

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Sunday, May 23, 2021

Pentecost Sunday: The Power of God's Spirit

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell, Senior Pastor

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcome and Announcements

Good morning! Welcome to worship on this Pentecost Sunday. Today we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit and the difference which that Spirit makes to our lives in the world today. Today we can actively see God's spirit at work in three ways.

First as part of this service today you will see ten students of this church becoming members of our church through footage of our confirmation class service. This celebration actually took place two weeks ago in our church parking lot service, but through the wonders of modern technology Susan Underhill has been able to blend footage from that original service with footage from this week of one of our students taking his confirmation vows because he was unable to be present on that original date.

Additionally, in today's service it is with joy that we celebrate the baptism of a child born during the pandemic. Bronson Henry DeLoy will be baptized later in our church service.

And finally Ashley Ashley is not with us today because on this Pentecost Sunday she is answering God's call upon her life and is being ordained in Pittsburgh as a minister of word and sacrament. The Reverend Ashley Ashley will be back with us next week, presiding over her first full communion service!

Friends, in addition to these Pentecost celebrations, I can tell you that all church members and regular visitors to our church will be receiving a letter next week from our church session laying out our reopening plans for our church's building. The reopening of our church building will come in phases throughout the summer as construction work is completed and cleaned up. Trust me when I tell you that we all want to be back as soon as possible, but also as safe as possible.

I also would like to remind you that this week, on Thursday, May 27th, at 7:00 p.m., there's an opportunity for you to join a Zoom book discussion on the book, "Arc of Justice", a saga of race, civil rights, and murder that takes place within the city of Detroit during the Jazz Age. This event is open to all and information about it can be found on our church's website and in today's bulletin.

I'm grateful this morning to be leading worship along with Mark Hovermale who's here as liturgist and Jeff Phillips who is providing music for our service.

Finally, Darlene Maginley, our Children's Ministry Director has a very special message to share with all our children and our young families. Let's listen.

Darlene Maginley, Director of Children's Ministry – Announcement regarding Vacation Bible School (VBS), July 18-23, 2021

Good morning, FPCP families! I am so happy to announce that Vacation Bible School 2021 is scheduled for departure on July 18th. Now it's going to look a little bit different this year than it has in past years. We're going to do a hybrid between parking lot and home, but I think that the silver lining in the cloud is that we get to experience Vacation Bible School as a family adventure.

So the train is going to depart the FPCP station on Sunday evening, and the FPCP station you might also know as the parking lot. On Wednesday night I get to do Zoom with the kids and share Bible stories, fun games and talk about our week. Then the train will arrive back in the station to conclude our adventure on Friday evening.

Now when you come on Sunday, we're going to have a whole bag packed for you. You don't even have to pack for the trip! Some of the things that you will get on Sunday evening are fun games to play together, “sciencey gizmos,” and crafts. You'll also have snacks and a few surprises.

So what we would like you to do is join in the fun. Climb aboard and take a ride on the Rocky Railway as we all learn together to trust Jesus. Now if I haven't made enough corny train references already, here's a couple more. To make sure that there's enough room in the trainyard for everybody who wants to ride the rails with us, we are asking that you go to the FPCP website, fpcp.net, and register in advance. Tickets are available for FPCP families starting now. But please take advantage of the early ticketing because we are going to be opening up tickets to the rest of the community, starting on June 4th. So take advantage of the time. Climb aboard! Join the fun! Look for information on the website and in the bulletin. In the meantime, if you have any questions, I'm the engineer for the trip, so please feel free to email me with any questions that you have. And I look forward to a fun summer adventure with all of you aboard the Rocky Railway.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Opening Prayer

Would you all please pray with me. Gracious and loving God, we praise you this morning for your everlasting desire to be near your people. We praise you that through your Holy Spirit we can each experience the nearness of your holy presence in our lives. In the midst of our busy and complicated day-to-day living, we pray that we would know the presence, power, and peace of your Spirit at work within us. Help us today to let go of all that worries us, burdens us or distracts us. Help us to let go of the sin that so easily entangles us. Revive our hearts and souls by your Spirit's power. And this we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Geff Phillips plays and sings “How Great Is Our God”

Rev. Mark Hovermale – First Scripture Reading of Acts 1:1-11

Our first scripture lesson today is found in Acts chapter 1, verses 1 through 11.

