

When the Spirit Comes

April 22, 2012

1 John 3: 1-7, 13-14 Acts 1:1-8

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¹ How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ... ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

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."

Will you pray with me...

May the words of my mouth...

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

It ought to begin to sound familiar – I told you we’d be dwelling on this passage of promise for a while...

I see three basic elements to this promise: there is a resource, a purpose, and a direction.

Last week we talked about the resource: power from the Holy Spirit. This week we will focus on the purpose, and next week we’ll begin to look at direction.

For those who were not here last week, we tried an experiment I was not sure would work. We all waved our bulletins expending energy like two year olds running around a playground. Then I had this side of the congregation wave their bulletins toward the other side – there was a direction to the energy. But then the other side I had wave their bulletins on the count of three – there was a more coordinated action. And I couldn’t have planned it better than when Carol Kenny spontaneously called out “wow” when that directed and coordinated wave of air blew across the sanctuary. And we began to understand power as energy aligned and applied in a manner to accomplish work... a purpose.

We also observed that power tools let us do more than we could with our own energy – automobile versus shoes, battery operated screwdriver versus ordinary screwdriver, vacuum versus broom. And we recognized the implication that if God intends to send *power* in the Holy Spirit – then the task which God wants to accomplish through us is very likely bigger than us and our ability – something we cannot expect to do without the empowerment of God’s spirit.

Wesley was not concerned that the Methodist societies would ever cease to exist, but he was concerned that they would become mere forms of religious practice, devoid of power. And he was correct in his concern. Many churches are busy, busy, busy, spending a lot of energy but never seeming to accomplish anything.

So, there is a resource for our life as a church, for our lives as representatives of Christ in the world, the power of the Spirit. We are not limited by our ability, but empowered by God's ability. We are not limited by our strength, but empowered by God's strength. We are not limited by our vision, but empowered by God's vision. However, we have to plug into that resource by aligning and focusing our energy in the direction of God's greater purpose.

We are empowered for a purpose, a reason. The promise has three elements; a resource, a purpose, a direction. Today we focus on the second element of the promise – the purpose.

So – let's go back to the text... why did Jesus say we would receive power? For what purpose?

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

You will receive power to _____
There is the purpose.

If Jesus is right, (and I think we can safely assume he knew what he was talking about) we receive power to be _____. It might come as a disappointment to us, but we don't receive the power of the Holy Spirit to preach well-crafted sermons, or to build awe-inspiring buildings, or to plan excellent programs, or to produce wonderful music, or to raise funds and balance budgets. *However*, those good

things are empowered when they bear witness to the risen Christ. They are not the purpose in and of themselves.

All those good things may be tools in the toolbox, skills in the skill set, but if they are empowered by the Spirit, they are empowered for one reason, one purpose – to bear witness to the risen Christ. A hammer in the toolbox has a purpose as a tool to drive nails or other materials into positions which connect and create something more than just a hammer and a nail.

A piece of music is just ink on a page. When musicians interpret it it can become a work of art. But when it bears witness to the risen Christ, it becomes empowered by the Spirit - doing far more in stirring hearts and drawing us toward God, than ink on a page, or even skilled musicians could ever do in their own energy.

Most of us have heard sermons preached which were well crafted, delivered well, but somehow lacked power. I probably have preached some of those. But, then there are also those sermons which may seemed disjointed, in which the preacher stumbles and mumbles, but they are somehow empowered. I had someone come up to me during the week and say “I actually got something out of your sermon last Sunday!” And it was the difference between energy and power. I’d never thought of it that way.

But the difference is not necessarily always in the delivery – sometimes the empowerment is in the receiving, whether our hearts are open to what God has to say. On any particular week any preacher within any congregation will be heard as inspiring by some, and as boring by others. The difference then is not in the delivery, but in the reception. Folks who come prepared to hear what God has for them are rarely disappointed. Folks who come wanting the preacher to say what they want to hear, frequently leave feeling ‘unfed.’

There is an account of John Wesley making an unexpected visit to one of the Methodist preaching houses – actually the one where his mother Suzanna was a leader. The scheduled speaker was a lay person and John apparently planned to step in and preach, but his mother resolutely insisted that he allow the service to proceed as planned. The speaker stammered as he started. His grammar disclosed that he was quite obviously not well educated and it took his mother’s hand on his knee to keep John from taking over for the sake of dignity. But as the speaker continued his witness to the risen Christ people were moved to tears, to conviction, to repentance, to salvation, and to regeneration.

What Wesley thought was a scandal – inadequate training and education for such a noble purpose – turned out to be a witness to even Wesley himself. The man was empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the presence of the risen Christ in his life. And through that witness others were drawn to an awareness of Christ’s presence in their own lives. But they also had to be open to hearing the Word.

So, when the Holy Spirit comes we will receive _____, to be his _____, in _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Witnesses. What does it mean to be a witness?

To tell what we know.

The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
Joe Friday of Dragnet: ‘The facts, ma’am, just the facts.’ -

A recipe book is a collection of witnesses of what result someone got when they put certain things together in a certain order. We repeat what they did and get a similar result.

A medical doctor looks at the evidence of a patient's symptoms and by their knowledge they bear witness to the likely diagnosis of their condition. Trusting their expertise we pursue a course of treatment.

The Scriptures are a collection of witnesses of what people experienced in relationship with God. It also evokes that relationship within the hearers when we are receptive.

Just as new recipes and new medical diagnoses are made each day, so new relationship with Jesus Christ and new dimensions of existing relationships with the risen Lord happen each day. And as we have those encounters we ourselves become witnesses of the living presence of the risen Lord.

So if the Holy Spirit gives us power to be witnesses to the risen Christ, there must be a purpose greater than our own satisfaction – otherwise we wouldn't need the power, right? Our purpose is not to just receive God's love and grace, but to share it, to bear witness. When we receive God's grace in Jesus Christ, we are also empowered to bear witness to the risen Lord.

I come across evidence of the presence and power of the risen Christ everyday. And, frankly, I sometimes just take it for granted, and might not even give it a second thought. The downside of that is that I often miss what we might call 'God sightings.' It becomes important to reflect, preferably each day, on the events of the past 24 hours and ask where we saw evidence of Christ's resurrected presence.

I could share a dozen examples but one particular instance this past week was when I got a forwarded email from Stephanie Wambles about her 5 year old granddaughter;

*I just got off the phone with Krista, Kalan's wife, and she had taken Ashlyn to the scoliosis doctor for her check up. After xrays the doctor told her that her scoliosis is **improving**, that is unheard of. I thank the Lord for a praying church. Keep circling her with your prayers. Thank you, so much. **"bold prayers honor God and God honors bold prayers"***

That is a medical expert's witness that a medically 'unheard of' healing is occurring. The Holy Spirit is empowering the witness of his people of that Jesus Christ is still alive, still at work, still on mission.

If you have prayed for Ashlyn anytime over the past 5 years, this is also now a part of your witness.

When I asked at the beginning of the service that we be intentional about prayer for the work of the General Conference, it is because I believe that prayer works. Not as a 'tell God what to do' formula, but as a focused concentration of spiritual energy from the Holy Spirit that can be felt as the delegates meet. And part of that prayer is that the delegates will be sensitive and responsive to the movement of the Spirit. And if we do that, then God's will made manifest will be yet another part of our witness.

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

God's purpose in our lives is not just our personal salvation, satisfaction and convenience. We are commissioned and empowered to be witnesses of his living presence. The resource is the Holy Spirit's power. The purpose is to be witnesses of God's grace in the risen Jesus. And the last element of the promise is the direction...

And we'll begin to look at that next week.