

“Equipped, Inspired, and Active”

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First Presbyterian Church
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Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 104:24-34

New Testament Lesson: Acts 2:1-13

A little girl on the way home from church turned to her mother and said, “Mommy, the preacher’s sermon this morning confused me.” “Oh! Why is that?” said the mother. The girl replied, “Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?” “Yes, that’s true,” said the mother. “He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?” Again the mother replied, “Yes.” “Well,” said the girl. “If God is bigger than us and he lives in us, wouldn’t he show through?”

Among the four Gospel writers, Luke is often referred to as the evangelist, perhaps because he, like Paul, was not one of the original 12 apostles of Jesus. And still, Luke took it upon himself to research and write and share an authoritative account of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Acts of the Apostles. In other words, Luke “let God show through.” How was it that Luke felt equipped to write the Gospel According to Luke and the Book of Acts? What inspired him to take this on? And what did he expect as a result of his actions? Equipped, inspired, and active. Luke really took a risk putting himself out there as an expert on Jesus Christ when, in fact, he never met Jesus in the flesh. And while none of us is an expert on Jesus – none of us knows everything about Christ and how God works in our lives – we, too, are called to put ourselves out there, to be **equipped, inspired, and active** in our faith. When Luke wrote about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he wrote about people being equipped, inspired, and active. They were equipped by the Holy Spirit, inspired by God, and active as followers of Jesus Christ. But, when the disciples first showed up on that particular day of Pentecost, they were not equipped to do anything, they weren’t overly inspired by anyone, or ready to be active doing anything. In fact, the disciples were still trying to figure things out after Jesus’ death and resurrection. They had no real plan of what to do. We know this because earlier, in Acts, at chapter 1, Luke tells about the risen Lord visiting the disciples, and they ask him, “Lord, is this the time when *you* will restore the kingdom to Israel?” And Jesus answers, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you* will be my witnesses....” So prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples are powerless to fulfill their mission. Apart from the Spirit of God, they are neither equip nor inspired to be active doing anything, let alone whatever it is Lord has in mind for them.

We, however, live on the other side of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit moves among us and within us. On this side of Pentecost, we have ready access to whatever God might equip us with. On this side of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit moves among us that we might be inspired. On this side of Pentecost, we have been given clear instructions about what actions the Lord would have us take. And so sometimes we do act in the name of the Lord, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and equipped in service to God; sometimes we do! And sometimes don’t. Sometimes some of us do little to reflect the nature of Jesus Christ to others. We may feel ill-equipped and uninspired and just pretty much inactive when it comes to our faith.

That’s the sad reality for many people, and we can get by in life like that. God understands that we don’t always have what it takes. God knows that it’s hard to get

out there and let the world know you are a follower of Jesus. We can get through life without doing that.

What we can't do – unless we are equipped and inspired and active – is experience the exhilaration of feeling a rush of wind as from God filling the space around us and moving through us – God equipping us and inspiring us to act on God's behalf. Many people live their entire lives never feeling the rush of God working through them. And those who do experience the power of God in their lives do so, not because it's easy or certain. Quite the opposite; they do so by rising above any doubts or fears or uncertainties about how God might work through them and in their lives.

In today's NT lesson, Luke reveals a process by which God works through us and in our lives. It's the same process that God took some 2,000 years ago in the lives of the earliest disciples – the same process through which God acts in our lives today. Luke writes, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." The first step in the process of being equipped, inspired, and active in Jesus Christ is to gather together as the people of God, and to **wait for the Holy Spirit**. And, of course, we do that on Sunday mornings, but also on Wednesday evenings, at weeknight sports outings, during Sunday school and fellowship activities, on mission outings such as Harvesters and our Guatemala trip, and during our Bible studies and book clubs. Wherever two or more are gathered in Christ's name, be on the look out for the Holy Spirit; be ready for a miracle. "And suddenly," says Luke, "from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them." It was a miracle, how God equipped these disciples to be active in their faith. The second step in acting on God's behalf is to be equipped – to have the words to say and the power to say them, the actions to take and the will to take them in a way that will **uplift the lives of others**. We are to be equipped to uplift the lives of others; there's nothing more inspiring than that, and in fact, it will uplift your life, as well. God equips us to serve others in many ways – through God's word, whether written in the Bible, spoken by another, song by the congregation, enacted by those who live in Jesus Christ, or mysteriously planted in our hearts by the very voice of God speaking to our inner being. Luke continues, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." They were inspired. First, they showed up – gathering as the people of God. Then, God equipped them for action and success – gave them tongues of fire to speak in all languages. And now God inspires them to **act on their God-given gifts**. And they do, indeed, act. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they (quote) "began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." We can come together as followers of Jesus Christ, be equipped to do miraculous thing in life, even feel inspired to act, but unless we muster the courage, take the time, and put forth the effort to do so, nothing good will come from it. The third step in the process is to be active in the world **on behalf of God**. God equips us and inspires us to use our God-given gifts out in the world. Ours is not a solitary faith of one person communing with God and thinking good thoughts and feeling content with oneself. To be a Christian is to be in action. As Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you* will be my witnesses...." If we have any God-given gifts, if we feel the Holy Spirit at all among us, we have these gifts and feel God's Spirit for no other purpose than to act on it, whether we're comfortable with that or not, whether we're certain of the outcome or not.