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 presented himself to them 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 Then they gathered around him and 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.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

This is the word of the Lord thanks be to God

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Sacrament of Baptism
Bronson Henry DeLoy, grandson of Dale and Becky DeLoy

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Second Scripture Reading of Acts 2:1-13

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of

God in our own tongues!”¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

May God help us to understand this reading from his Holy Word. Amen.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcoming of the Confirmation Class of 2021

Confirmation Class Teachers: Doug and Julie Heasley

- Teddy Ewers
- Sydney Kirkland
- Tess O'Donnell
- Brooke Petty
- Sophie Sherwood
- Molly Geib
- Bradan McCorry
- Joshua Peck-Dimit
- Callista Sawicki
- Vince Van Hala

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Sermon: “The Power of God’s Spirit”

Would you all please pray with me. Holy Spirit, come and fill our hearts and minds this day. Come and fill our lives with your power, with your purpose, and with your peace. This we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Today, on this Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit is alive and at work! I know this because I can see God's Holy Spirit moving powerfully through the membership of this church much like the wind. We cannot see the exact form of God's Spirit, but we can see the effects of the Spirit today in our church service.

Ten confirmation students have professed their faith in Jesus Christ and become members of Christ’s church. We have already seen in this service, as well, a baptism of a child from this church, born in the midst of a global pandemic. His parents have brought him forward in faith today, asking for God's help and blessing for their child.

God's spirit is clearly at work and not just here in Plymouth, but in Pittsburgh as well on this Pentecost Sunday, where this very afternoon Ashley Ashley is being ordained as a minister of word and sacrament. She is responding to God's call upon her life and somehow, by God's grace, our congregation is blessed through this call.

Yes, there is no doubt God's Holy Spirit is alive and at work today! And we should not be surprised about all this movement caused by the Spirit, because this is precisely what happens when God's Spirit is poured out upon His people.

This certainly is what took place on that very first Pentecost day, which took place fifty days after Passover; hence, the name Pentecost, coming from ‘pente’, the beginning of the Latin word for fifty. At that original Pentecost day, frightened disciples, hiding in Jerusalem, were empowered by God's Holy Spirit to become fearless witnesses.

In that setting we begin to understand that God's Holy Spirit works in three very powerful, yet unique, ways. First, we can see that on that Pentecost God’s Spirit was at work changing lives for the good. God's Spirit changed the lives of all those disciples gathered

on that day. We are told that there were crowds there, crowds from all over, and yet they were utterly amazed when each of them could hear the other speaking in their native language. They were amazed and perplexed how they could hear the wonders of God proclaimed in their own tongues.

God's Holy Spirit was changing the lives of those disciples on that very day. But we see that change even more clearly through the greater span of scripture in the life of the Apostle Paul, the man who used to persecute Christians. He suddenly found himself preaching the faith that he once had tried to destroy. God's Spirit was seen at work, changing the life of Peter, who went from almost a wimpy character, hiding after Christ's crucifixion. After he had denied Christ, he hid from those who might associate him as Christ's disciple. Within five weeks he became one of the greatest preachers in the early church. On that Pentecost, in the passage that immediately follows our passage from Acts, chapter 2, we are told that Peter preached a sermon and thousands of people came to faith on that day! Because of the changes in Peter's life and the changes in their lives, God's Holy Spirit was at work.

The followers of Jesus Christ received a tremendous infusion of Spirit. They were drenched in power on that Pentecost and lives were changed as they became witnesses and messengers of the gospel. Wherever faith is shared, we know that the Spirit is alive and at work.

This is the second unique and powerful feature of God's spirit. Lives are changed and faith is shared. At Pentecost, the disciples received energy to become witnesses. They started spreading the good news of Christ in Jerusalem, not by their own strength, but by God's strength gifted to them through the Spirit.

The book of Acts as a whole tells us about the spread of the gospel through Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, which is what chapters 8 through 12 of that book cover, and to the ends of the earth, which are talked about in chapters 13 through 28 of the book of Acts. In the Old Testament, by contrast, the Holy Spirit acted only through a few select individuals at any one time. Those individuals tended to be prophets or kings, but only a few select individuals in the Old Testament had that Spirit. In the New Testament we know the Holy Spirit was poured out upon everyone.

Suddenly the spirit empowered Christ's followers to live out His ministry. Those tasks that Jesus once did were now gifted to his disciples to carry on. God's Holy Spirit was at work in his early followers, as God's Spirit is at work today. If we were to look back into the gospels on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, what we would find there is that the work that Jesus did in healing and teaching and comforting is the work that the Spirit now does through us!

God leads us by His Spirit to heal, to teach, and to comfort. We are part of Christ's ongoing ministry, by the power of God's Spirit at work within us. We also not only share our faith as we partake in all the ministries of Christ, but we are moved forward by the Spirit as God's Spirit is at work within each of us. We have the ability to find strength beyond our own strength; we have the ability to find peace beyond any circumstance we must endure; we have the ability to know comfort and compassion gifted to us by God's Holy Spirit that we, in turn, are able to give to others. Both the apostles Peter and Paul faced, throughout their lives, hardships and challenges, trials and temptations, but they remained faithful to God's Holy Spirit working through them, even in the midst of pain.

