

## Something for Everyone

Acts 2:1-4, 43-47; 1 Cor 12:1-11; Jn 14:15-27

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Church of the New Covenant

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There is an amusing scene at the beginning of the book of Acts. Jesus has been stopping in on his disciples in the days following his resurrection, and he's been telling them things much like what we heard today in the gospel of John. "Pretty soon you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." One day he leads them out of Jerusalem to a certain place – some say Bethany – and it's easy to picture them on a hilltop of some sort. He stands among them, speaking about the Holy Spirit, and about some kind of power they are supposed to be receiving. While he is still speaking he begins to rise up into the air: [Voice fading into the distance] "... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth ..."

He rises up and up until they can't hear him any more, up and up until fades out of view into the clouds. And there they are, the disciples, staring up into space.

"Duuuuuuuuude."

[pause]

Out of nowhere comes another voice. "Hey guys!"

"Whoa!!"

They whip their heads around and see two guys in white. They appear to be standing, well, near the ground but not quite *on* it.

"What are you looking up there for? You've got work to do down here. You'll see him later. Go on back to Jerusalem."

The guys in white dissolve into the trees behind them. The disciples stare in their direction for a while. Then they look around at each other. Nobody knows what to say. One of them shrugs his shoulders, and so they trundle off down the hill and back to house where they were hiding.

They were still pretty unsettled after all that had happened. They had been afraid for their lives when Jesus was executed. They had been alarmed by his arrival in their midst afterwards. They still weren't sure what to make of his repeated appearances to them. Sure, it was better than him being dead. But it was awfully weird to see him that way. Now he was gone again.

As the men and women who had been his followers spent the next several days together, they must have had a question something like this running through their conversation: What are we going to do now?

What are we going to do now?

To a great degree, this is where we find ourselves today. Of course, we are not living in the post-resurrection disorientation of the disciples. Most of us have been living and serving in this church or the larger Christian fellowship for years. But -- especially here -- we find ourselves wondering, What are we doing here?

We have been experiencing our fair share of difficulties over the past several years. What is going to happen next? What door is God opening for us now? And once that door begins to open, How on earth are we going to be able to rise to our new task?

The answer for the frightened and perplexed followers of Jesus in Jerusalem came in spectacular fashion. It came on the day of Pentecost, which is an ancient Jewish festival celebrating the grain harvest. The name itself means "fifty" -- so named because it comes fifty days after Passover. The day also became associated with the giving of the Law to Moses at Sinai, which also came with a dramatic display of heavenly power on the mountaintop. The giving of the Law to the people of Israel, and the arrival of the Holy Spirit into the Community of Christ bear important similarities.

Pentecost was the day a wind blew through the room where the disciples were hiding. It has often been described as "the rush of a mighty wind," but that is a very wimpy rendering. It was a *gale* that shook not only the windows but the entire building. It blasted through the room where they were sitting, throwing dust into their faces, whipping their hair and their clothes, nearly knocking them over on top of each other.

With the fierce wind came the fire, streaming like lightning onto each of their heads.

The writer goes on to say they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Whereas once they had hidden in fear, now they began to speak forthrightly about what they had experienced in their time with Jesus. Not only did they tell their story, somehow they were able to convey it in languages they had never before been able to speak.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit. They weren't merely aglow with it. They were on fire.

This was the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise Jesus had made to them. In John's gospel we heard Jesus say, "The Father will send you another Advocate [or Helper], the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, who will confirm in you everything I have said and done." Luke, in his gospel, reports him as saying "You will be clothed with power from on high."

This was the beginning of the empowering of the church -- of the women and men whom God was sending forth to say to a fractured and deluded world, "There is a better way for you to live!"

The Holy Spirit was filling disciples with courage, with powers of utterance, and with a passion for the way of living they had experienced with Christ. They had received the answer to their question, "What are we going to do now?"

Which brings us back to *our* questions. What is next for us? and How are we going to rise to our task?

Here is where St Paul can give us a little help. When he is writing to the church in Corinth, some time has elapsed since that Pentecost day – 20 years at least. Various apostles have been establishing churches throughout the Roman empire. Paul himself founded the one in Corinth, among others.

They have been about the business of inviting people into the life of faith and expressing that faith through their ministries of generosity and compassion. All the churches have been empowered and inspired by the same Spirit who had manifested itself so vividly at Pentecost.

In addition to unexpected powers of speech, that Spirit has been providing them with special abilities they would not have guessed they had.

Paul lists some of them: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, discernment, and more. This is the first of several lists in the epistles of what we call spiritual gifts.

Heady things, to be sure, which we'll explore in more depth next week. For today, we need to have one thing impressed upon our hearts: The Spirit has provided gifts to the church for one purpose, and one purpose alone: For continuing the ministry of Christ in this broken and fearful world.

It is a daunting undertaking. Where there is hunger, we are called to provide food. Where there is sickness, we are called to provide comfort. Where there is injustice, we are called to speak truth. Where people wall others out, we are called to roll out the welcome mat. Where people are bound up by hatred and greed and the idiocy of war, we are called to place flowers in the gun barrels and proclaim the liberating love of God.

There are new ways in which we are being called into that work. How are we going to be able to do it?

At this point in the life of the Church of the New Covenant, we may feel more like the disciples did a day or so *before* Pentecost than they did afterwards. We are wondering what our future is going to be like, and we are wondering whether we will have what we need to venture into it.

Therefore, part of our Lenten discipline is to *live* with these questions and *watch* for the ways the Holy Spirit will manifest itself in each one of us. That's right. Each one of us. You – and me. The Spirit of God has empowering gifts for each one of us.

Our time of watching is not simply sitting here waiting. It will require prayer. It will require conversation. It will require a deep sense of expectation. A new door is about to open to us.

We can't just set up a row of chairs in front of the door and wait for it to happen. We have to get up and move toward it, which means we have to stay fully engaged in the ways we already are serving.

We have to move toward that door, and press against it and try the handle. We have to look for the light that is coming in around the edges, and listen for the wind that's beginning to rustle the dried leaves outside. We have to be ready for that door to fling wide open and for the gusts of the Holy Spirit to catch us up with great power and send us forward who knows where.

And wherever that is, and whatever we will be called to do, we have nothing to fear. Each of us will have everything we need to do our part, and together we will be equipped with the power that exceeds all other powers in the universe: the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.