

Power partners

Part 3, Acts 2:1-12

Introduction: We are on week 3 of Power Partners our preaching series on the Holy Spirit. We began with Jesus incredible claim in John 14 that the presence of the Holy Spirit is just as if Jesus was right there with us in flesh and blood. Last week Ric spoke about the many different ways in which the power and person of Jesus is made present in our lives through the gifts of the Spirit. Today is Pentecost Sunday, where we celebrate the day the church was introduced to the Holy Spirit in a big way.

Acts 2:1-12 (NIV)

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 them speaking in his own language.*

⁷ *Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"*

⁸ *Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own 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?"*

It helps to understand this day of Pentecost as a day of introduction.

For instance, you're starting a new job as manager of Widgets International and you are introduced to Mr. Widgy the head of research and development and the inventor of the famous oval widget and instantly you realise that here is someone you need to get to know, someone who is central to making this business prosper.



God is introducing the church to the Holy Spirit in exactly the same way, explaining to them how important the Holy Spirit will be to the enterprise of church through three signs, a powerful wind, a column of fire and a miracle of language. You may not have noticed before the column of fire – It was something I hadn't noticed until this week when God drew it to my attention.



*They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire **that separated** and came to rest on each of them. (Acts 2:3)*

Luke says that the tongues of fire **separated**, which means that when the tongues of fire first appeared they were together in a single column of fire. What this means is that two out of the three signs were instantly recognisable to these Jewish Christians because they were the two key elements of the greatest event of Jewish history.

Every Jewish boy intimately knows the story we read in Exodus 14. The Children of Israel find themselves trapped between the red sea and Pharaoh's army and God rescues them, sending a powerful wind to roll back the waters of the red sea and a column of fire to confound the Egyptian army. That both these images are present on the day of Pentecost is God saying to his church that He is with them in the very same powerful way that he was with Moses. In a sense these powerful signs are like the Holy Spirit's calling card



The Holy Spirit

Rolling back oceans and saving God's people for a thousand years

Check out our new business plan!

The Holy Spirit is the power of God in the business of making a way where there is no way. There was no way for the Israelites to escape the trap of the Egyptian army but the power of God made a way where there was no way and this is incredibly important news for the early church. They were a small group of people all alone in the world. In the whole of the world, no one was like them. No other group of people in all of the world had given their lives to Jesus. No other group of people in all of the world had seen someone die and rise again. No other group of people in all of the world had been given a mission to say to all the rest of the world, we know the best way to live and the best way to know God. How do you think they might have been feeling? I think that when they thought about their time with Jesus they would have felt some confidence remembering all that they had seen. Then they

would remember he wasn't with them anymore and the incredibly difficult task he had set them and I think they would have completely freaked out! That's why God introduced them to the Holy Spirit as the one who makes a way where there is no way.

But God is also saying something else to the early church. It is what happens to the column of fire separating to become tongues of fire and the miracle of language that signalled to the early church that the Holy Spirit came with a whole new business plan. In Israel's glory days the pillar of fire was the sign of God's power and presence, but it was always over there or over here but now, on the day of Pentecost – it was in here.! Each believer had become a pillar of the Holy Spirit's fire and each believer was touched with the power to speak and be understood by people who should not have been able to understand them. Which was telling the early church that they did not face the challenge of building and rebuilding the Kingdom alone. That the Holy Spirit was partnering with every single member of the church to make a way where there was no way.

Which brings us to a challenging question. Why did Jesus go to all this trouble of teaching the disciples about the Holy Spirit, instructing them in how to prepare for the Holy Spirit and surrounding the coming of the Holy Spirit with all these telling signs and wonders? Why not just send the Holy Spirit and let the Holy Spirit sort it out? The answer is that people's attitude towards the Holy Spirit is a big player in this game. Jesus prepared his disciples so they would trust and depend on the Holy Spirit for their very lives, because their attitude, their commitment, their trust, their need for the Holy Spirit, all impacted on the freedom the Holy Spirit had to work in them and in the church. Paul warned the church; *Do not put out the Spirit's fire*; (1 Thessalonians 5:19) because that can happen depending on your attitude towards the Holy Spirit.