Romans, chapter 8, at verse 26, tells us that God's Holy Spirit helps us with our weakness. And in our grief, in our loss, in our worry, in our feelings of being overwhelmed by life, God's Spirit lifts our heart and grants us strength and grace to keep moving forward. This does not mean that we escape the pain; it means that we are not alone, not ever, in it, and God gives us the grace to either move beyond our pain or to manage it with God's help.

I believe God's Holy Spirit is at work in each of our lives, but let me ask you this. What do you do in those moments when you feel an absence of power in your life? For each of us, there are times and incidences when we feel distanced from God and the idea of sensing the power of God's Spirit at work within us is a foreign concept to us. What do we do when we feel a power failure? Well, there are things we do.

First of all, following the example of so many others in the scripture, we wait on God for direction. We're called to be patient, to wait on God, and remember that the Bible is full of stories of very faithful people who were called during different seasons in their lives to wait.

Abraham had to wait for a promised son well into his old age. Moses had to wait forty years in the wilderness. Mary had to wait nine months for the fulfillment of God's promise in her life. Jesus had to wait thirty years before his ministry on earth began. God instills within each of our lives seasons of silence, seasons that could be described as winter, where we wait on the movement of God, we wait on God to move, to nudge, to direct us forward according to God's timing. But we do not have to wait while doing nothing. There are steps we can take, even while we wait, to check that the connection we have with God is strong and that God is at work.

Even when we can't see or understand how God is working when we are called to wait and when we feel distant from God, what we should do first is check our power connection. I don't know if you've ever had the experience; I'm sure we all have at times, when our computer suddenly stops working, stops working in the way we might hope, or move the way that we would like it to work. At that time, often the very first thing we need to do is check our power connection. Is it properly plugged in; does it have a proper power source? The same is true of our faith lives when we feel distanced from God. We should check the 'power source' and make sure that we are connecting with God through scripture, through prayer, by listening to others share about their faith.

Sometimes there are obstacles in our lives that we need to remove to better hear God's word and whisper in our lives. To be more open to God's power source, we need to check all our connections with God, but also we look at our spiritual dashboard.

Max Lucado in one of his books on our lives and God's lives together, talks about a spiritual dashboard that God lays out for us through Galatians, chapter 5, where God speaks of the fruits of the Spirit. He says that in each of our lives you can measure the strength of God's Spirit at work by looking at how well we are managing these fruits, how well are we loving others, or finding joy or peace or patience or kindness. How well does our life express gentleness or goodness, faithfulness or self-control? When these seem to be running on low, it could be that our power source is also on low, not because God's power ever wanes, but sometimes *our connection* does. Sometimes we are also called to wait. We are called to live by the Spirit, but we're also called to keep in step with the Spirit.

So when our dashboard lights register empty, we are called to pray, connect, wait, repeat. Start praying when you find yourself in that situation that God will fill you with his Spirit and that God will fill the church with his Spirit. This is a prayer that I offer daily for this church,

for myself, for the leadership, for the staff. I pray that God would give us power by his Spirit to do God's work, in God's way, for God's glory.

Honestly, these type of prayers are a little bit scary. We never know how God is going to move. But what we do know from the witness of scripture in Acts, chapters 1 and 2, is that the Spirit changes lives, faith is shared, and we are able to move forward because God's Spirit is in us and at work through us, today and every day.

Thanks be to God for this powerful gift of grace. Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Prayers of the People

Let us pray. We come before you, Lord, and we are simply just thankful. We have so many concerns, though, Lord, for so many different things. And as the Spirit has led us, we take time and specifically pray for a few of these concerns, as we ask you to remember the ones we haven't remembered.

We pray for those who are struggling this season as they have lost loved ones throughout the year. We pray for your comfort, for your mercy, and your grace for those who are struggling with fear, either from the pandemic or from job changes or family changes. We pray again for those who are struggling with fear that you would be there. We pray for peace for those who have been dealing with unexpected changes to their family lives. We pray again for your grace and for your hand in their lives and in their families' lives.

We pray for those who are in need, for their physical needs, their emotional needs, their spiritual needs, that they would find *you* the fulfillment of those needs.

We take a moment, and we pray for the specific ministries that cover those physical, emotional and spiritual needs. We pray for the Hope Clinic, we pray for the Second Mile Center, we pray for Colina de Luz. We pray for the many other missions that we support. We pray for their strength and support and success as they meet the needs, both physical and emotional, along with spiritual, of the people.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in Malawi at our sister church. We lift them up to you as we remember them.

We pray for Emily, that she would have time to reconnect and recharge during her time off.

Finally, we pray for the Holy Spirit to sweep through our lives, our church, our state, and our country, and bring about revival that only you can bring in our hearts. We pray all these things and more in the name of your son Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray with the words,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,

and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Geff Phillips plays and sings *"You Are So Good To Me"*

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Benediction and Blessing

Let us go from here today in the power of God's Holy Spirit. And as we go, may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forevermore. Amen.