

“Think About What You and God Can Do Together”

Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-13

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Frankfort, Kentucky

June 8, 2014

“If you can do it by yourself, it won’t be very big!” I still remember the place and time my friend said that to me many years ago. In some ways it was my Pentecost moment, and the message I needed to hear at that point in my life and ministry. He reminded me how much all of us need God, family and friends to achieve our potential and meet our toughest challenges.

I believe the disciples learned this lesson at the Pentecost celebration Luke described in today’s text. They had gathered in Jerusalem, along with thousands of other Jewish pilgrims, to celebrate the spring wheat harvest by giving thanks to the God of creation for being generous and faithful.

Certainly, they were grateful, but they were also anxious and worried. They were trying to get a clearer picture of what their future looked like after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Just ten days before Pentecost, the resurrected Jesus made his final appearance to the disciples before ascending back to his Father in heaven. Once again he assured them he wanted them to continue the work they had begun, but he told them not to begin that work until God empowered them with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knew the challenges they would face would overwhelm them if they relied solely upon their ability. Jesus also knew they needed confidence and courage to go back into the marketplace, especially after living through his arrest and crucifixion and now fearing for their own safety. So, the disciples followed Jesus’ instructions and stayed around Jerusalem waiting for God’s gift of the Spirit.

It was while these disciples were gathered in a room somewhere near the temple celebrating the Pentecost Feast that something remarkable occurred. Listen to Luke's description.

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, they came together in bewilderment because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked, 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?' " Acts 2:1-8

Luke goes on to record that Peter, the one who had lost his voice around a charcoal fire the night Jesus was arrested, suddenly found it again. He boldly and powerfully shared the story of Jesus to all who would listen and concluded by saying, "Therefore let all of Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ." Acts 2:36

Upon hearing this, the people asked the disciples, "What shall we do?" Peter replied, "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. This promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord will call." Acts 2:37b-39

Of course, not everyone embraced Peter or his message, but Luke records a great number did. He writes that 3,000 responded to Peter's invitation by being baptized.

You can only imagine how that made him and the disciples feel. They had to be relieved and euphoric! The gift of the Spirit, which Jesus promised, gave them the courage, confidence and ability they needed to resume the work Jesus called them to do around the Sea of Galilee and re-commissioned them to do after his

death and resurrection. Their future, at least this portion of it, had become crystal clear.

What do you think Luke wants us to take away from this story today? I pondered that question a lot last week and want to share some ideas with you.

Pentecost is a reminder that God has called all of us to a life of service. God has blessed us so we can be a blessing. What God has done for us through His redemptive and transforming work, He wants to do for all people.

At Pentecost, God sent the disciples back into a sinful and broken world to continue the work they began with Jesus during his public ministry. Jesus' earthly ministry was over, but not theirs. In many ways, it was just beginning.

It was now their duty to proclaim the gospel, confront evil in the pursuit of justice and peace, speak truth to power, teach others what Jesus had taught them about life and faith, feed the hungry, heal the sick, comfort the grieving, empower the weak, encourage the discouraged, make hope visible and reflect God's heart and nature in everything they did.

This meant they had to throw caution and fear to the wind and come out of hiding from the Upper Room. They had to love God and people as much as Jesus did, and they had to be as passionate about ministry and as devoted to this cause as Jesus was. And if they were, God would use them to make the world a better place for all people.

This challenge is now ours. The baton has been handed to us. It is our time to come down from the bleachers and run the good race.

This includes all of us. No one is exempt or excluded from this sacred responsibility.

Don't overlook Luke's inclusive language in this passage. "**All of them** were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability," Acts 2:4.

When Peter quoted the prophet, Joel, in the sermon he preached that day at Pentecost, he selected an inclusive passage. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on **all people**. Your **sons** and your **daughters** will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even on **my**

servants, both **men** and **women**, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy," Acts 2:17-18.

God's Spirit is available in equal measure to all people. The mantle of ministry has been placed upon every believer.

Even Paul picked up on this idea in his advice to the Corinthians. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God who works all of them in all men. Now to **each one** the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." I Corinthians 12:4-7

All of us have been called to Christian service, and each of us has been given gifts, skills, talents and abilities which can be used every day to help those we meet who are struggling.

I am indebted to my friend, Dr. Colin Harris, for teaching me the difference between a talent and a spiritual gift. "The difference," Dr. Harris says, "is how it is used."

Any talent used to help someone in need, encourage someone facing a challenge, clear up a misunderstanding, teach people how to live, tear down a barrier separating people, overturn injustice, heal a wound or inspire someone to achieve a dream becomes a spiritual gift and ushers in the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

As the late, great poet, Maya Angelou was fond of saying, "When you have learned, teach. When you have been given to, give."

This is the Pentecost challenge because all of us have been called to a life of service. Will you embrace this challenge? Each day, use the time, talents and resources God has given you the way Jesus would.

Pentecost is also a reminder that God will empower each of us to do what He has called us to do. What did the disciples need that day to leave the security of the Upper Room where they had gathered and go into the streets boldly proclaiming the good news of the gospel?

They needed confidence and courage to leave that room and seize this opportunity to share the gospel with people from all over the world. They also

needed to be able to speak in ways everyone could understand so they could take their message back home and share it with their family and friends.

Through the gift of the Spirit, God provided everything they needed that day to turn strangers into friends. This was why the early disciples came to associate God's Spirit with power, the power needed to do God's will and serve their fellowman.

It was the Holy Spirit who gave them the strength and courage they needed to face their fears, fling open those doors and leave that room.

It was the Spirit who enabled them to share boldly the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and the good news of forgiveness and hope for a better life.

It was the Spirit who enabled them to be as passionate about ushering in the kingdom of God as Jesus was.

It is the Spirit who enabled them to speak truth to power and demand those in authority "do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God."

It was the Spirit who gave them the ability to remain faithful when their lives were threatened.

It was the Spirit who gave them the ability to model what they preached, as Jesus did.

It was the Spirit who gave them the wisdom and determination needed to seize every opportunity to tear down walls of suspicion and hate and build bridges of reconciliation and goodwill.

It was the Spirit who enabled them to be agents of change in a world that had lost its way.

Furthermore, it is the Spirit who is eager to empower us for our journey by enabling us to follow their example.

What do you think God wants to help you do this week? What opportunity, challenge or dream awaits you this week? Are you going to tackle it on your own or ask God to help you?

I strongly encourage you to look to God for wisdom, guidance, strength and courage. I assure you what He did for the disciples at Pentecost, He will do for you.

"If you can do it by yourself, it won't be very big," my friend said on that memorable day. Just think what you and God could do together.