about our relationship to God because those who object feel fairly secure in their position before the Lord, but rather we object because God’s relationship with the lost has to be based on judgment and not on grace. How dare we assume that God includes them?

Turn to verses 28-29: what does it say? I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. All flesh. The young, the old, the slaves, the free, men, and women, saved, and unsaved. God’s Holy spirit will fall on all. But, not all will have their hands open as the Spirit is poured out so they will live their lives and go to their deaths as if they didn’t receive it at all. But there is no question that it will be poured out on all of us. God so loved the world…

If you look at the impact the power of the Holy Spirit will have on us, Joel explains it perfectly well and in detail. Your children will speak with God’s words on their tongues, they will be prophets speaking prophecies. We experienced that on confirmation Sunday, didn’t we? But is that all? Is it a once a year special occasion when we allow the youth to have their say and then we lock them back out of sight and out of mind? We have a youth deacon, why not an elder who is a youth, or a trustee. Joel tells us that they will prophecy, they will speak with God’s words.

The old men shall dream dreams, we hear. Those who have traditionally kept the institution running decently and in order and made sure that we do those things that we have been doing, well, all of a sudden they start dreaming of a new way to do things. They creatively think outside the box and dram of what could be instead of what was

Young men see visions I have no idea what it means so we will skip it. Male and female slaves will receive the Spirit of God. All of us have received it, but will we use it as the early disciples did in Acts 2?

Holy Spirit power was seen in the Old Testament well before it fell on the church on that day in Pentecost as they were gathered in that room. Samson prays and brings down the house, Gideon prays for guidance and he is given it, Ezekiel prays for life in them old bones, and he gets it from the Holy Spirit.

The power is seen in what the disciples said as they extolled the wonders of God, but then that same power is seen even more clearly in their actions as they go out and plant church after church, after church. The power of the Holy Spirit is not staying bewildered by what is happening around you but to hear the words that are spoken and see the results of the actions and believe that it is of God.

Acts 4:33 we read that with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrected Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon all. That’s what it says. May we, First Presbyterian, be engulfed in the Holy Spirit, have it poured out over us like water, like rain, so that grace would be upon us. Amen.