

When the Spirit Comes

April 15, 2012

1 John 1:1-2:2 Acts 1:1-8

1 John 1-2:2

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

^{2:1} My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Acts 1:1-8

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Christ is Risen!

He is Risen indeed!

Will you pray with me...
May the words of my mouth...

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Let me set the scene in a broader context for where we are in the life of the church, both historically and where we are going over the next few weeks.

After the resurrection Jesus appeared bodily to his disciples, and others, in various places over the following 40 days. We're 7 days into that sequence and from texts which we won't read this morning we remember that Thomas, who was somewhere else last week, thought they were playing an April Fools joke on him, and refused to believe their story that Jesus was alive. However he was with the disciples a week later when Jesus showed up again. We're not focusing on that event, but that evening Thomas saw him, fell to his knees and made the profound confession "My Lord, and my God!"

We might expect they were eager to soak in all they could – the one they had thought was the Messiah – and who was the Messiah, but not the Messiah they expected. Here he was, appearing and disappearing and talking with them, like the days before, but somehow different.

Different certainly because he would just show up in their midst whereas before his presence was more predictable. Different because before they knew it was him, and now when he appeared it took them a few moments to recognize him... Kind of like when you see someone you know from church at Walmart – they're in street clothes instead of Sunday dress. Their hair may not be done up, they have made a dash out without putting on their makeup. You see them, their face is familiar, but it takes a moment to connect. But in this case it could take anywhere from minutes to hours to realize it was Jesus.

So the disciples struggled with this contextual paradox – he was there but not. He looked familiar but out of place. He appeared different but the same. He was dead but is alive. Perhaps there was a renewed sense of invincibility and power – the One who could

command the storm to cease, had been crucified and died, yet was alive again.

Perhaps there was an expectation that now, with the suffering servant part of the prophecy fulfilled, that the original expectations would finally be fulfilled; the good stuff they had been anticipating. "Lord, now are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel?"

And his reply does not appear to answer their question, but perhaps it actually does. "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

'I can't tell you when that part of your expectation is coming, but I will tell you what's coming next... When the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will receive power ...'

So like Jesus: not the answer they wanted, but the answer they needed. This is the paradox within which we will focus our attention over the next several weeks. We, too would like to know when God is going to step in and make everything right. And, like the disciples (though we may be reluctant to admit it) we are kind of looking forward to our own reward in all that aren't we? "No more tears and sorrow, no more pain and suffering, no more death and separation... all our time praising Jesus by and by in the land of cloudless days... And Jesus says "in God's time, by God's Spirit." Meanwhile, there is work to be done.

Jesus was not side-stepping the question, he was actually going to the heart of the matter. God's restoration of Israel was not to be the establishment of a politically independent nation. God knows how easily people can adopt an idolatrous relationship with their national identity. Instead Jesus was telling them, and us, that the movement which God started through Jesus, was a movement of inclusiveness for Jew and Gentile alike. It is for Christian and non-Christian, for God sends rain and sunshine on all humanity.

God's call to Abraham was that he would be blessed in order to be a blessing to people of all nations. Blessing, in God's terms, is not a showering of favor and prosperity. Blessing in God's terms is a commissioning and an empowerment to accomplish God's purpose and will. God's blessing on us today is the same – not a satisfaction of our

temporal needs and wants, but a commissioning and empowerment to contribute to God's purpose for all humanity.

When the Holy Spirit comes you will receive _____, to be my _____, in _____, _____, _____, and _____.

So let's start with that first word "When the Holy Spirit comes you will receive _____, .

What is power?

What is the difference between energy and power?

A yard full of preschoolers has energy, but is that power?

I want to try something and I have no idea if it will work, but I want to try it anyway – **bulletin wave:** "everyone wave your bulletin around in the air – that expends energy but it does not particularly represent power. Now this side of the congregation I want you to stand and face the other side and wave your bulletins at them. Ok – the energy is all going in a general direction – but not much power. Now the other side – there are fewer of you, but I want you to do the same, but this time all wave your bulletins just once on the count of three..." (the wave of air caused one to cry out "wow!")

Power is the ability to accomplish work. It is energy directed and focused with a purpose. Most of us used a power tool to get here this morning – how many walked here? How many used a car? The power tool of a car got all but one of us here this morning. I used to be envious of people who had a cordless screwdriver but could never justify buying one – I just didn't need it *that* much... But my envy was resolved when my son bought me a cordless drill and I'm all set, when the battery is charged up. This morning Janice used a broom to sweep off the entry areas. But if I asked you to sweep the whole sanctuary would you want to use the broom or a vacuum? The power tools allow us to do more work in less time, with less effort on our part, right?

Broom is ok for small job... but if I asked you to sweep the sanctuary would you prefer a broom, or a vacuum? Only problem is that we have to plug into the power source, charge up the battery, or gas up the car and turn the key...

Stay with me... if Jesus says we are to be given power – i.e. a power tool – then the implication is that the work is greater, the task assigned is bigger than we can reasonably be expected to do in our own strength. Right?

Most of us have heard the story about the boy on the beach after a storm had washed up thousands of starfish stranded when the waters receded. The boy was throwing starfish back into the water and a man, after watching him for a while asked “Why do you bother? What you’re doing is admirable, but it doesn’t really matter. There must be thousands and you can’t save them all.” And without missing a beat the boy said, “it matters to this one, and this one, and this one.”

Sometimes I ask myself if what I am doing really matters, even if what we are doing together as a church, really matters. And, of course, the answer is yes, it matters to this one, and this one, and this one. Yet sometimes churches can get so busy doing and doing and doing in our own energy and strength, that we feel like we never really get anything done. Sweeping with a broom instead of a vacuum.

In a meeting early this year, after reading through the Charge Conference list of all that we had done, all the energy expended, one member of the group asked “if we are doing all that, what is missing? Why aren’t we busting out at the seams?”

Perhaps what is missing the power – the power that comes from seeking and pursuing God’s will as revealed by the Holy Spirit. We can get so busy doing what we usually do, that when the Spirit calls us to a new perspective, a new venture, we simply are too busy to respond. As a result we burn a lot of energy, and it makes a difference to this one, and this one, and this one... but it falls short of transforming the world.

As United Methodists that’s our mission; to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Transformation of the world. That will require more energy than I have, more than we have all put together, but “when the Spirit comes... you will receive _____.”

Power comes from aligning the energy and strength we have with God’s purpose in our lives. And by God’s purpose in our lives I don’t mean just our personal salvation, and receiving the gift of

eternal life... God has an assignment – a commissioning, a task, for each of us as his representatives in the world.

And we'll look at that next week.