So what is our attitude to the Holy Spirit? Certainly we believe **in** the Holy Spirit but how prepared are we to create a place and space for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

About 12 years ago a large group of young adults experienced a fairly intense period of the presence of the Holy Spirit and were part of a large and vibrant evening congregation. As young adults do, many have moved on over the years, but many have also stayed in this church and married and had children and migrated to the morning service. This group has been the strength of our church over the last ten years. It gave us good numbers and a good spread of ages and we have been pretty much coasting on the back of it ever since. It is worth considering what happens to a church's attitude towards the Holy Spirit when it appears that it's doing okay.

However, increasingly that's not our situation. That particular group of young adults has been growing older and reaching the same critical point in family life when kids are heading off to high school and decisions about the future of the family have to be made. With the real-estate market as it is the Northern Beaches is just too expensive for many of our people to live here and some have had to move away and

others will also need to make that decision. Which means that for the first time in a while we are facing the challenge of a shrinking congregation. Now we can let that challenge discourage us or we can remember who it was that grew this church in the first place, that it is the Holy Spirit who makes a way where there is no way depending on our attitude, on our trust and on our need.

Jesus taught me this many years ago when I was leading a youth Alpha course. I wanted the 20 or so young people I was responsible for to be personally introduced to the Holy Spirit, to feel the wind and be touched by the flames. But in the preparation Jesus said to me; "I don't want you to do this the normal way". Now the normal way was to preach my heart out and get the worship band to crank up the music and to call forth the Holy Spirit out of the sheer intensity of it all. Instead Jesus said, don't preach, don't sing, get them to lay down and ask the Holy Spirit to come. My immediate reaction was, really? Are you sure? That doesn't sound right? But Jesus insisted and he pointed out to me that one of the reasons I went for the normal plan, is that if we really rev things up, and the Holy Spirit doesn't come, it might just seem like he did.

So there we were in the meeting room with all the kids spread out all over the floor. I asked them if God started to do something in their lives that they should just pray it out, and then I prayed; come Holy Spirit. The next 15 minutes, was the longest 15 minutes of my life. It was really silent in that room and the silence seemed to go on for an eternity. And just when I was beginning to think I knew nothing about anything, I felt something and it distracted me. What is that? It was something moving in the atmosphere in the room and as I began to tear up I recognised it as God's love moving in the room. And I wasn't the only one noticing this. Some of the kids had started to sniff and cry a little and then one of the kids spontaneously prayed about how amazing was the love of God, how amazing how wonderful. And then one young person after another young person began to pray the same thing.

What was God doing? He was attending to our heart attitude, preparing us just as he prepared the early church, opening up our spirits like flowers to the sun and then came the Holy Spirit. And those young people, many of whom could never be in church for more than five minutes without fidgeting, many of whom you had to have a gun against their heads to sing (metaphorically speaking), rose as one and began a time of praise and worship which was the best praise and worship I have ever been in. We started at 7:30m and by 11:00 O'clock it was still going without any sign of letting up. It was wonderful.

So what is our attitude towards the Holy Spirit going to be?

We are going to spend a little time now, seeking the Holy Spirit, I'm going to start with a song that began to bubble away in me during the week as I thought back over some of the wonderful times I've had with the Holy Spirit. Then we are going to sing a little and then we are going to have a time of quite instrumental music and if the Holy Spirit is doing something in you, I invite you to pray it out using the microphone

on the communion table. Can the music team come forward as I ask you to join with me in praying this simple prayer; Come Holy Spirit.

See the Wind

Words and music by Steve Everist 2016

See the wind kiss the lake
Autumn leaves are the laughter that
 he makes
And we don't know how he comes
And we don't know where he goes
But we love, oh we love
The touch of his holy Fire
Burning through our hearts
Roaring through our minds
Blow, Oh Blow, Holy Spirit, in us

See the church taking wing
In the freedom the Holy Spirit brings
And we don't know how he comes
And we don't know where he goes
But we love, oh we love
The touch of his holy Fire
Burning through our hearts
Roaring through our minds
Blow, Oh Blow, Holy Spirit, in us

See the clouds flying by
Eagle soars with a whisper and a sigh
And we don't know how he comes
And we don't know where he goes
But we love, oh we love
The touch of his holy Fire
Burning through our hearts
Roaring through our minds
Blow, Oh Blow, Holy Spirit, in us

Bridge

Blow in us, Blow in us
Blow out the cobwebs,
sweeping us clean
Clearing the way for people to dream
Blow in us, Blow in us
Blow with your laughter,
come with a grin
Set loose the prisoners,
freedom begins
Blow in us, Blow in us
Blow on your children,
spreading their wings
Rising like eagles, laughing like kings
Blow in us, Blow in us