Irvington Presbyterian Church

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**“Pentecost Power”**

Larry Thorson

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***Acts 2:1-4***

*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 tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

***Today’s New International Version***

Each week our sermons are dealing with what was shown the previous Sunday night on the NBC series A.D. at 9:00. If you can’t or don’t want to watch it I plan to summarize the episode each week. If you’re watching the series, and I hope you are, I want to just say that its script is not necessarily inspired by God. In other words what you see on the screen may or may not be consistent with God’s inspired Bible. While the producers of the show are Christ followers, NBC is not. NBC is about winning ratings races. So I encourage you to read the first ten chapters of the Book of Acts for yourself. That’s what the series A.D. is based on.

Last week we were introduced to King Herod who came into Jerusalem on a human carried chariot. He was the ceremonial king of Israel but a very pompous little man. Unfortunately for him, Rome now controlled Israel so he didn’t have much authority. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor whom we met in the first episode now lived in the king’s palace in Jerusalem, the house where Herod grew up when his dad was king. That’s explains a little of the tension we saw between the two men. The only thing they had in common was they didn’t like Jesus.

Last Sunday night we also saw Jerusalem crowded for the Jewish festival of Pentecost. This was an annual festival celebrating the harvest and also commemorating when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. It was always celebrated fifty days after Passover. Jews would bring the first fruits of their harvest as an offering to the Lord at this festival.

In last Sunday night’s episode the very cocky Pontius Pilate tried to enter the temple for Pentecost even though he wasn’t Jewish. Emotions were at a feverish pitch because only Jews were allowed in the temple. The Middle East then was like the Middle East now, a dangerous political hot bed. The Jews and Romans hated each other but they were also united in their hatred for Christ followers. So that meant Jesus’ followers had to huddle upstairs in hiding from both the Roman soldiers and the Jewish priests.

I thought the film did a good job showing some of the confusion and frustration of the disciples after Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus had told them to go into all the world and make disciples but he also told them to wait until the coming of the Holy Spirit. If you were told to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit what do you think that would look like? They didn’t know. But how were they going to tell the world about the risen Jesus when they had to stay hidden in a darkened room with a bounty on their head?

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where we’re stuck. None of our options look very appealing. That’s where the disciples were when we were introduced to a young woman named Maya who’s supposedly the daughter of the apostle Peter. Did Peter have a daughter? Maybe. Does the Bible mention that he had children? No. This is an interesting little side.

Maya asked her dad a question, something like: what would you be doing if Jesus was here? Peter replied “pray.” “We’d be in prayer.” When you find yourself in a situation where you’re stuck prayer is a good place to start. I don’t know about you but when I’m stuck and start praying all I can’t think about is how stuck I am. But instead of having a prayer time it turns into a strategizing time trying to resolve the problem in my head. That causes me to get more worked up. But that’s not praying about it, that’s worrying about it.

I find group prayer is really good for times like that. That’s what the disciples did. But I don’t think it was because of Peter’s daughter reminding them. Acts 1 says they were constantly in prayer together. The film shows like a dozen disciples shouting the Lord’s Prayer over the sound of howling winds. But Acts 1 says the group had grown to 120 so I suspect it was a larger number than just the disciples. Remember this is Hollywood story telling.

Then on the show something like a whirlwind tornado of flames circled the room signifying the Holy Spirit. But is that picture biblical? Acts 2:1 says *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.* The television program has them standing as if ready to run out the door. But the Bible says they were sitting and praying.

*They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.* I didn’t see that fire separating in the show. I kind of thought the special effects people let us down there.

*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.* That’s what the television show left out and it’s a significant omission. The flames separating or not isn’t that important. Each disciple was given the Holy Spirit. How do we know they received the Holy Spirit. They were given the gift of language. That gift enabled them to speak a language they hadn’t learned. It was a one-time gift for a specific purpose. That purpose was evangelism in order to launch the church. Acts 2 says Peter immediately stood up from the prayer meeting and preached a sermon to explain this phenomenon and gave an invitation to accept Christ. Three thousand people gave their lives to Christ as a result. The film left that out.

The biblical book of Acts shows that God had a plan and it went like this: He allowed the brutal Romans, the people who had devised the cross as the most painful way possible to kill someone, he allowed them to build an elaborate road system that better enabled people from all over the then known world to get into Jerusalem for that Pentecost festival of harvest. These folks came speaking the languages of their lands they lived in. The only way they would be able to hear and understand that Jesus Christ had died for their sins and rose from the dead is if the message was spoken in their language. Then once they heard it in their language at the festival they could return home with the gospel message to share it those back home and thus launching the church. It was a brilliant plan that God executed brilliantly. God even used the brutal Romans for his purpose.

But the film didn’t show any of that, at least not in the last episode. We’ll see what they do tonight. But this is significant. God didn’t send his Holy Spirit upon those people just to encourage them. He didn’t send his Holy Spirit to improve their prayer life. He didn’t send his Holy Spirit to give them a greater knowledge of the Bible. He didn’t send his Holy Spirit so that they could make a lame beggar here or there walk again. God sent his Holy Spirit so that they could witness the gospel to people who hadn’t heard or hadn’t given their lives yet to Christ.

