

New St. James Presbyterian Church
Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan

“PEACE, POWER, PURPOSE”

Acts 2:1–21 Numbers 11:24–30 Psalm 104:24–34, 35b John 20: 19-23

Today is Pentecost Day. The birth-day of the Christian Church

The day the Holy Spirit came, with power.

The day that Presbyterians usually celebrate, in some form or fashion.

In worship, on Pentecost, I have used fans, hair dryers, streamers, and other paraphernalia to convey the movement of the Spirit – with mixed results.

Presbyterians celebrate Pentecost, but we aren’t exactly “*Pentecost-al*” in the best sense of that word.

Unfortunately, the word has become associated with a certain style of worship which is unlike our own, and which we have sort of sneered at, or dismissed.

For today, let’s take another look at the Gospel story.

Today's Gospel text begins with scared disciples in a locked room.

The disciples fear the Roman and religious authorities that murdered Jesus would possibly murder them for being associated with this radical, itinerant preacher from Galilee.

Their messianic hopes have dissolved into mere survival, coupled by utter confusion and calamity.

But the evangelist John records that Mary reports to them that she *has seen the risen Christ*.

I am sure they thought she was delusional to have witnessed Jesus.

In John, the 20th chapter, around verse 19, something happens when Christ shows up to them.

The Rev. William E. Flippin, Jr. suggests that Christ offered them three things that day:
PEACE, POWER, AND PURPOSE.

When Christ shows up, He gives us **Peace**.

This passage says that the first words that Jesus provides to those disciples that have abandoned him and left him on an old rugged cross is Peace, not “*How could you leave me abandoned to die?*”

Christ came through the locked doors in His glorified body and brought the fearful disciples peace.

Note that twice He speaks of peace (vv. 19, 21).

The first "peace" is peace with God, based on His sacrifice on the cross.

That is why He showed them His hands and side.

The second peace is the peace of God that comes from His presence with us.

The prophet Isaiah declares in Isaiah chapter 26,
Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace— in peace because they trust in you.

As a good Presbyterian, Romans 5:1 tells us that *"therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Peace be with you, Jesus says.

But how can we have peace when there is conflict in the Middle East and Africa, and Hong Kong, and Korea and....?

How can we have this peace when there are earthquakes and floods and fires, and food insecurity and...?

How can we have peace when the economic realities of the pandemic are now starting to be seen?

How can we have peace when those who are marginalized socially, economically, politically, have no voice?

How do we find peace of mind?

How do we empty our minds of all the worry, fear, resentment, and pain that living in this sin sick world brings?

How do we find that peace that Christ promises us?

The Rev. William E. Flippin, Jr.

One man said that he had been told that one way to achieve inner peace is to finish the things he's already started.

He said, *"Today I finished two bags of potato chips and a chocolate cake. I feel better already."*

This outlook perhaps can give us temporary peace and helps to relieve stress--not your waistline--but when Christ shows up, he gives us Peace.

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Jesus also gives us **Power**.

Verse 22 tells us that *"when he said this, he breathed on them."*

John, unlike the gospel writer Luke-Acts, forfeits the experience of Pentecost which records the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2, but says in this moment that Christ breathed on his disciples has great significance.

Our Lord's breathing upon them is reminiscent of **Genesis 2:7** when God breathed into Adam.

This action toward the disciples was personal and individual, giving them the spiritual power and discernment, they would need to fulfill His commission.

In **Ezekiel 37** we see the dry bones of an old battlefield come together as skeletons and then organs and tissues and kin, but they laid there like corpses until verse 9.

Then he said to me,

“Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath:^[a] Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,^[b] and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

The fact that Christ breathed on them gave them transforming power that commissioned them to be changed.

Christ gave them power through his breath and they were transformed.

Christ wants to transform us with his breath.... I am so glad that God transformed us....

Come here, Moses, tell me what God can do; he can turn a murderer into a leader....

Come here, David, tell me what God can do; he can turn a lowly shepherd boy into a king....

Come here, Nehemiah, what can God do; God can turn a cup bearer into a wall builder....

Come here, Jeremiah, I wonder what God can do; he can turn a cry baby and make them a prophet....

Come here, Mary Magdalene, what can God do; he can turn a so-called harlot and make them an apostle and first witness to the Resurrection.

Christ's power is not temporary but everlasting.

About 5 years ago, I began to understand Pentecost a little differently.

That is when I began to use a “*Continuous positive airway pressure*” machine, CPAP for short.

I have been diagnosed with sleep apnea, and CPAP is the therapy.

I wear it every night, in order to keep me sleeping and breathing properly.

In some ways, it literally keeps me alive.

Over time, I began to realize that this is what Jesus did that day, with his disciples, in that room.

He breathed into them, gave them his Spirit, so that they might live.

