

Real Change You Can Believe In: Empowering the Church: (Power to the People)
 Mordecai Anderson
 March 30, 2008

Introduction.

If I were to ask around our congregation when our church began, some would say the birthday of our church was in June of 2001. And while that's when our congregation became an autonomous body of believers, the real birthday of the church of Christ was on a Sunday nearly 2000 years ago, on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus rose from the grave.

Warren Wiersby writes (Be Dynamic: Acts. Page 23. Chariot Victor Publishing, 1987):
 "The early church had none of the things that we think are so essential for success today—buildings, money, political influence, social status—and yet the church won multitudes to Christ and saw many churches established throughout the Roman world. Why? **Because the church had the power of the Holy Spirit energizing its ministry.**"

That same power from the Holy Spirit is available today to us. We are a part of the same church that began at Pentecost, but oftentimes Christians miss out on this power. I believe the better we can understand just what took place on Pentecost, the better witnesses we can be for Jesus Christ, and the more empowered our congregation will be to doing God's will.

Let me set the stage a little. After Jesus was buried, his disciples were afraid. They hid together in the same upper room where they had eaten the Passover meal with Jesus. But it was the resurrection that had changed them. If Jesus were still dead, the disciples would have remained silent. But Jesus isn't dead. He rose from the grave.

I don't know if many people realize this but hundreds of peoples saw Jesus after he rose from the dead. He really died on the cross. He did not fake dying after being scourged to a pulp, and being nailed to a cross where he hung for six hours. He didn't pretend when the Roman soldiers thrust a spear into his heart to make sure he was dead. He wasn't still alive when they took him down from the cross and wrapped him with layer upon layer of linens, and with the 75 pounds of spices and incense. So when hundreds of people saw Jesus alive after his resurrection, there was no mistaking that Jesus conquered the grave.

1 Corinthians 15

3For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:3-6, NIV)

Today is the last sermon in our series on Real Change you can Believe in. And while that's a play on words based on our country's politics, there is a very serious and important truth here. Jesus Christ really was and is God in the flesh, and he has conquered the grave – And if you want to experience real change in your life, it comes from putting your hope and trust in that resurrection. And the power for that change is found in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' resurrection changed everything, and He had a plan for the beginning of his church. Let's read together from Acts chapter 1.

Acts 1:3-9, NIV

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4On one occasion, while he 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. 5For John baptized with [a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

6So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

9After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

So during the 40 days Jesus spends with his disciples, he convinces them that He is alive. And he opens their minds to all he had taught them and to the Scriptures. Notice how important Bible knowledge is to Jesus at the start of his church. Knowing God's word is still absolutely important for the success of the church.

And then Jesus tells his disciples they will be his WITNESSES. This word is used over and over in Acts. A witness is someone who tells what they have seen and heard. In court, a witness shares what they have seen. It's not so much about what you think or your opinion, but it's what you know.

Friends not every Christian has gifts when it comes to evangelism, but Jesus commands EVERY Christian to be a witness and tell the lost about their Savior. Proverbs 14:25 says a true witness delivers souls. The word here for witness is where we get the English word "martyr". Many early Christians gave their very lives to share the Savior they knew with the lost. And I know it can be embarrassing or scary to talk to other people about your faith, but that's where the power of the Holy Spirit is so important, because it's that power that can help us be faithful to Jesus even when it's hard, and yes, even if our very lives are at stake!

So Jesus tells his disciples to wait there for that power to come on them, and then they could be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the whole world. After Jesus says this, he ascends into heaven before their eyes. Ten days later, it's Pentecost.

Pentecost means fifty days. This is the festival fifty days after Passover. While Passover celebrated when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, Pentecost celebrated the day that God gave Moses the Law on Mount Sinai. That's when God wrote the ten commandments on stone tablets. The Hebrew people celebrated the giving of the law, but Christians celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit had been active in the world at creation, and throughout the Old Testament. But now there would be some major changes:

1. The Holy Spirit would dwell IN God's people rather than just come on them, and
2. The Holy Spirit would be permanent rather than temporary.

Let's read what happened: **Acts 2:1**

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [a] as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4, NIV).

I want you to imagine what happened that day, and then I want to talk about what really changed for them and for us. And to do that, I want you to see the city of Jerusalem and the place where this story likely happened.

--Watch Video Clip—*In this segment, Mr. Vander Laan shows us what remains of the ancient Southern Stairs of the Herodian Temple Mount in Jesus' time. He suggests that these stairs were the location of the events on Pentecost. And he points out the significance of God's presence leaving the Temple once and for all, and entering the new temple, us (our bodies).*

From the Temple, to the Heart!

I. What changed in Jerusalem/on that day of Pentecost?

1. The Temple is no longer a building in Jerusalem. We are the Temple.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, NIV

Do you not know that your body is a temple 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 body.

2 Corinthians 6:16, NIV - For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

In the Jewish mind of that day, God's presence had only been in the Temple in Jerusalem for hundreds of years. Beginning on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit of God would no longer dwell in a building, but in our hearts. And that leads to the next point...

