

## **Acts 2:1-21**

### **The face of true power**



There are so many stories in the Bible about the work of the Spirit.

The prophet Ezekiel saw a vision. Remember how there was a drought and a valley filled with dry bones. Then Ezekiel sees and hears a wind, rattling, and all the bones come together, and the bones live when the wind of God, the Spirit of God breathes breath into them. (Ezek 37:1-14).

People said of the prophet Hosea, "The man of the spirit is mad!" (Hos 9:7). You will note that they said the same of the apostles at Pentecost, "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13).

Luke portrays the Spirit in Jesus primarily as the power behind Jesus' speaking the good news of God's love (4:14-15, 18), power which subsequently continues in his disciples (Luke 12:12).

Throughout Acts, the Spirit is that which controls mission, which prods and drags the church, kicking and screaming, into new areas of ministry. The word spreads, through the power of the Spirit.

In former times, only a few special, charismatic individuals were called to be prophets. With the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost all God's people are called to prophesy, to tell the good news of God's truth in Jesus Christ.

Today, I hope to be able to persuade you that everyone of you can and must exercise your God-given call to be prophets.

It was Luther who said that we preachers speak on Sunday so that the whole church can preach all week long, that we preach in church so that you can preach in the office, or school, or wherever you are during the week.

So we are here this Pentecost Sunday and each Sunday, so that we might speak to one another about Jesus, so that we might get the courage and conviction to leave here and to speak to the world about Jesus.

And I know that in many ways more is expected of you than of me or any other minister. Potentially, you may have a much tougher time being a prophet than we have. We stand up in our pulpits, protected by the church and tradition. It's perhaps easier for us to speak up, speak out in the name of Christ - it's even expected of us. But you are in the classroom, on the assembly line, at the places you volunteer / socialize, and in a hundred other places. It takes great courage to be the one to speak up for the right, to bring the truth to speech, no matter the consequences.

As reassurance, let me reiterate. On Pentecost, God's promised Holy Spirit descended on all. Everyone received the power to speak, to tell the whole world what had happened in Jesus Christ.

As I read the Pentecost story in the book of Acts, I note a number of things. First, the disciples return to Jerusalem and wait, as they had been instructed. I picture them, huddled together, wondering what next. The "what next" was that they were sent out into the streets, to be preachers and healers, witnesses and prophets.

It must have been something, for them. They were fishermen and business people, farmers and tax collectors. Whatever they were expecting, I'm fairly confident it wasn't to be

declared prophets.

Someone has commented, "Sometimes I wonder if I want to be that filled with the Spirit. I'd have to do a whole lot more than what I'm doing now." And another person reflects, "I don't think people want Pentecostal fervour. Imagine - the whole congregation, just hanging out on Sunday morning being Anglican/[Presbyterian] and something like that happened. Some people would be most unhappy."

The first Pentecost was a miracle. The miracle was that Peter found the courage to move from a place of fear to a place of confidence. He preached with such vitality that day that people across the ages have understood his meaning.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes this in *Bread of Angels*, "If you believe the Bible, then there is no better proof that Jesus was who he said he was than the before-and-after pictures of the disciples. Before Pentecost, they were dense, timid bumbleres who fled at the least sign of trouble. Afterwards, they were fearless leaders. They healed the sick and cast out demons. They went to jail gladly, where they sang hymns until the walls fell down. How did this transformation occur? You can read all about it in the book of Acts.

"The last thing Jesus told his disciples to do before he ascended into heaven was to go back to Jerusalem and wait there for God's promise to come true. They would be baptized by the Holy Spirit he told them. They did as they were told. They went back to Jerusalem. They did not have to wait long for the answer to their prayers. On the day of Pentecost, a Jewish festival set fifty days after Passover, they were all together in one place when they got a crash course in power. [Peter] got up and delivered a sensational sermon, based on the second chapter of Joel. 'In the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.' That is what is happening now, Peter tells them. The Holy Spirit of God is being poured out on them, and this is how it looks: wind like the wind that revived the valley of dry bones, and fire, and tongues." [Barbara Brown Taylor, *Bread of Angels*, Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997, pp. 66-67]

"I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and everyone will prophesy." That is what is still happening. We are the body of Christ in and for this world. We are to see the world and one another as Jesus sees it and us. We are to be his hands, his feet, his heart. We are to be his voice. We are called and equipped to be witnesses - to his story, to his truth - in all the places we live, work, study, play. It is intended that we tell tales out of, beyond this church.

The final verse of our Acts passage, quoted by the author of Luke-Acts from the book of the prophet Joel is particularly powerful – "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Later Paul would ask, what we all should ask ourselves every day – in Romans 10:14: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?"

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were huddled together, and the Spirit of God descended upon them and literally blew them away - blew them out into the streets to prophesy, to tell the tales, to be Christ in and for the world.