We serve a risen Christ that has given us peace and a power by breathing on his disciples, a power that can transform our tempests into triumphs.

When Christ shows up, he gives us Peace, he gives us Power, he gives us lastly **Purpose**.

This is our purpose.

We are to be:

a mouth to speak for Jesus;
feet to run errands for Jesus,
hands to do the work of Jesus,
and a heart to love Jesus.

When Christ shows up in our lives, it displays the purpose for all of us.

God has constructed every member of his body in a customized way.

God has uniquely crafted every one of us to hit the mark of His purpose and calling on our lives.

We are not an assembly line with the same automated parts.

We have been uniquely crafted for His purpose.

On this Pentecost Sunday, Jesus still breathes upon us and shows up in our darkest hours and says, "*Peace*."

What a gift.

Our response in knowing that Christ has shown up to give us Peace, Power and Purpose is to tell it now to everyone:

"This is that which was promised of old; the Spirit of God is with us."

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, RISEN CHRIST, AND PENTECOSTAL SPIRIT...AMEN

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You may have seen this already:

Ed MacLeod, First Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, NC

Our church is already open

We are open to the Spirit's leading

We are open to new opportunities for mission

We are open to the stirring challenge of the call to discipleship

We are open to anyone who wants to join us on the journey of faith

We are open to learning new ways to tell our old story

We are open to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue

We are open to criticism when we fall short.

We are already open

We just happen to be worshipping in our homes, for now, as a way of promoting safety and mitigating risk, as an expression of the love we have for our neighbours, and as an

acknowledgement that any reckless behaviour on our part could have a devastating effect on others.

And we are grateful for the technology that makes this possible, aware that we are richly blessed.

But we are already open.

John 20: 19-23 - comment

"Faith is a choice; a choice to look at reality from the point of view that God is making all things new rather than that death is the ultimate reality.

But that kind of choice isn't something you can prove or verify."

OFFERING QUOTE

Theirs is an endless road, a hopeless maze, who seek for goods before they seek for God.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), French abbot

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Loving God, Compassionate Son, Healing Spirit, with tender kindness you transform our lives with your presence.

You turn weeping into laughter, sorrow into joy, and death into life.

We come in adoration this day and pause to worship you.

We rest from our work and responsibilities; we set aside our distractions and activities to praise you for the beauty that fills your world and to enjoy our life in you.

Holy One, Source of our lives, we confess that we have not always listened for your Spirit's call.

You call us to love our enemies, but we cling to animosity old and new.

You call us to unity in the body of Christ, but we remain divided.

You send us into the world to be witnesses, but we avoid opportunities to share our joy in Christ.

Loving God, you know us better than we know ourselves.

Hear us as we share with you the secrets of our hearts in this silence:

(Silence is kept)

Assurance of Pardon

Friends, hear and believe the good news of the Gospel!

In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us.

In Christ, we are forgiven and set free to begin again

in the renewing power of the Spirit.

Thanks be to God for this most generous gift.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us on this day of Pentecost and renew our faith.

Re-awaken our love for God, let your flames warm our hearts with trust in Jesus Christ and dare us to do great things in his name.

Leader: Spirit of Power and Purpose,

All: Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and give us energy to serve you in Christ's church.
Open our eyes to recognize needs for ministry and mission, and to learn from this time when we have had to do things differently in worship and pastoral care.
Open our hearts to connect with those for whom the time of social distancing has been very difficult.
Open our hands to share in the tasks that need doing, and open our lips in prayer and praise.
Leader: Spirit of Power and Purpose,
All: Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and give us understanding:
For those whose lives seem so different from ours and those facing situations because of the pandemic that we didn't encounter;
Understanding for those with whom we've disagreed; and for problems and challenges we will now face at home, at work, and in your world as we try to recover from the effects of coronavirus.
Leader: Spirit of Power and Purpose,
All: Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and bring healing for all who face pain or illness, discouragement or disappointment, made so much keener because of isolation; healing for all who know sorrow, sadness or grief, and for those who face stress and pressure as they try to rebuild their lives.
Bring healing to the earth, to places of upheaval and to ecosystems at risk.
Leader: Spirit of Power and Purpose,
All: Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and bring us the compassion we see in Christ Jesus.
Blow through us and refresh us as your faithful followers, equipped to serve the world you love in Jesus name, as together we say the words Jesus taught us.
Our Father, ... Amen

Benediction for Pentecost

As you enter a new week, may you experience God's presence.
May you feel God pouring out the Holy Spirit
over your heads and your thoughts and the words of your lips,
over your hearts and your feelings and emotions
and your compassion for all others,
and over your hands and your feet
as you put into action all that God commands you.

During this week,
may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the peace, power, and purpose of the Holy Spirit
be with each of you; Amen.