The temple stood in Jerusalem for all to see as a witness of God's glory and presence in the earth. Now that we are the temple, we can worship God through our lives. The church is the mobile temple. The presence of God goes with us wherever we are. And we are God's ambassadors. Christians represent God to everyone who sees you. That's why it's so important that we seek to live holy lives. It's because when a Christian sins, and they represent God, it makes God out to be evil to others.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21, NIV, "20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

What do you allow into your temple? What thoughts do we entertain? What words do we let come out of our mouths? If God's holy and loving spirit is in us, but all we do is complain or gripe, or we criticize all the time, or we cut people down with sarcastic comments, then what does that make our God look like to a lost person?

If you're a Christian, and God's spirit dwells in your heart, then we cannot allow sin to dwell there too. And here's the third thing that happened in Jerusalem on Pentecost...

2. It was the final split between religion and relationship.

When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn by God from top to bottom. Before that time, only the high priest could enter into the small room where God's presence was. But when Jesus died, every believer was given access to God's presence. And when the Holy Spirit came, God revealed how personal he really is. He wants to be with you all the time, everywhere we go, in every thought we have. God loves us, and He lives with us. The temple was just a model, but when the Holy spirit came, the true plan of God was finally revealed. The writer of Hebrews put it this way.

Hebrews 10:19Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20**by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21**and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22**let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. **23**Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. **25**Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:19-25, NIV)

That's it – the birthday of the church.

Peter preached and explained to the crowd exactly who Jesus was, that he was indeed the Messiah, the Christ, and that he lived a perfect, sinless life. And yet, the people had him crucified. When it dawned on them, that they had killed God in the flesh, but that he had risen from the dead, they were cut to the heart. Read along with me beginning in Chapter 2 verse 36.

Peter concluded his sermon, "**Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.**"

37When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "**Brothers, what shall we do?**"

38Peter replied, "**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. 39**The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:36-39, NIV)

That challenge still stands for us. It was our sin that sent Jesus to the cross. What shall we do? Believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, repent of your sins and confess him as Lord of your life, and you will receive the same Holy Spirit that was poured out on the world that day.

II. So what will you do? What difference will the Holy Spirit make in your life if you're a Christian?

The **Holy Spirit** is:

1. Power –we were powerless/unable/morally weak, but now we have power.

Romans 5:6, NIV - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

- Before we come to Christ, we are powerless against our guilt and against temptation.
- But the Holy Spirit gives us Power over sin, over temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13, NIV - No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Church, it's time to claim the power of the Holy Spirit over the sin and temptation in our lives. There is no habit, no addiction, no behavior, no struggle that God cannot help us overcome.

- Power over death.

Romans 8:13-14, NIV - . 13For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, **14**because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

We were dead in our sins, but God has made us alive by the Holy Spirit.

- Power to do good (fruit of the spirit).

Galatians 5:22-23, NIV - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control.

What will it mean for you to reflect God's presence into the world? We should be noticing more and more of the fruit of the spirit in our lives. We should be loving. Not just toward our relatives and our close friends, but toward the unlovable. We should have joy, even in trials. Too often church people are in a rotten mood, and they say rotten things. The Christian who lives by the Spirit rises above that to demonstrate love and joy and peace. Look at that list again: patience, kindness, goodness. Do those words describe you? Are you faithful, do you handle stress with gentleness, are you self-controlled?

Christians must allow the Holy Spirit to develop these things in us so that we can be God's ambassadors in the world. When people see you, do they see Christ?

- Power to change your World.

2 Timothy 1:7, NIV - For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

I know it's hard to imagine for some of you. I know all the what if's.

What if I get embarrassed?
 What if I can't answer a Bible question?
 What if they make fun of me?
 What if I lose the promotion?
 What if I lose a friend?

Let me ask you another what if...What if you're the only chance someone has of hearing about Jesus? What if they die without knowing Jesus as Savior because you were too afraid to tell them?

God has empowered YOU. What gifts has he given you to use in service to others? Use them. Will you trust God to lead you, or will you sit back on the sidelines without participating? God wants to use you in this church, and he wants you to be that witness in the world so that lost people will be found.

Remember, Jesus said, **"8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8, NIV)**

It begins with your decision to trust your life in Jesus' hands. And you will be empowered with the Holy Spirit, who will change your life. Then every Christian is called to tell others what they know about Christ. Starting with your nearest relatives and friends, moving to your neighbors and co-workers, and then our community.

The early church was born on Pentecost, and the Lord added thousands to their number. Three thousand that day, thousands more soon after. The message of Christ spread around the globe, spanning centuries, to this moment, in our congregation.

Conclusion: That early church had no building, no computers or cell phones, no senior minister. They didn't have easy transportation. They didn't have Bibles or hymnals. They didn't have communion trays. They didn't have pianos or organs. But here's what they had:

They had the Power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine. Why? Because the resurrection of Jesus was real to them, and the power of the Holy Spirit was changing them.

And when we start allowing the Holy Spirit to move in OUR hearts, then and only then will our lives start changing. And when our lives begin to be changed by the Holy Spirit, then our church will grow and mature.

Are you ready to begin that journey by becoming a Christian? Or if you're already a Christian, are you ready to be a member of this church and let the Holy Spirit change you as a part of this congregation? If so, then you come as we stand and as we sing.

© 2008 Friends in Fellowship Christian Church. All Scripture references are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted. The "Faith Lessons" video series is available from Zondervan.