



THE NEW SHOFAR

In the Spirit all things become possible!

Acts 2:1-11 - John 15:26-27; 14:4b-15

PENTECOST

This is the dawning of the age of Jesus Christ

For Luke, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marks the beginning of a whole new age in human history, in the story of creation. Prior to this moment, the Spirit had dwelt in various people, at different times and for a range of reasons. What was not possible was having this indwelling of the Spirit available for all who come to God. Something new has come. Something definitive for all history and for what it means to be a man and a woman in God's creation. Pentecost means it is God who is doing this "something new". This is the moment towards which God's saving works have been moving, a time when salvation will be proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles alike, to the very *ends of the earth*.

The Spirit is about the empowering of believers for mission

Luke records the final words of Jesus to his disciples as being about this *power* that will come upon them when the Spirit is *poured out* upon them. That word *power* means something that has been transferred from the Spirit to a person. It is a *power for* something, a power that enables believers to

Giving witness

The Greek word for "witness" is the word from which our word "martyr" is derived. It means providing testimony to something I have seen, heard, experienced. All missionary preaching living is a work of witness – it opens up to others the reality of God that drives the missionary. The witness was the guarantor of the truth of the Gospel, living proof of the veracity of what was being said and proclaimed. As Jesus revealed the saving love of God (gave witness to), so disciples give witness to that same saving love accessible through Jesus Christ. In this way we are called to be the imitators of Christ in the world.

carry out the will of God in creation. Believers are empowered to give witness to the Risen Christ present and active in the world. Living in imitation of Christ is difficult, if not impossible on our own. There are far too many ways of escaping or compromising. It is only when we live the Gospel in the *power of the Holy Spirit* can we get close to being faithful.

What is *faithful living of the Gospel*? According to the New Testament, it is living in such a way that unbelievers and those who are struggling to find faith can experience Christ alive in the world. It is putting the Gospel command of *Love* into action. It is allowing the Spirit's power to shape our lives so that we are characterized as being the people of whom Paul speaks in **Galatians 5**... *people of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*.

Is that really us? Is that how the world experiences the Gospel? It will be if believers are open to this *outpouring* of the Spirit by God. It is a power to transform. A power to enliven, enlighten and transform. It is a gift enabling believers to overcome sin and temptation, to move from a faith acknowledged in the head to a faith that has an impact on everything I do and speaks to everyone I encounter.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

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Does this empowering by the Spirit actually work?

Yes it does. Luke's Book of Acts gives ample proof of how the Spirit can work. It works when those so "empowered" have the courage of their convictions. The gift of the Spirit is given to men and women in order that the saving works of God can be preached to everyone, everywhere at every time until the end of history itself. The disciples look as though they were expecting a different kind of power – seats in the kingdom, an army to overcome the Romans and restore Israel. Instead the Risen and Living Christ guarantees them a share in the mission he himself had been given by his Father. The community now has a job to do. God sends the Spirit to enable them to do this job.

NOTE: This power is a power from heaven that is at work only when the faithful are in missionary mode. When they are active in engaging the world with the saving love of God. It is not some kind of magical power to be used for personal betterment or improvement. It is not something that will feather our own nests. It transforms us at the very heart of who we are in-order-that the world can know and experience something of the reality of God. That is Pentecost power. It something God does to us.

And the people were "astonished"

The standard reaction of those observing the grace of God at work in and through the missionaries is that of *astonishment*. It comes as a shock as it is not what is expected. It goes against the status quo, the religious and civil norms of the day. They are astonished because they can see, hear, touch – experience the ways in which Christ is alive among them. They had all heard about the wonders of the gods before but now they can see Christ in these men and women and feel the divine presence in what is happening. It is the response of the world that validates our faith because they respond to what the Spirit is doing in us and through us. **Note Luke's measure here:** We know we are faithful to our calling when our actions as Christians and as a community of faith astonish the world around us.

The witness is someone who speaks of something they have experienced, a truth they validate by their deeds and their words. Christian martyrdom is not about dying in order to get to paradise. Martyrdom is about revealing the presence of the Risen Christ living among people in the world..

Jesus' prayer for us – Isaiah 42

*Here is my servant,
whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom
my soul delights;
I have put my spirit
upon him;
he will bring forth
justice to the nations*

Doing God's will means collaborating in what Jesus is doing

Jesus did not pray this particular verse from Isaiah but in his priestly prayer in chapter 17 of John's Gospel he does pray for us. The focus of Pentecost must come back to being on what God is doing, on why the Holy Spirit is poured out into men and women of faith. Thus we need to be reminding ourselves of what it is God is doing.

St Luke tells us in Acts how the Risen Christ continues to engage in the missionary work given to him by his Father. We experience that presence of the Son through the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit we know Christ and it is in the Spirit the Living Christ works alongside of us. Christians are thus *fellow workers*, collaborators with Christ in the Father's work. That work of the

Father is about bringing the saving love, compassion and mercy the world sees in Jesus into the lives of every man, woman and child on the earth. This is why the Spirit has been *put upon us*.

Note the powerful way Isaiah ends the above verse. It is not about *preaching* justice to the nations. It is all about *bringing* justice to the nations. The way to measure our true standing as individual believers or as faith communities is thus abundantly clear but difficult to see through to the end.

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