

“A NEW SOURCE OF POWER!”

Acts 2:1-21

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There is a lot of talk about energy these days — cheap energy, renewable sources of energy, and energy efficiency. Our modern lifestyle depends on power to make things run and to make things happen. Last Sunday at Church of the Saviour we were thwarted by a failure in power supplied by the Illuminating Company. The lights in our sanctuary were dim, and the organ was not working. Many of us recall the blackout a few years ago when the whole eastern half of the United States was without power.

Most of us do not spend a lot of time thinking about energy and power. We take it for granted that when we plug our electronic gadgets and devices into the wall, they will work. When a battery wears out, we throw it away and get another one. I remember as a boy going to visit my grandparents in southeastern Ohio and seeing the great coal shovels strip mining the land in order to fuel the industries of our nation. Little thought was given to the permanent damage that was being done, or the fact that there was not a limitless supply of coal to be mined. In like fashion, automobiles were built that used gasoline with little concern over a source of their energy or the efficiency with which they operated. Buildings were built with single pane glass and no insulation, and no one worried about the cost of heating and cooling them.

Clearly, the situation has changed. It is difficult to pick up a newspaper these days or listen to television news without hearing something about the energy situation. New standards are being set by the government all the time, and almost everyone is concerned about the cost and availability of energy. Indeed, natural gas and electricity are two of the largest line items in the budget at Church of the Saviour.

This morning I want to talk to you about **a new source of power**. No, I am not offering you stock in a new company that I am starting. Nor do I have a hot investment opportunity. Yet my source is available even to those who, in these difficult times, do not have the wherewithal to make a substantial investment. I want to talk to you about the power of God that came upon the first disciples on the day of Pentecost. It was a power like nothing the world had ever experienced before. And it is available to each of us — to all of us — today.

The **new source of power** is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, which came upon the assembled congregation and enabled them to do great things. I say it was a new source of power because no group had ever appropriated the power of God to that extent before that first Pentecost. The prophet Joel had talked about God pouring out his Spirit on all people. He had caught a vision of a day when young people would see visions and old people would dream dreams, a day when all barriers of race and class and economic status would be eliminated. But that day had never come. Now, fifty days after Easter, the Spirit of God descended upon the

worshipping, praying, believing, trusting congregation, to enable communication, understanding and cooperation the likes of which the world had never seen!

On Pentecost, the barriers came down. The Bible tells us that people from every race and nation were living in Jerusalem at that time. Anyone who has done foreign travel knows that communication can be a huge barrier. How could the disciples communicate the good news about Jesus and his way of life to those whose language they did not know and whose customs they did not understand? How do we communicate with people of other languages and cultures today? Smiles and body language are important. But being able to speak their language is key. That's what happened at Pentecost. The Bible says, "*In their own languages people heard about God's deeds of power.*"(2:11) Regardless of their background or language, on the day of Pentecost people heard God's message. The barriers that divide nations, begin wars, and destroy peace were gone. Gone too were the barriers that we have erected between genders and between those of different socio-economic backgrounds. Most significant of all, the barriers between God and humanity were broken down. The indwelling of God through the Spirit of God, formerly available only to a handful of prophets and religious gurus, was now universally and extravagantly available to all people everywhere. This is the message of Pentecost. This is the **new source of power** that I want to tell you about today. What a source of power it is!

As a congregation, many of our members have come from other nations and cultures. Some have come from Asia, some from Africa, some from Europe. More significantly, we come together from many different spiritual places. Some grew up in the church; some grew up as part of another faith tradition. For some, the experience of being part of Church of the Saviour is the first formal religious experience they have ever had. At Pentecost, the Spirit of God was poured out on a diverse group. That diversity continues to be part of our congregation today. All are welcome here. No barriers of geography or spirituality should keep anyone away from the message of God's accepting love.

The Spirit is poured out on everyone, and that includes all ages of people — from the very youngest child to the oldest adult. The reason we have Youth Sundays at Church of the Saviour is because we believe that God speaks to our youth and through our youth. We believe they have something to say to us adults. In like manner, one never retires from being a Christian. Sometimes people do not want to take an office in the church because of their age. We are never too old to serve the Lord! When the Bible tells us that on the day of Pentecost, God poured out his Spirit upon everyone, no one was excluded. No one should be excluded today. A seminary professor of mine emphasized to our class that as Christians, we must listen to every voice, for we do not know through whom God will speak.

