

Acts 1:6-11  
Power to Keep Going  
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5-24-15

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Today is the day of Pentecost. Happy Pentecost, or is it Merry Pentecost? What's the proper greeting? This week, I was walking through the greeting card aisle at Kroger and I noticed there weren't any Merry Pentecost cards. No Pentecost Turkeys in the oven at home, or maxed out credit cards on Pentecost presents. I think if there is a holiday that the wider secular society has given complete freedom for the church to celebrate, it's Pentecost. You want to have a holiday for what, now? Go ahead.

That's because the wider world doesn't see the dream God for the world. But then again neither did the disciples when it all began.

When we meet the disciples and the others gathered here in Acts chapter 1, they are standing, starrng confused up into the clouds. Jesus had just given his parting words to them, something about receiving power and being witnesses. *Huh?* I can just imagine their confused look, heads cocked to the side like a puppy who has just watched his master walk out the door. They're thinking to themselves, *What do we do now? You don't think he meant to leave us in charge, did he?*

Then their cloud-gazing was interrupted by a couple of angels who say to them: "men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

So the lot of them—the text says about 120—go back to Jerusalem to the upper room. And because they haven't the slightest clue what to do next, they see there is a vacancy in the disciples: "We've got 11 disciples; we can't just have 11, we've got to have 12." So they form a committee. And the text says that Peter and the others bring two candidates for the job opening, Justus and Matthias. They cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles...and he was never heard from again.

About the time they were done with their cloud staring and bureaucracy, it says a mighty rush of VIOLENT wind blasted through the place where they were all staying and something like fire descended down upon them. And in an instant, men and women were speaking languages they didn't know 5 minutes ago.

When this happens, they're no longer looking up; now are looking out at one another in amazement. *Do you believe this? Do you know what just happened? No, do you?* The Holy Spirit of God came down and rested upon them and they were given power. But of course in the mix, there were those who were astonished by it and sneered at them, saying "They are filled with new wine." Things could have begun to derail at this point, but Peter gets up, and notice he doesn't say, "We're spiritual people, we don't drink wine." No, he looks at his watch and says, "It's 9 o'clock in the morning; it's a little early."

Now, when the disciples and the 120 others had calmed down a bit, after seeing this miraculous event, they remembered what Jesus said to them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In our life of faith, so often we are after capturing moments and preserving them forever. It’s why we love to memorialize people and moments. And Pentecost, like so many other experiences of signs and wonders, is a moment the followers of Jesus are tempted to memorialize.

But once you get past the initial ecstasy of the event, you realize what a terrifying event Pentecost really was.

Author and Pastor Craig Barnes puts it this way: “When Jesus was born, we were delighted because God is with us. When Jesus conducted his ministry, we were taught and challenged to be followers. When he died on the cross, we were overcome with God’s love for us. When he rose from the dead, we were surprised by the hope of eternal life. But when Jesus ascended into heaven, like the first disciples we are terrified to discover that he calls us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. And then at Pentecost, we discover that the Spirit actually gives us the power to do this.”

The Holy Spirit is the gift of power to witness to the risen Jesus to a world that needs his word of hope. In the Bible, you’ll notice that no longer are the followers of Jesus referred to as disciples; they are called apostles. The word apostle is the Greek word *apostolos* which means the sent ones, ambassadors. From now on, they would have a job to do: to witness.

That’s right. The Savior of the world entrusted the unwritten chapter of God’s story to you and me.

I believe that we are standing in the midst of a time of unprecedented opportunity and blessing in Wabash, and in this church. This is our opportunity to go from a time of memorializing the past to a time of moving into the future, because we continue to live in the midst of the chapter of God’s story that is not yet written. As one writer puts it: “We are not the embalmers of the past but the enablers of the present and the empowered people for a new age.” At Pentecost, followers became apostles, the sent ones, people with a job to do.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 8 says that the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. Jesus told his disciples in John 14 that the one who believes in him will do greater works than he did.

And what’s your job? Jesus tells his apostles that *you will be my witnesses*. Notice he didn’t say you’re going to do exactly the same thing I did. He didn’t necessarily say that you were going to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and raise people from the dead—that was mostly Jesus’ job. What he did say was that we were going to be his witnesses.

What does a witness do? A witness doesn't make something happen. Any courtroom judge will attest that they don't want their witnesses being creative with the story. Just tell the people what happened.

Each and every one of you has spent the last week carrying out a multitude of everyday things. You changed diapers, you sat in meetings, you visited relatives, you went to the dentist, and took kids to practice. In all honesty, that doesn't sound like greater things, but what it does sound like is an opportunity to witness with real people in real situations what the risen Lord Jesus is doing in your life.

That is what a witness does. Witnesses don't provide salvation; Jesus still does that. He or she takes notice of what Jesus is doing in the places that will virtually go unnoticed otherwise, but with people like you pointing them out and sharing that grace with others, it's like Spiritual show and tell. And the great irony is that with lots of little people like you and me doing just that, lives change, communities change, systems change. It's not fanfare; it's faithful.

Perhaps that's what Jesus meant when he said that we would do greater things. Maybe he meant, that through a lifetime of small moments where we point one another back to Jesus, the world can actually change.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The second thing the Spirit does is it gets us out of our upper room and it gets us going. As the apostles left Jerusalem and went their separate ways to spread the news to the world, they most certainly encountered difficulty, there were lots of closed doors. In fact at one point they thought they were convinced they were going north, but they were prevented; then they turned south, but they were stopped; then east, nothing. Finally Paul said to them, I have heard distinctively from the Lord that we are to go West.

The power of the Holy Spirit keeps us moving, it keeps us pressing forward, despite the road blocks before us—always searching, always seeking for where Jesus is on the move to next.

I know there are those among us who have felt sure that God was calling them along one path, but for whatever reason that path was blocked. I know there are those among us who thought the remaining years would be spent with their spouse enjoying the fruits of all their hard work, and that story was halted abruptly. I know there are those among us who believed that their career would be the thing that finally allowed them to have that breakthrough, but that path was cut short.

The power, the fire, the strength of the Holy Spirit is the ability to keep moving and keep witnessing to the risen Christ no matter what the circumstance. We were not given the ability to rise up into the courts of heaven to discern the mind of God. What we are given is the power and strength to keep moving when what we thought would happen didn't. We were given the power to look for Jesus in the successes, as well as the failures, the mundane, as well as the extraordinary; when things are going well and when they are under great stress

We don't have to stare up into the clouds to see Jesus, he comes to us, like he did to the first apostles. But if you want to continue to see him you've got to keep moving.

What the Spirit does: enable us to witness and  
keeps us moving – sparlings, chuck ravenscroft,

Staring at the clouds  
Appointing a 12<sup>th</sup> disciple to fill Judas' spot. Bureaucracy.

About the time the disciples are done staring at the clouds and with their bureaucracy, Pentecost Came.

If we are paying attention, Pentecost should actually frighten us. When Jesus was born, we were delighted because God is with us. When Jesus conducted his ministry, we were taught and challenged to be followers. When he died on the cross, we were overcome with God's love for us. When he rose from the dead, we were surprised by the hope of eternal life. But when Jesus ascended into heaven, like the first disciples we are terrified to discover that he calls us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. And then at Pentecost, we discover that the Spirit actually gives us the power to do this. No longer does the New Testament speak about disciples, which means followers. Now it refers to us as apostles, which means those who are sent out with a job to do.

When the spirit comes on the disciples  
Shaking hands with a person who says good message, we'll see.