

Essential Choices: Power over Weakness

Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-21, 38-39; Ephesians 3:16-21

If you were to visit us at our home this time of year,
we would host you on our patio in the backyard.
To be ready, I would mow the lawn and even get out the weed-eater
to trim around the flowers, trees, and garden.
If it looked like rain, or if flies from nearby farms were bad,
we would move up the back steps into the sunroom.
With all the windows open, it would be just like being outside,
minus flies and mosquitos, and only an occasional stink bug.
If you helped Connie set out food, you would go into the kitchen
and we would point out the way to the bathroom down the hall.

If you came to visit in the *winter*,
you would come in the front door, up the steps of our bi-level house
into the living room, and then into the kitchen/dining room;
and we would show you the way to the bathroom.

As guests in the summer *or* winter, Connie and I would welcome you
into the *common* (or *shared*) spaces in our house.

By contrast, when our family comes to visit,
especially when several households come at the same time,
they spread out *all over* the house.
The beds are all in use; sleeping bags are spread out on floors;
books, toys, and games *immediately* appear from the family room.
One of the children naps in Connie's and my bedroom.
Children (and their moms) go anywhere and everywhere.
No space is unused—or unexplored.
And after everyone leaves,
Connie and I are finding *trucks* and *books* and *marbles* and *socks*
anywhere in the house for the next week (or more).

Guests are invited into shared spaces; *family* goes everywhere in the house.

Sometimes, we treat God like a *guest* in our life;
we welcome him into *some* parts of our life, and not others.

But we can treat God like family!
When invite the Holy Spirit to go anywhere in our life,
to see everything that is there, and change whatever he wants,
that **essential choice** is transformative!

We enter a whole new dimension of living;
we begin to have the same kinds of experiences we read about in the NT.

This sermon series is about essential choices
as we see the apostles making them, sequentially, through the *Book of Acts*.

Each message this summer is an invitation for each of us
to make these same *essential choices*—
choices will draw us into the life of the Spirit,
the transformation of this church,
and the dynamic movement of God in the world.

To focus the decision in this message, I have a question for you:
if you could choose **power** over *weakness* in your Christian life,
would you think about it long and hard?
Or would you jump at the chance?!

In Acts 2, God offers us this choice:
We can choose **power** over *weakness* in our Christian life
when we invite the Holy Spirit to fill the whole of our lives.

Before the second chapter in *Acts*—in chapter 1, verses 4-5—
Jesus gives this instruction to his disciples:

On one occasion, while Jesus was eating with them, he gave them this
command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father
promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with
water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

What does Jesus mean by “the Holy Spirit?”

God has revealed his person, nature, and character in the Bible
as one God who forever is—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Mind-boggling as this is, we believe in one sovereign, true, and living God,
who, as our Father in heaven, transcends time and space;
who has entered human history in the person of Jesus Christ;
and who comes to live in us by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the person and presence of God *within* us.

It wasn't always this way.

As we read through the Bible, up to the second chapter of Acts, “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was only given to *special* people—to prophets, kings, and heroes—but not to *all* of God’s people.

Only a *few* of God’s people were “moved” or “filled” with the Holy Spirit—and in the most fascinating (and varied) ways.

The Holy Spirit came mightily upon Samson and he became extraordinarily strong (Judges 14:5-6). The Lord filled Bezalel with the “Spirit of God” and he created beautiful works of art for the tabernacle—in precious metals, in wood, and embroidered cloth (Ex 35:30-35). When Samuel anointed David with oil, “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and David became a brilliant leader, and an inspired poet and musician (1 Samuel 16—2 Samuel 24)

Because the Spirit of God rested on Elijah, the prophet amazed and convicted Israel with miracles (2 Kings 2-10). The Spirit gave Joseph and Daniel the ability to interpret dreams. The OT prophets spoke with boldness and confidence because they were filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord (Micah 3:8). A young girl, Mary, was filled with the Holy Spirit and the Messiah was conceived within her (Luke 1:35, 46-55). To be moved by the Spirit, as these persons were, was an *exceptional* privilege, not for everyone.

And then, we come to this moment in what Bible teachers and theologians call “salvation history.”

Going all the way back to Abraham, in Genesis 12, God acted in human history to repair the damage of sin and make a way for humankind to be restored to the image of God. Through Abraham, God began to form a people, a community of faith, that would reveal His will to *all* the peoples of the world.

Through His words, acts, and relationship with the people of Israel, God has made His person and purposes known in order to provide salvation to all who respond in faith and obedience.

In this relationship, God was preparing for the time when He would reveal Himself preeminently through His Son, Jesus Christ — as recorded in the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John— and recounted and interpreted in the rest of the New Testament.

From Abraham to the last writing of the apostles, this span of human history recounts and interprets all that is needed for us to know and trust in God.

In this whole sweep of salvation history, we come to this watershed moment in which everything changes for ordinary believers like you and me.

50 days after the Passover (the time of Jesus' crucifixion), when Jews from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost, this is what happened.