You see the church of Jesus Christ wasn’t founded on the premise that they had better ping pong tables than the pagans. It wasn’t founded on the premise that their pastries were plumper than the synagogues. It wasn’t founded on the premise that joining a church would advance your career. The church of Jesus Christ was founded on the premise that it would tell the world…the entire world that Jesus Christ is the savior of the world. That’s the purpose of the church.

I believe that’s why the Holy Spirit is given to us today. You’ve heard me say this before and you’re going to hear me say it a lot. I believe there are at least 500 people within a short bus ride of this campus who are not presently worshipping our Lord anywhere. They probably don’t yet know this, but they really want to be here at IPC worshipping Jesus. All it takes is each person inviting one person to come here. One person. Then that one new person will invite one new person to come here.

But I see the church of Jesus Christ today in the United States being kind of like the early disciples huddled in that upper room. We can’t figure out what we’re supposed to be doing. All we know how to do is wait. But what are we waiting for? The Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is not going to come upon us just to make us look spiritual. The Holy Spirit isn’t going to come on us to make us a big church again so we’ll have some prominence in this city.

Never in the Old Testament did the Holy Spirit come on someone for recreational purposes or to be eye candy. It was always for a specific task, sometimes to prophecy, sometimes to bring healing. But in those words of prophecy or healing it was to advance God’s kingdom.

The Apostle Paul talked about the gift of tongues in his biblical writings but it was rarely mentioned throughout church history and never manifested in the gift of languages. Then in 1906 a group of Christians were gathering in a tiny house church in downtown Los Angeles praying for the evangelization of their city when the Holy Spirit suddenly fell upon them and they began speaking in tongues. But it wasn’t the gift languages. It was what’s called glossolalia or praying in a prayer language that only God understands. It was called the Azusa St. Revival and it was the start of what became known as the modern Pentecostal movement. But by and large the overall result of the Pentecostal movement coming out Los Angeles was a greater spread of the gospel across the world. Out of the Azusa St. Revival came such denominations as the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Church among many others. Monica Moore, our own worship leader grew up in the Church of God in Christ, a denomination that came out of the Baptist church when it had a Pentecostal filling of the Holy Spirit.

None of this touched the mainline Methodist, Presbyterian or Episcopal churches until 1959 when Father Dennis Bennett was leading spirituality group less than twenty miles from where the Azusa St. Revival had broken out in his Van Nuys Episcopal Church. This revival spread to all the denominations including the Presbyterians and it was called the charismatic movement. Speaking in tongues even spread to the Roman Catholic Church. So we had the Pentecostal movement of 1906 and the charismatic movement of 1959.

Speaking in tongues split churches between those who spoke in tongues and those who didn’t. Those who did lauded it over those who didn’t as if they were spiritually dead. The apostle Paul even urged Christians to seek the greater gifts of signs and healing.

God’s plan for the growth of the church is the same today as it was when the church was founded. We receive the Holy Spirit when two things happen: 1) we’ve gotten to the point where we just don’t know what to do on our own power to bring a hostile world to Christ and 2) we demonstrate we really believe that it’s all up to God by praying. No Christian revival has ever occurred driven by the Holy Spirit where God’s people weren’t first in prayer seeking on behalf of the lost of the world. That’s the key.

Let me ask you a very Pentecost question. If we had two services both packed to the balcony and we had four choirs, two praise bands, the organ played every Sunday, a young, good looking pastor in his prime, and groups for every age and situation in our community would you still care enough about the unchurched alcoholic on your block to try and share Jesus with him? You see churches that are rebuilding as this one is sometimes get their priorities mixed up. Institutional preservation becomes more important than evangelism. If there were just 80 of us gathered in a room with one heart felt desire to see people come to know Jesus that would be enough for the Holy Spirit to fall upon us fresh. It doesn’t matter how many people there are but what matters is our heart. When there’s more concern over how a hymn is sung, or how loud the drums are or whether the organ is played or not that’s a sign that our heart is not with God.

In the 90’s I watched our denomination spend over two million dollars a year in failed new churches, churches that had no passion to share Christ but were simply trying to maintain the traditions of the past. When the passion is lost the Holy Spirit moves on. So ask yourself when was the last time God seemed very real in your life. When was the last time you prayed for the salvation of someone you loved? When was the last time you made a new relationship with someone who doesn’t go to church and then prayed for an opportunity to witness to them?

What I’m watching now is a whole new set of churches sprouting up around the country with one desire to share Jesus Christ. They look different and they sound different but they’re on fire for Christ and God’s Holy Spirit is pouring out upon them. I want you to look into your heart and look deep. How do you feel about your neighbors who look and act different than you do? Ask what drives me? What puts the fear of God in me? Jesus died so that all could live forever in absolute peace. That is the greatest news on the face of this earth. Our mission, if we so choose to accept it, is to take that to the ends of the earth. For that purpose God’s Holy Spirit will fall upon us. Apart from that purpose we’re on our own.

**TO LEARN MORE**

**Join a Small Group – call the church office for times and location 510/657-3133**

**To learn and encourage one another**

**IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO**

**GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s ideal**

**Romans 3:23**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 8:5**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life**

**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below…**

*“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”*