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**The Day of Pentecost**  
**June 8, 2025**  
**Romans 8:14-17; Acts 2:1-21**

**"O, The Places We'll Go"**

Some Pastors have a dramatic flair (not me of course!), but sometimes the drama backfires. One such minister of a large church conspired with the custodian to surprise the congregation on Pentecost with a dove that they had hidden in the highest part of the Nave. The idea was for the custodian to release the dove into the unsuspecting congregation on the minister's cue, "The Holy Spirit descended like a dove."

At the proper time in the sermon, the preacher said, "The Holy Spirit descended like a dove," looking skyward, but nothing happened. Again he said, a little louder, "The Holy Spirit descended like a dove," but still nothing happened. A third time he repeated his cue, almost bellowing it out, "The Holy Spirit descended like a dove," only to have the custodian reply: The cat ate the Holy Spirit. Do you want me to throw down the cat?"

The day of Pentecost is supposed to be a surprising day (maybe not that surprising, but surprising nonetheless). On the day of Pentecost, the disciples gathered to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Weeks, a harvest festival, sort of like our Thanksgiving Day, when they were overcome by a power unlike anything they had ever experienced.

Luke, the writer of Acts, groped for words or images to describe their ecstatic experience, saying first that they heard the power of the Holy Spirit, which sounded like the wind of a hurricane or a tornado; then stating that "tongues," meaning languages, danced among them like flames.

In a miraculous reversal of the outcome of the "Tower of Babel," the disciples were given an extraordinary ability to speak like accomplished "Rosetta Stone" graduates. In a single, swift, symbolic surprise, God demolished all the barriers humanity had constructed through the centuries. Differences in language, race, ethnic background, and religion were rendered obsolete by the inclusion of such a variety of folks in the Pentecost experience. Clearly, the power of the Holy Spirit was not to be restricted to a select group of people.

Like a stone breaking the still surface of a lake, the Holy Spirit splashed into the world sending ripples to the furthest shores, and throughout all time. We call Pentecost the birthday of the church because it was the day when the church was born. Before the day of

Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were a small, close-knit group of folks. After the day of Pentecost, their numbers had grown by more than three thousand and they were charged with energy to do some mighty miraculous things. Those miraculous things are continuing today, even though we are probably not aware of it.

According to Lifeway Research, Christianity is growing the fastest in Africa and Asia. Just 22 years ago 814 million Christians lived in Europe and North America and 660 million lived in Africa and Asia. Today, 838 million Christians live in the Global north and 1.1 Billion live in Africa and Asia. The converting power of the Holy Spirit was set loose on Pentecost Day, and it is still shocking the world with electrifying results.

Pentecost was and is a day of conversion. The conversion that takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit is not only the conversion of non-believers into believers, but also the conversion of believers into **doers**. At the same time that the Holy Spirit moved three thousand non-believers to become believers on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit motivated the disciples, those who already believed, to convert their passive belief into active faith.

In the disciples' Pentecost experience, we see three aspects of conversion demonstrated by the power of the Holy Spirit: mere **speech** was converted into **communication**; **adversity** was transformed into **advantage**; and **inertia** was changed into **momentum**.

The miracle of Pentecost is as much about hearing as it is about speaking. It is a miracle of ears as well as tongues. The amazing thing was not just that these uneducated men spoke languages they didn't know, but that their speech meant something to each person in the crowd. This was a two-way miracle which occurred in both the sender and the receiver of the message of Good News. God had converted **speech** into **communication**.

The disciples had faced serious threats against their safety throughout Jesus' earthly ministry. On the day of Pentecost, they came together "for old times' sake," not really knowing what to expect. It had been a decade of days since Jesus' ascension into heaven and they were anxious about their future. The Holy Spirit empowered these mostly illiterate followers to speak fluently in languages they should not have been able to speak. With the mysterious cacophony echoing through the alleyways of Jerusalem, a crowd, which resembled a mini United Nations, gathered and listened with astonishment as each person heard the gospel in their native language. The disciples' anxiety disappeared as they realized that the Spirit had created conditions where they could speak and be understood. The Holy Spirit had converted **adversity** into an **advantage**.

Did you know there has been a resurgence of the church in Cuba? The Presbyterian Church is growing daily in Cuba and has several presbyteries and even a seminary. I visited Cuba with other denominational leaders in 2010 and was pleasantly surprised to discover a thriving Presbyterian presence on the island.

One pastor related that by the 1980's her church had dwindled to 2 members under an oppressive regime. But they were determined to keep their church open no matter what. In 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union, faith leaders began to organize to petition for a change in the Cuban constitution. They were granted a meeting with Fidel Castro, the President of Cuba as they plead their cause to loosen restrictions on churches and synagogues.

At the end of the meeting President Castro agreed to change one word in the Cuban constitution. Since 1959, the constitution stated that Cuba existed as an atheist state, which meant that churches and synagogues were forced to go underground for fear of arrest. The change in the constitution Castro agreed to support was to change the word "atheist" to "secular." Shortly after this momentous meeting, the Cuban constitution declared Cuba as a secular (not atheist) state, and churches emerged from the shadows and immediately began to grow.

Today the seminary has more than 100 students, 2/3 of which are women. It's an amazing turn around in a country that was thought by many to be beyond reach. But the reach of the Holy Spirit is unstoppable. Truly, the faith leaders in Cuba turned adversity into advantage.

God demonstrated the ultimate conversion of a negative into a positive on the cross, transforming it from a symbol of defeat and death into a symbol of victory and newlife. Converting adversity into advantage is a trademark of the Holy Spirit in our world today.

