

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt  
Fourth Presbyterian Church  
Day of Pentecost  
June 4, 2017

### **When You Send Forth Your Spirit**

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34

Today is a profoundly powerful day at Fourth Presbyterian Church.

Profoundly powerful, first of all,  
because today is the Day of Pentecost,  
the day we celebrate the fulfillment of Jesus' Ascension Day promise to his disciples,  
the promise we heard in last week's reading from Acts,  
*that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;  
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria,  
and to the ends of the earth.*

And profoundly powerful because this year the Day of Pentecost  
is coinciding with the Day of Commissioning for our young men and women,  
(and a few of our not-so-young men and women—I'll let you choose your own group)  
as you go out to the ends of the earth in fulfillment of Christ's promise  
and in fulfillment of his Great Commission.

I am emboldened today, and I pray that you, too, are emboldened.  
Emboldened because this power is at work in you,  
in us —  
a power that none of us can fully fathom.

This power has called us and gathered us here today.  
This power is sending you out into the world over the next several weeks.  
The power at work in us is the Holy Spirit —  
the Spirit of the Living God, the Living Christ, the Crucified and Risen One  
who breathed on the first disciples,  
and still breathes on his disciples today.

Now, to be sure,  
this power may not always make us *feel* powerful.  
In fact, it may be the case that more often than not  
we may be *feel* rather weak, rather feeble, and unsure of ourselves,  
even while this power is at work in us.

But this is the good news about God's power at work in us:  
It does not in any way depend upon how we *feel* at any given time!  
Sometimes this power may inspire us, embolden us, revive us, delight us,  
overjoy us, and overwhelm us with ecstatic feeling.

But sometimes — and perhaps even more often than not —  
this power works in us to sustain in us an endurance,

and strengthens us  
to draw our next breath,  
to put one foot in front of the other, to take the next step,  
to shape the lips, loose the tongue, and find the voice, to speak the next word,  
to lift our hands to share a cup of cold water with the next thirsty soul.

Sometimes — an perhaps even more often than not —  
this power works in us when all we feel is exhausted.  
Which is to point out that it is not our power,  
but God's power.  
It is the power of God's Holy Spirit.  
And the reality of that power at work in us  
is the ONLY reason for us to be gathered here today.

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It is especially good that so many of the missionaries we are commissioning today  
are our youth,  
and that many of you have been through confirmation  
within the last several years.

You have been confirmed into the faith of the church,  
but also into the persistent questioning and wondering of the church;  
the questioning and wondering of people of faith  
who struggle to know God,  
and to follow God's Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
and to experience God's Spirit — the Holy Spirit.

It is always a question that confirmands ask,  
because it is a question that older, more mature believers will often ask:  
what or who is the Holy Spirit,  
and have I ever experienced this Spirit at work in me?  
It is a good question. A real question.

The Brief Statement of Faith of the Presbyterian Church (USA)  
declares: "We trust in God the Holy Spirit,  
everywhere the giver and renewer of life."

The Holy Spirit is everywhere the giver and renewer of life.  
In other words,  
while we who are the church may claim and celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit  
among us,  
we cannot claim any sort of exclusive rights to the Holy Spirit  
who is at work everywhere!

Our calling as the church is to know and to proclaim  
where and how and why the Spirit is at work,  
as Jesus Christ has revealed this to us.

We are the proclaimers, the witnesses,  
but not the owners of the Spirit,  
who is everywhere the giver and renewer of life.

From the beginning of holy scripture to the end,  
the work of the Holy Spirit is proclaimed, in many and various ways.

We do not get past the second verse of Genesis before the Spirit makes an appearance:  
*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,  
the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,  
while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.*

That wind is the Spirit of God.  
*Ruach* in the Hebrew, which refers to the wind, the breath, and the Spirit of God.  
The next time you enter the sanctuary through this front vestibule,  
notice the window.  
The symbol of the Spirit, a dove, is brooding over you,  
and over the face of the waters of creation,  
which roil and billow around it.  
And the dove carries a branch in its beak,  
a symbol of the life, and the renewal of life, God gives.

In the Psalm for this Pentecost Sunday, Psalm 104,  
we hear about the Spirit at work, giving life to all creation...  
*O LORD, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.  
These all look to you to give them their food in due season;  
when you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.  
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath [their *ruach*],  
they die and return to their dust.  
When you send forth your spirit [your *ruach*] they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground.*

In the Old Testament reading for this Pentecost Sunday,  
Moses shares the Spirit of God with the elders of the community,  
and they are given the power to proclaim the Word of God.  
And while Moses and the elders are out proclaiming the Word of God  
in the way that Moses has ordained them to do,  
there is a stir back in the camp  
as two other members of the community begin to proclaim the Word,  
but they are not part of the group Moses has ordained.  
It seems out of order to some Presbyterian-like folk,  
and they get a little bunched up about this,  
but Moses is not bothered.

He says to his defenders:

*"Are you jealous for my sake?*

*Would that all the Lord's people were prophets,  
and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!"*

He does not feel the need to control, much less to limit, the work of the Spirit,  
but rejoices wherever he sees the Spirit giving life,  
whenever the Lord sends forth his Spirit.

And so Paul, in the epistle reading for this Pentecost Sunday,  
celebrates the Spirit at work in the community of faith, saying

*...there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;  
and there are varieties of activities,  
but it is the same God  
who activates all of them in everyone.*

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

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So the witness of holy scriptures is that *when the Lord sends forth his Spirit*  
she shows up in all manner of ways,  
in all manner of people, places, moments, actions, events, and surprises.

The Spirit is at work in the wild-eyed prophet standing on the street corner,  
as well as the carefully-choreographed high-church liturgy.

The Spirit is at work in the homeless panhandler in Manchester, England,  
who runs *toward* the sound of bombs exploding to comfort the injured and the dying.

The Spirit is at work in the great proclaimers of the Word  
like Billy Graham and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pope Francis,  
as well as the 9-year old girl who learns sign-language  
so she can communicate with her deaf grandfather.

The Spirit is at work in Presbyterian minister David Taylor  
who befriends the youth here in Nicholtown and out in rural Greenville County  
in the ministry of Momentum Bike Club,  
as well as the many members of our community  
who are diligently working for the growth of affordable housing  
as our city and county grow.

And yes, the Spirit can even be at work in the glacially slow and tedious work  
of administrative statecraft — carefully and professionally carried out —  
it is not just the devil that is in the details,  
but also the Spirit.

And the Spirit is at work in you.  
In the community of believers  
*gathered*  
and *going*  
and *generously giving*.

So on this Pentecost Sunday, my charge to all of us,  
but especially to you who will be commissioned today,  
is this:

Be alert!  
Be on the lookout!  
Be witnesses to what the Spirit of God is doing today!  
And find a way to join in that work!

Sometimes it's fun...  
but when it's not...  
find a way to go deeper,  
and discover the joy...  
...the joy of life... new and abundant...  
...that springs up in this world...

*when the Lord sends forth his Spirit.*