George Ross, formerly of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio, once taught about the Holy Spirit during children's Sunday school. "The topic that morning was the Holy Ghost," said Ross. "I tried to explain to the boys and girls that the Holy Ghost is God inside us. I told one little boy by the name of David (no relation) to put his hand

inside his (own) shirt, which he ... did. Reminding him that God was inside, I asked: 'Now, David, what does God feel like?' He furrowed his forehead in thought and then answered soberly, 'Damp. It feels damp.'

Sometimes we are not comfortable with how God makes us feel – maybe not damp, but sometimes uncertain, hesitant, even fearful when God pushes us into action. Sometimes we feel ill-equipped when called on by God to act. Sometimes we feel, "Why me, Lord? Send someone else – I can't afford it, I don't have the time, people will laugh at me, it's no use, nothing I can do will ever make a difference." And maybe all that is true. Maybe the cost is high and the sacrifice great. Maybe people will laugh at us or respond inappropriately. Maybe you will *never* see the outcome of what God is doing through you to build up the Kingdom and bless the lives of others. But God doesn't ask us to act only in certainty. God only asks that we act in faith. The disciples at Pentecost were not certain what would happen when they opened their mouths and began to speak. Remember when God sent the Holy Spirit to equip and inspire and spur the disciples to action, and when they did in fact act, speaking the truth of Jesus Christ, Luke tells us (quote) "there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each." You see, sometimes our words and our actions as Christians, they do leave people bewildered. And that's OK. Luke says that "all were amazed and perplexed saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' (And that) others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'"

We have all been afraid of such reactions when acting on our Christian faith, afraid of being misunderstood if we come across too strong as a Christian – a little too forward about just why we do the things you do? Have you ever been afraid to do the right thing – or not participate in the wrong thing – because others might make fun of you or look down on you? Well, sometimes that's just part of being a Christian. God doesn't promise us that every time we act on our Christian faith, it's going to go over just fine, we're going to be appreciated for what we did or said, or even that whatever we do or say will have a positive effect on others. Some of the devout Jews sneered at the disciples. They called them drunkards. But others were amazed and perplexed and looked for meaning in what they saw and heard. They looked for God's hand at work in the lives of the disciples. So, sometimes we might be sneered at (like it says in the Bible) or otherwise criticized when trying to follow God's word and do Christ's work in the world. But other times, people may actually see a miracle happening in their lives through what God is speaking to them through our words or actions. That's what makes it worth the risk when we act as those who have been inspired by God, as a people confident that God has already equipped us to be successful. And we may not always be the ones to actually see the miracles taking place, but when it is God's Spirit that is working through us, we can rest assured that the truth of God's word will prevail over any who sneer and be a blessing to all those who draw near. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Lord Almighty, at Pentecost like at no other time, your the disciples are all filled with the Holy Spirit, given the power to express ourselves in new and exciting and mysterious ways. We invite you, Holy Spirit, into our hearts and minds. Free us from our fear and powerlessness. Like the earliest disciples, give us the power to express the love you gave and the truth you shared. Free us from our reluctance to be your faithful followers and give us an overwhelming confidence in your power to work miracles. And work your miracles this day, O God, guiding those who are blind and cannot see, and opening the eyes of those who can see but are blind to the people around them. Strengthen those who move slowly because of accident, illness or disability, while tempering those who move too fast to be aware of the world they live in. Uplift families, friends and caregivers who serve people in need, and soften the heart of those who feel awkward in their presence. Comfort those who grieve. Comfort, too, those who think they are worthless and beyond your love, and draw nearer still to those who think they don't need your love. And, God, for all people throughout all creation, we pray on this Memorial Day weekend, that we may learn to respect each other and learn to live together in your peace. Bring us, O Lord, ever quicker to a time of peace on earth when sons and daughters, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers need no longer risk their lives in wars and other armed conflicts. We know this is possible and yes, Lord, even assured. We know this in the certainty of your Word to us, your prayer for us, best expressed in the prayer you taught us, saying:

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.