You can imagine that when the Spirit came upon the congregation at Pentecost, when everybody was able to understand, great energy, great power was unleashed. Can you imagine the worship service that Sunday? It was exciting, but it was not just worship for worship's sake. It led to action. That's why I'm talking about power this morning. The Spirit of God led the disciples to witness, to preach and teach, and to share in ways they had never dreamed of before. Within a few days, hundreds of people had joined the movement. Within a few decades the church grew and became a driving force in the entire near eastern world. Within three hundred years, Christianity became the state religion of Rome. Eventually, Christianity became a world-wide religion with millions of followers around the globe. And it all started when the disciples came to understand that the power of God was available to them and to all who believed. That

power motivated them to attempt great things for God, and as they say, the rest is history.

I have entitled this sermon “A ‘New’ Source of Power.” You may say, God’s power is not new. It has been around since the dawn of creation. Indeed, the power of God called our world into being. God’s power created you and me and sustains us from day to day. Yes, that’s true. But I believe that every time someone comes to faith or grasps God’s message in a deeper and fuller way and allows God’s power to work through him or her, something new and fresh and energizing happens in our world.

I am talking about a “new” source of power because we have not fully appropriated God’s power in our lives. On that first Pentecost, Peter got up and tried to explain God’s power. Peter envisioned what could happen if all the people that were gathered together that day let the Spirit loose to work in their lives. Many people believed. In fact, the Spirit of God moved so dramatically that the church grew in ways that even Peter could not imagine.

We are receiving new members into the church today. What would happen if these new members let the Spirit of God take over their lives in a new and fresh way, and at the same time, we let the Spirit of God loose in our lives as well? Would the church be able to make a bigger difference in this community and in our world? Of course it would!

I have not been to a meeting in a long time as exciting as the council chairs meeting I attended a few weeks ago. Almost everybody there had come with one idea or more of about ministries in which this church is already involved or could become involved. We heard about progress on our Habitat House, the meals that the Children’s Council and others are taking to new parents, the stock sale by the youth for the mission trip, and the list goes on. There were many proposals for new and exciting ministries. There was a little frustration in the group. The problem was not a lack of vision, but a need to prioritize and to motivate more people to become involved as God’s faithful disciples in our world today.

Many times when an idea is proposed or a ministry need expressed, it is quickly dismissed because of the cost, either in manpower or dollars. In these uncertain economic times, we are keenly aware of the limitations of our resources. I am reminded of a story that I think should be our model as we move forward in faith. Once upon a time in the middle ages, there was a great famine which caused people to hoard whatever food they could find, hiding it even from their friends and neighbors. One day a wandering pilgrim came into the village and began to ask questions as if he planned to stay for the night.

“There’s not a bite to eat in the whole province,” he was told. “Better keep moving.”

“Oh, I have everything I need,” he said. “In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you.” He pulled an iron cauldron from his wagon, filled it with water, and built a fire under it. Then, with great ceremony, he took an ordinary-looking stone from a velvet bag and dropped it into the water.

“Ah,” said the pilgrim to himself in a stage whisper, “I do like tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage — that’s hard to beat!”

Soon a villager approached him hesitantly, holding a cabbage he’d retrieved from its hiding place, and added it to the pot. “Great!” Cried the pilgrim. “You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salt beef as well, and it was fit for a king.”

The village butcher managed to find some salt beef, and so it went with potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms and so on, until there was indeed a delicious meal for all. The villagers offered the traveler a great deal of money for the magic stone, but he refused to sell and traveled

on the next day. Moral of the story: we have more resources than we are aware. When we work together, great things will happen.

In an adult Sunday school class I once attended, the teacher posed this question to the class, **“What will you attempt this week that is so bold, so risky that you will succeed only with God’s help?”** We need to ask the same question as a church. The truth is, most of us are not sticking our necks out very far, are we? There is **a new source of power** available this day to you and to me. The Spirit of God is in our midst. On the first Pentecost, the church was born. On this Pentecost may the church be born again as we discover **a new source of power** to energize us for God’s work in the world today.

Prayer: On this Pentecost Sunday, help us, O God, to realize that all our energy and power comes from you. May we use this power to spread the word about your love for all people. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.