

Fear No More
Acts 2:1-21
Colebrook Congregational Church
June 4, 2017 / Pentecost

This is the birthday of the Christian Church. Jesus has ascended, He gave the Great Commission to the Disciples, and He promised an imminent return. This return happens in the form of the Holy Spirit, enabling the early community to overcome their fears and to carry an inspired word to all the Earth.

The Books of Luke and Acts are tied together by the same author, Luke the Evangelist. Two composite parts of the same story. The Gospel of Luke is the story of God made known through Jesus, His Life and Ministry; but now in Acts, it is the story of God made known through the Holy Spirit, how She moved and inspired the First Christians to set out and spread the Good News.

So, after recounting the events at the end of Luke in the first chapter of Acts, the second chapter of Acts starts with the birth of the Church of Christ. One-hundred twenty disciples of Jesus had gathered together in one place, traditionally considered to be the same room that the Last Supper was held in, during the Jewish festival of Pentecost, which was later re-named the Festival of Weeks to avoid confusion with this event. The Holy Spirit arrived in a wind and took hold of the believers. The Gift, promised by Jesus.

The Holy Spirit took possession of them and filled their hearts with a fire, giving them a power and transforming their outlook. While the believers were aware of the Spirit before this time, especially after the Resurrection, this is the first time that those First Christians were enlightened to the power of the Spirit to guide them forth out into the world.

This is Jesus' Gift to us. When we are gathered together, in Christ's Name, the Spirit is with us as well, guiding us as we follow Jesus together in our community, responding with all our efforts to His teachings to Love and Serve one another.

The disciples there were filled with such a fervor, that some observers thought they were drunk. But that was just their conviction, their joy in Christ, after the pain of the Crucifixion, followed by the relief of the Resurrection, followed by the confusion of Jesus departing a second time, and at all times with fear, as they were in constant danger if they openly proclaimed their faith. So, they have been through an emotional roller coaster, and finally filled with such fearless joy and inflamed by the Holy Spirit, it is understandable why they appeared that way.

Before the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the First Believers in that room lived in that fear, as they were wanted people. Sure, Jesus came to reassure them and they believed the things that had happened, but Jesus only appeared to them, not to everyone publicly. It was up to them to witness to what they had seen and to spread the Good News, but they did not have the courage to go about preaching yet.

But the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the inspiration She provided changed all that, helping the Believers to overcome any and all fears to go outside, in front of people from all over, and publicly profess their faith, and get to work responding to Jesus' Call.

The Holy Spirit moved them in a way that a leader inspires a group when they need to overcome a fear of some kind. Like how FDR inspired a nation gripped by the Great Depression in his first inaugural speech, telling them that the only thing to fear is fear itself; or how Winston Churchill rallied a nation after the disaster of Dunkirk, outlining every place where they will fight the Nazis; or Coach Herb Brooks at the 1980 Winter Olympics to his underdog hockey team before they took to the ice against the Soviet team. Each of these inspired a group to overcome a fear in the face of overwhelming odds to accomplish a goal, just as the Holy Spirit did to the Disciples.

Sports movies are good examples of this sort of thing. You almost can't have a proper one without a last minute speech either before the game or at half-time, to rally the team, to inspire them to give their all, to forget their fears and their worries, and just go out and give their all, in the face of

overwhelming odds.

Take the based on a true story movie Hoosiers. A very small town basketball team is swept up in events, and amazingly they are able to reach the state championship tournament. They are about to play a game, where if they win, they go to the Finals, but in front of them first is a game against a team that is from a school much bigger than them, with fancier uniforms, a deeper bench, more physically strong, and in front of the largest crowd they have ever seen. And you could see the fear and concern on the faces of the Husker players.

But then in comes Gene Hackman, playing their coach, and he tells them to keep their focus on what is immediately in front of them, not worrying about the game after this one; to ignore all the things that are overwhelming them about their opponents; to focus on the fundamentals that they've gone over time and time again; do not get caught up in winning or losing that game, because if they play the best that they can, they are all winners in his book, no matter the score at the end. This inspires them and hypes them up to go out and win the game.

It was probably like that for the Disciples. Like a smaller team facing the overwhelming odds of antagonistic Pharisees and the might of Rome. They were frozen in fear and confusion, and were without direction. The Holy Spirit came in like a coach and inspired the Disciples to overcome that fear, pointed them in the direction they needed to go in, and set their souls afire with courageous faith. That is why we consider this day as the Church's birthday, and not any other day that came before. It was the day where the Holy Spirit helped the Disciples face their fears and say, NO MORE.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer:

Loving God, we give thanks for Your Spirit and all that She inspires in us. Help us to be open to Her holy wind moving us, and giving us, as Your Church, the courage we need to overcome any fear in the face of any obstacle or overwhelming situation. We know that our openness to Your Spirit will guide our actions as You wish them. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

O Holy Spirit, on that first Pentecost Sunday, You descended upon your people, granting them Your special gifts. Through the work You empowered them to do, souls were saved and the name of Christ glorified.

We give you thanks, Holy Spirit, for family, friends, life, and love. Thank You for all the blessings You have bestowed upon us, and for moving us to be Your instruments of Divine Love.

Spirit of God, we know that we often fall short of Your call to love one another well. Especially when we tune out the cries of those in need and those on the edges of our communities. Help us to see Your great generosity, hear Your word of mercy, and feel Your great love for all who needs it; and help strengthen us to reach out in service to those who are in need.

We join offer up our prayers to You. For those we know who are ill or troubled, who are lost, who are bereaved, who are refugees from violence from war or terrorism or in the home, and for all Your suffering people who are beyond our reach: we know that all are brought home to Your heart in the prayers of Christ and in the silent intercessions of Your Spirit, who comes from Your deep heart to ours, and returns again to You with all our deepest thoughts.

Holy Spirit, we pray you that you would fill our hearts with love, peace, patience, goodness, and faithfulness. Renew us and kindle the fire of faith brightly within us. Make us bold action-takers of Your Good News! And help us to keep our hearts open to You to enter and move us.

We especially pray for:

The Suddath Family
Sean Larose

Deanna Muzzulin Sue Kenny
Family of Greg Roberts Becky Bodycoat

Today we pray that You would also continue to enter our hearts. Fill us with strong faith in Jesus and a firm desire to do godly works in Your name. Use us to accomplish Your saving will in our community. Amen.

Acts 2:1-21

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. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 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." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Psalm 104:24-33

104:24 O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

104:25 Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.

104:26 There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

104:27 These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

104:28 when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

104:29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

104:30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

104:31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works--

104:32 who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.

104:33 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.