

**PENTECOST SUNDAY 2008 – Series A**  
**John 20:19-23 “The Power Among Us”**

Pentecost Sunday is the birthday of the church. The Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost and the disciples received **power** that grew the church in a dramatic fashion. But the account given by Luke in Acts is quite different from the version recorded in this gospel lesson from John 20. Luke’s version is dramatic; wind, fire, crowds, conversion, glory. John’s account is very different.

In John’s account the disciples were gathered in the upper room with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. They were afraid of what might happen next. Were they next to be arrested? The apocryphal Gospel of Peter, 26, reports a search for the disciples on the grounds that they were going to try to burn down the temple. (Raymond Brown, Anchor Bible Commentary, The Gospel According to John, Vol. 2, p. 1020). Jesus came to them in the midst of their fears and said, **“Peace be with you.”** (John 20:19). These words of Jesus literally gave the disciples peace. Jesus’ words create what they say. When Jesus met a man with a shriveled hand he healed him by saying **“Stretch out your hand.”** (Matt. 12:10-13). When he met a funeral procession on its way to bury a young man Jesus stopped the procession and said to the corpse, **“Young man, I say to you, get up!”** (Luke 7:14). When Lazarus was dead and buried Jesus came to his grave and said, **“Lazarus, come out!”** (John 11:43). Jesus’ words have **power** and they create what they say. When Jesus said to his disciples, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”** (John 20:22) his words literally gave the disciples what he said.

Both Luke and John both describe the gift of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus. **“The descriptions are different...but for both Luke and John the spirit’s task is to take the place of Jesus, to carry on his work, and to constitute his presence in the world.”** (R. Brown, Anchor Bible Commentary, The Gospel According to John, Vol 2, p. 1039).

The **power** of the church is and always has been the Holy Spirit. It is not fancy buildings or exotic programs that create faith. It is the Spirit of God that, as Martin Luther said, **“calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and preserves the church.”** It is the Holy Spirit that points us to Jesus as Savior. It is the Holy Spirit that has worked in your life to bring you to faith and hold you in faith.

When you build a house you install lights and outlets to run your appliances. But unless you hook your house up to the **power** company lines your appliances remain useless.

Sometimes we in church think that some new program, some new gimmick will grow the church, make it more exciting, more desirable for people. So work hard on the new program but we forget that the Spirit is the **power** that makes the

church work. The Spirit works through the word of scripture and the faithful witness of Xians to perform its mighty work.

We don't control the **power** of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Spirit is like the wind, you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. We can't see the Spirit, but we can see its effects.

The work of the Holy Spirit in your life can have a **powerful** effect on your life. On Pentecost Sunday, May 18th, 1980, 28 years ago, Mount St. Helens erupted in a mighty blast that was heard for hundreds of miles. The ash cloud climbed high into the atmosphere and started to spread eastward. Darkness and ash fell in communities in eastern Washington. The effect of the eruption was felt worldwide. The blast didn't take long...but the effect of the eruption lasted for years. Farmers in eastern Washington have reported record crops because of the rich fertilizer that the ash contained. The **powerful** effects of the eruption lasted long after the thunder died away.

So also with the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came in **power** upon the disciples. It was a magnificent display of the **power** of God. Three thousand were baptized that first Pentecost Sunday. But the work of the Spirit of God has continued in quiet ways to work in the hearts of Xians for nearly 2000 years. And the Spirit will continue to work until Jesus comes again. You and I are the beneficiaries of the Spirit's work. You have faith because the Holy Spirit called you into faith. It began in your baptism and it continues each day of your life.

We are given the gift of faith through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. We help plant the seed of faith in our children. Parents can do that in many ways. In the last 4 months we have had the joy of having our 3 year old grandson living with us. It has given us opportunities to point to God through conversations that bring God into everyday life. When we wake up in the mornig and hear the birds singing we told Zephyr, "The birds are singing their morning praise of God." When we put him to bed in the evening we made the sign of the cross on his forehead in remembrance of baptism and said, "God bless you with long life, good health, and strong faith in Jesus." You can do the same. Start today! When you are out walking note the wonders of creation and say, "Isn't God great and **powerful** to make such a beautiful world!" When you eat your meals, begin with a prayer of thanks. When you come to church help your children remember their baptism.

One example comes to mind and I have permission to use it. When Cyndee Blackmore enters church each Sunday with her children she stops at the baptismal font to dip her finger in the water and make the sign of the cross on her children's foreheads from little Maddie to Hunter and Dalton. This is an excellent way to encourage their faith. Parents can also be regular and disciplined in their

own church attendance, your children are watching you. If worship is important to you it will be important to your children. This is a **powerful** example. Attending Adult Sunday School will help keep you growing in your own faith.

Our confirmands today will make their own “Affirmation of Baptism”. When your parents brought you to church to be baptized they made some promises. They promised to bring you (not send you) to the services of God’s house, to teach you the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed and the 10 Commandments. They promised to place in your hands the Holy Scriptures and to provide for your instruction in the Christian faith. They did this for you because they love you and want only what is best for you. And the very best thing a parent can do for their children is to raise them to know and love God. Confirmation is an educational program of the church, it is not graduation from church. I urge the parents of our confirmands and all parents to continue to encourage their children in faith by faithfully praying for their children and by providing a good example of faithful Christian living.

Grandparents can do some of these same things. One example, make a celebration out of your grandchild’s baptism anniversary. Take your grandchild out to lunch or dinner on the anniversary of his or her baptism and talk about the day they were baptized. If you can’t remember the date of your grandchild’s baptism, just call the church office.

One of our main goals here at Zion is to help you learn more about passing on the faith to your children. We offer special classes for parents on Passing on the Faith. We have special materials available for you. Take responsibility for your child’s growth in faith. Work on it with the same diligence you give to their public school education. The Holy Spirit will **empower** your witness to keep your child in faith and growing in the love of God. This is the most precious gift you can give your children. It is a gift that will last a lifetime.

As we trust in the **power** of the Holy Spirit to uphold, uplift and sustain us we experience the **power** of God holding us in faith. We rest back on the **power** of God knowing that nothing in this life can separate us from His love in Jesus. We belong to God and the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of God's **power** among us.

St. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is appropriate for this Sunday and for you this day. Here’s what St. Paul wrote. **“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with **power** through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**”

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his **power** that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!" (Eph. 3:14-21) **Thanks be to God. AMEN**