Acts 2, verse 1, all the way to verse 21.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 your young men will see visions,
 your old men will dream dreams.
 Even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
 and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above
 and signs on the earth below,
 blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness
 and the moon to blood
 before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls
 on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

At this point, for the first time in salvation history,
 the Holy Spirit—the person and presence of God within us—
 was poured out on everyone who trusts Christ as Savior.
 men and women, young and old,
 all who call on the name of the Lord.

We can be an ordinary believer.
 We can be a kid. We can be seriously old, in our 70's.
 We can be a pastor. We can be a teacher. We can be an excavator.
 We can be an extrovert. We can be introvert.
Whoever we are, we can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit—
 the *person* and *presence* of God within.

And when we do, we will experience a *personal* Pentecost,
 just like this one, with *wind* and *fire* and *language*!

There three phenomena are *signs* or *metaphors*
 that point to the realities we can anticipate
 when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

The sound like the blowing of a violent wind
 depicts the power of Holy Spirit,
 which is the essential choice for us in focus today: power over weakness.

In Ephesians 3:16, the apostle Paul prays:

I pray that out of his glorious riches [our Heavenly Father] may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. . .”

This power, within, convinces us we are a child of God (Romans 8:2), gives us peace with God (Romans 8:6), assures us of God’s nearness and affection (Romans 8:16; Galatians 4:4-7), guides us into truth (John 16:13-15; 1 John 2:27), gives us hope (Romans 15:13), fills us with praise (Ephesians 5:18-20), and helps us to say, “Jesus is Lord.” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The *extra strength* we need to live for Jesus *at a higher level* is given to us by the *inner power* of the Holy Spirit.

The second sign, flames of fire, depicts the purifying work of the Holy Spirit, the power of God, striving within us, for life-change, for transformation!

John the Baptist said this about Jesus, in Luke 3:16-17.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The fire of the Holy Spirit burns the chaff out of our lives, the things that are *sinful* and *hurtful* and *useless* (Titus 3:5-6). The Holy Spirit attacks everything in us that is unholy and replaces them with good traits of character—love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22).

This transformation of life is accomplished, not by willpower, but by the purifying power of the Holy Spirit within us.

The third sign of languages points to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, supernatural abilities given for effective witness and service.

The apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:10:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

Every believer receives a gift, one or more, to serve others. These are supernatural abilities, normally without *seeming to be* supernatural. The interplay between our own abilities and the gifts of the Spirit are often so seamless that we only recognize these gifts by the eyes of faith.

For example, to hear the apostles speaking in other languages at Pentecost, would have been like hearing Frankie Rēgan speak Spanish, and Liga Landis speaking Latvian or Lithuanian or Russian, and one of our Zambian friends speaking Chitonga—all at the same time. If we don't know the languages, it seems like a jumble of sounds, but if we *do* know one of the languages, we understand clearly. . . which is exactly what occurred at Pentecost. Some people thought the apostles were drunk, but the ones who understood the languages cried out, "What must we do to be saved?"

Gifts of the Spirit are not expressed in *rapture* or *euphoria* or *ecstasy*. When they occur, we are not *delirious* or *beside ourselves* or *out of our head*. Most often then not, the supernatural grace of the Holy Spirit meshes with our own calling and natural gifting so smoothly that we are not even aware that the Holy Spirit is moving through us.

By the power of the Holy Spirit within, we have extra strength to live for Jesus at a higher level; we are progressively changed to be more like Jesus, and our natural abilities are suffused with supernatural grace and truth.

The final question is: how is this power activated in our lives? Is the Holy Spirit given to us at the time we trust in Jesus? Or do we need to ask Jesus to fill us with the Holy Spirit?

As Peter concluded his sermon, he says: (Acts 2:38-29)

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Earlier, Jesus taught:

For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son

asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven *give the Holy Spirit* to those who ask him!"

For myself, as I understand the teaching of the NT,
when we trust Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit comes into our life,
so to speak, as a guest,
into all the space that we're willing to share with him at that time.
He doesn't *push*, he doesn't *intrude*, he doesn't *insist*;
He waits for our *invitation*, our *permission*, our *consent*
to fill the whole of our life.

When we ask Jesus to "baptize" us with the Holy Spirit—
the word means to *suffuse*, to *inundate*, to *saturate*, to *fill completely*—
the Holy Spirit, at our invitation, comes into the whole of our life.

For Connie and me,
the day we asked Jesus to baptize us with the Holy Spirit
was a watershed day for us—August 24, 1972.
From that time on, we have increasingly experienced the inner power,
the purifying work, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

That's what I want for you—for all of us:
a *personal* Pentecost, a *watershed* moment,
when you ask for and receive the Holy Spirit into the whole of your life.

If you are willing, and ready, for the Holy Spirit
to go anywhere and change anything in your life—
to be *filled* and *changed* and *empowered*—just **ask**.

You can ask alone with Jesus by prayer;
You can ask with another believer praying with and for you;
or you can ask with your pastor—with Connie and me—anytime.

If you have not already, I hope you will ask *today*, without *delay*,
because when all of us, together, make this essential choice,
we can become the kind of church we envision—a healthy, growing,
empowered, innovative, outward-focused, and life-changing church.

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