Lastly, the power of the Holy Spirit works on converting our lack of motivation. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were transformed from a timid, trembling, troop to a courageous, convincing, company of converts. The Holy Spirit transformed their **inertia** into **momentum**. The Holy Spirit moved the disciples to take action because they couldn't contain this power to themselves.

Electricians tell me that if I stand in this pulpit on a rubber pad or something that grounds me, I can touch a live cable carrying one thousand volts of electricity without any harm to myself, for the simple reason that electricity will not come in unless it can go out. The same is true of the power of the Holy Spirit. If I try to keep my faith to myself, I will stagnate because I will lack the power of the Holy Spirit. Power comes in only when it can get out.

Several years ago, I led a group to explore opportunities for mission with our brothers and sisters in Peru. While there, we met Pastor Leopoldo, who serves a church in Cusco. Pastor Leopoldo went with us to a location about 8 hours by bus from Cusco to a town named Quillabamba. Leopoldo wanted to show us a project about a 2 hour bus ride outside Quillabamba, where his vision was to establish a seminary.

We left early in the morning and traveled into the high jungle to the location where a local couple had donated some land for the seminary. The bus stopped and our group of 16 got out onto the dirt road and looked around for a sign of the seminary. The only thing I saw was jungle and lots of it. Then, one of our group saw a man on the hillside coming down through the undergrowth swinging a machete to clear a path for us. He motioned for us to follow him up the hillside, which we did.

The crest of the hill had been cleared for a very basic structure of 2X4's, a dirt floor, a metal roof and plastic "walls." This was the beginnings of their seminary. And they had a student roll list posted - on a post - with 18 students. They met for classes in this rudimentary structure, slept, cooked and ate in a house that was probably 12X16, all because they wanted to know how to spread the gospel to their neighbors. And they were happy about it!

After our visit, we discovered that Leopoldo makes the bus ride of 8 hours each way once each week to teach at the seminary and nurture the students in the faith. I asked him why he did this, when it was not even in his own presbytery. He said, "Because I cannot keep faith to myself. My responsibility is to pass the faith on to the next generation of leaders of Christ's church." By the way, Leopoldo is 84 and still going strong.

As a result of that trip, one church in Texas agreed to help construct proper buildings for the seminary. Today the seminary buildings are complete and provide space for classrooms and dormitories for 55 students.

The power of the Holy Spirit is a surprising thing when we allow it to work through us. With the Holy Spirit inspiring and challenging us, there isn't anything we can't do except keep it to ourselves. When we share the power with others we will be surprised at what we are led to do.

Those who gathered on Pentecost did not expect to be infused by power any more than we expect it today. But I've got news for you - the power of the Holy Spirit is available to us right now. The Holy Spirit is up to something grand with Providence Presbyterian Church. We don't know what it is yet, but I can tell that God is urging us to expand our mission and ministry.

We are being called to witness to God's inclusive love in this community. The good news of God's unconditional love for all creation has gotten lost in all the cacophony of politics and un-Christ-like behavior of many who purport to be Christian. Unfortunately, hate and prejudice shout louder than love, but love always wins out when we persist in welcoming, serving and loving everyone.

The church has too often been commandeered by those with an agenda of exclusivity and judgment which has made many folks avoid the church. Our responsibility is to reclaim the

essential message of Christ – love God and love one another. We need to be prepared to listen, really listen, to those who have felt excluded and judged by the church, even to the point of apologizing for the pain caused by those whose God acts an awful lot like them. It is up to us to show people that God is so much more inclusive, loving and forgiving than anyone can imagine.

There is a world of hurting people all around us who need to know that God loves and accepts them just as they are; and they need to know that God won't leave them where they are but will walk beside them through all the trials, troubles and turmoil the world throws at them. We share this good news not as those who have "arrived" but as those who need that love, acceptance and forgiveness just as much as anyone. As the theologian D. T. Niles said, spreading the good news is "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

This may seem like a big task for us to represent God's love in the world, but that is where the Holy Spirit comes in, giving us the actions and words that will spread God's love to those most in need. We can be sure that when the Holy Spirit is involved our speech will be converted into communication, our adversity will be converted into advantage and our inertia will be converted into momentum. We don't have to be in Peru or Africa or Cuba to experience it in a dynamic way in our lives.

Dr Suess wrote a book titled, Oh the Places You'll Go, which has this passage:

All Alone!

Whether you like it or not,

Alone will be something

you'll be quite a lot.

And when you're alone,

there's a very good chance

you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants.

There are some, down the road between hither and yon,

that can scare you so much you won't want to go on.

But on you will go

though the weather be foul.

On you will go

though your enemies prowl.

On you will go

though the Hakken-Kraks howl.

Onward up many

a frightening creek,  
 though your arms may get sore  
 and your sneakers may leak.  
 On and on you will hike,  
 And I know you'll hike far  
 and face up to your problems  
 whatever they are.  
 You'll get mixed up, of course,  
 as you already know.  
 You'll get mixed up  
 with many strange birds as you go.  
 So be sure when you step.  
 Step with care and great tact  
 and remember that Life's  
 a Great Balancing Act.  
 Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.  
 And never mix up your right foot with your left.  
 And will you succeed?  
 Yes! You will, indeed!  
 (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)  
 KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!

Moving mountains is the business of the Holy Spirit.

So, take a chance, yes, take a leap.  
 Even when you're scared or want to weep.  
 The Spirit gives you words to speak  
 and actions for even the most meek.  
 Do not give up, do not give in.  
 The Spirit will be with you through thick and through thin.  
 So, don't be surprised when your love and your care  
 are welcomed by those with whom you'd dare.  
 The surprising thing that isn't so odd,  
 is that when we share love, we represent God.

Oh, the places we'll go when we go with God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE CHARGE: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen