

The Day the Power Came

Acts 2:1-41

Last week we began the fall sermon series on the first half of the book of Acts and I talked a lot about vision – what is God’s vision for our church? What does he want us to focus on that will unite us together? Vision isn’t just a good idea or another project or program – in our small group this week we talked about how none of us needs one more thing to do. We don’t need a new project or program; we need a new picture of what God wants us to become. A vision that clarifies who we are as a church family and who God wants us to be. We know that we are supposed to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ, because that’s what God calls every church to do – that’s our mission. But what is that going to look like at East Lincoln Alliance Church? That’s the question we’re asking God to answer as we seek his vision together.

Last week we saw some of God’s vision for the church in Jerusalem begin to unfold as Jesus told them to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit and when it came they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And we know that part of that vision applies to us as well – we too are called to be witnesses of Christ – not in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but in our local communities and county here in Wisconsin. We too need the power of the Holy Spirit in order to do that, and in order to experience that power we too have to devote ourselves to prayer – just like the early disciples did. I don’t know how it all works or why God does things the way he does, but I do know that prayer, power, and witness are part of the equation. Today we are going to look at the day that power came.

I think it was two summers ago when we had a huge amount of rain – I remember 3 separate rainfalls that were about 5 inches each. It was during one of those storms that the electricity went out and the power to the sump pump in our finished basement went out. When it’s really wet there are times when our sump pump runs every 1-2 minutes and pumps out hundreds of gallons of water a day. One of those times was the night the electricity went out. It was about 10 pm and I remember thinking, “how am I going to get rid of all that water?” The first thing I tried to do was set up a siphoning system with a garden hose that would suck the water up and around and dump it down a floor drain. After trying for about half an hour and sucking my brains out I finally realized that wasn’t going to work, so I

resorted to emptying the water out of the sump basket one ice cream pail at a time. Thankfully our utility sink was only about 3 feet away.

At about midnight the water had filled the basket and backed up in the drain tile around the whole house and I had to empty it. 100 bucketful's later it was done. But the water kept pouring in, so I had to set an alarm for 2am to do it again. 2am rolled around and I went downstairs and repeated the process. And I dreaded the fact that I was going to have to get up every 2 hours to do the same thing. I was desperately hoping the power would turn back on... and then it did. Right after I finished emptying a hundred buckets for the second time. Besides being annoyed it hadn't turned on a little earlier, I was relieved. The pump was working and it was back to normal. When the power turned on it made all the difference in the world.

The same was true for the disciples who were waiting in Jerusalem. When the power turned on, it made all the difference in the world. Today we are going to look at the very first time that happened and why we need it today. After Jesus ascended into heaven, his disciples did what he told them to do – they went back to Jerusalem and waited. At that time there were about 120 people who were part of the band of believers. They devoted themselves to prayer as they waited for the promise of the Father – the Holy Spirit. About a week went by, when suddenly the power turned on...

Read Acts 2:1-4.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Pretty exciting stuff... There are some very significant things I want to point out here about why things happened the way they did. I want us to see that the day that God poured out the Holy Spirit was a specific day – the day of Pentecost. I want us to see that when he poured out the Holy Spirit, it was accompanied by the sound of a mighty rushing wind and the appearance of tongues of fire that rested on each of them. And I want us to see that when they received the power of the Holy Spirit they were given the ability to speak in different languages. Why

did these things happen? I learned a lot about what was going on in the book Israel's Holy Days in Type and Prophecy by Daniel Fuchs. What was happening wasn't random. It was a very intentional transition from something old to something new. And I think the disciples were aware of several things going on that day that we probably miss.

The Day of Pentecost was a special day, not just because the Holy Spirit came on that day, but because of what happened 1,500 years earlier. The Jews actually celebrated Pentecost every year since they left the land of Egypt. It was one of three great annual feasts of Israel and was celebrated exactly 50 days after the Passover – thus the prefix “pente.” The feast of Pentecost celebrated the completion of the harvest season, but also a very significant event in Jewish history. It commemorated the day when God appeared to them on Mt. Sinai to give Moses the Law and establish a covenant with them as his chosen people. That day was about 50 days after the very first Passover in Egypt when God delivered them out of slavery. In the days leading up to meeting God at Mt. Sinai, the people had to prepare themselves through ceremonial washings. Then, when the appointed day came, all kinds of crazy stuff started to happen. Pay attention to the details – What did they see? What did they hear?

Read Exodus 19:16-19.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. ¹⁹ And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

This is what the day of Pentecost commemorated. On that day they heard a combination of intense sounds that grew louder and louder. I've heard people say that a tornado sounds like a freight train and that's what I imagine things sounded like at Mt. Sinai on that day. Accompanying these sounds were many awesome sights, but most importantly, fire – God descended on the mountain in fire.

So as the Jewish people prepared for and celebrated Pentecost every year after that, they remembered the sights and sounds of that day – the day when God appeared to them to give them the Law to teach and guide them and begin a new covenant with them. And those were the things the disciples were thinking about in Jerusalem after Jesus ascended to heaven. They were preparing for Pentecost, but they were also waiting for God to give them the promise of the Holy Spirit as part of the new covenant he was beginning with them.

So on the Day of Pentecost when they had all gathered together for the feast, *50 days after Christ, the Passover Lamb, died on the cross to deliver them from their sins*, God appeared to the disciples in much the same way he appeared to their fathers 1,500 years earlier. There was a sound from heaven like a mighty rushing wind that filled the house they were in and there was the appearance of fire, only this time the fire divided and came to rest on each of their heads. It was on that day that God poured out his Spirit on them, in place of the Law, to teach and guide them as part of the new covenant he was beginning with them – his chosen people – the church. And I think he was telling them some very significant things: No longer was he separate from them, high up on the mountain and untouchable because of their sin. Now he was with them and would dwell in them because of all that Christ had done. They were his chosen people; they were the people he was in a new covenant with – people whom he had delivered through the death of the Passover Lamb.

And I want us to see one more thing. The power of the Holy Spirit wasn't just in what they saw and heard, it was also in them. When they received the power of the Holy Spirit they had the ability to speak in different languages. And the reason that's so significant is because of what Luke writes about next.

Read Acts 2:5-13.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes,

Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

The power of the Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak in different languages so that they could tell all the people gathered in Jerusalem the “mighty works of God” in their native languages. The very thing that Jesus told them a week earlier was unfolding before their eyes. We read in Acts 1:8 last week that Jesus told them: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The Holy Spirit was given to empower them to be Christ’s witnesses. And with his power, that’s what they did.

Peter proceeded to get up and address the whole crowd. He told them what was happening – that the outpouring of God’s Spirit had been foretold by the prophets – and then he told them about Jesus Christ – who he was, what he did, and what they must do to be saved. I want to read the last part of his message, so we can see how this applies to us today.

Read Acts 2:38-39.

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

That was the beginning of the new church movement. Three thousand souls were added to their number on that day and the church continued to spread throughout the world as they became witnesses for Christ. When the power turned on, it made all the difference in the world. They needed that power for what Christ called them to do and we still need that power today – not for our own supernatural experiences and entertainment, like so many Christians chase after – but so that we will be effective witnesses of Jesus Christ – spreading the promise to “our children and those who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

So as I think about God’s vision for East Lincoln Alliance Church, one of the things I see is our church family involved in witnessing and the people we’re witnessing to

actually turning to Jesus Christ and putting their faith in him. It feels like that hasn't happened much in a long time. I just talked to another pastor earlier this week who said, "I've given up trying to do outreach in this community because nothing works." And I've often felt the same way. We've tried to do different things, but it seems like nothing works. Maybe God's done saving people in this area... Maybe this is the end times when people grow cold toward God and society is filled with apostasy. Or maybe God is waiting for us to stop relying on our own power in witnessing and start seeking and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. When the power turns on, it makes all the difference in the world...

But how and when is that going to happen? Jesus told his disciples in Luke 11:5-13, "*Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹²or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

The impression I get is that God wants to give us the power of the Holy Spirit, but he's not going to give us that power unless we ask him. And he doesn't want us to just ask him once, like he's a genie in a bottle, he wants us to keep asking him all the time. So not only do I see us becoming a church involved in being witnesses for Christ, but I also see us bowing our knees before the Father and humbly asking him for the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's become a church that persistently asks God for the Holy Spirit so that we can become a church of witnesses and begin to see people coming to Christ. When he turns the power on, it will make all the difference in the world.