

Prayer: Dear God, we abound in hope by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Fill us with all joy and peace as we believe in You. Holy Spirit, empower our lives to produce Your fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Amen.

Fifth Ave. UMC, We Needs Power

Often, we think of the Holy Spirit as something similar to ‘the force.’ In truth, it is difficult for us to comprehend someone that is spirit rather than flesh and not think of them as a force or power. In fact, it is quite common for people to talk about ‘the Spirit’ as a thing rather than as a person. However, the Holy Spirit is a person. She is the third Person of our Triune God. It recently came to my attention that there are many churches in the city of West Bend. Not only is there a church on almost every corner, but also on some blocks there are two churches sitting right next door to one another or facing one another across the street.

Let’s assume West Bend is not unique in this area; let’s assume in cities and towns all across America there are a great many churches of all denominations and all styles of worship and all types of architecture. The question I want to raise with you today is, how we can have so many churches, and so much sin and suffering at the same time? How can we have so many churches and still have so much crime, so much drug abuse, so much alcoholism and so much violence? You would think that with churches throughout our nation, condition might be a lot better than they are, but that does not seem to be the case.

The church is supposed to be the city that sits on a hill whose light cannot be hidden. The church is supposed to be the salt in the earth that brings seasoning and preservation to the whole community. The church is supposed to be the wellspring of hope and help and healing in a sinful world, but that does not seem to be the case. On the surface of things, it would seem that we have enough churches and enough Christians to get the job done. If you were to add up all of the members who attend all of the churches in West Bend it would seem that we have more than enough people to get our message out, and make our presence felt and transform this entire city. But despite having over diverse denominations of churches, our influence is limited, our effect on civic life is minimal and our ability to prevent social problems is negligible. I have only one thing to say about this situation; the church needs some power. We have wonderful worship services on Sunday morning, but at all other times during the week most of our churches are unoccupied. What difference does it make that we have over faith communities if the church community as a whole has no power?

This is not the first time that the church has been without the power that was needed to transform the city in which it lived. The same thing was true in the city of Jerusalem as described in the opening lines of the Book of Acts. Jesus had finished his earthly ministry and had ascended back into heaven. The whole world was waiting to hear the Gospel message that Jesus had come to deliver, but not a sound could be heard. The disciples who had been called and trained by Jesus to carry his message to the ends of the earth were all locked up inside the upper room. They were hiding from the very people they were supposed to be challenging with the message. They were whispering to each other behind locked doors rather than shouting to Jerusalem about the message of salvation.

Right outside their doors were the blind, the crippled and the sick. Jesus had touched such people and restored health to them, but these men could do no such thing because they had no power. Right outside their door were Roman soldiers who were imposing their will on other nations through force of arms. Jesus had already told Peter that if you live by the sword you will perish by the sword. But these disciples could not act on that principle, because they had no power. Right outside their door were people who were going through the motions of religion; saying prayers that held no meaning to them and sacrificing dead animals, which had no long-term effect on them. But these men could not offer the world anything better because they had no power.

However, on the Day of Pentecost, a day that marked 50 days after the Jewish festival of Passover, something happened that touched and transformed the men in that room and they in turn stepped outside of the doors and touched and transformed the rest of the world. The Bible says the room was filled with a sound like the roaring of a mighty wind. What appeared to be cloven tongues of flame rested upon the head of every man in that room. Each one of them was filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in unknown tongues.

As they spoke, those men began moving out into the city and a mysterious thing happened; people from various nations throughout the Mediterranean world understood what those men were saying in their own native language. The human speech that God had confused at the Tower of Babel back in the book of Genesis had been reversed. The Gospel was being preached. By the end of the day 3,000 new converts had been added to the church. Those who heard the message that day took it with them back to their homes all over the world.

All of this happened, because men who had no influence and no power on one day had suddenly been filled with the Holy Spirit. Now they could preach with power. Now they could pray with power. Now they could sing and witness with power, because on Pentecost they had been filled with the Holy Ghost. And on this Pentecost Sunday, I am inviting every one of us to pray to God that something similar happen to us. I am praying that God give me the power of Pentecost. I am praying that God give our music, and our prayers, and our preaching and our worship the power of Pentecost. I am praying that God wake us up and bring us alive so that Fifth Ave. UMC will have the power that is needed to tackle the problems that surround us in this city.

Those men were so excited about their faith that some of the people in the city said, “These men must be filled with wine.” It looked as if they must have been drunk. Peter responded to that church by saying, “These men are not drunk; it is just the ninth hour of the day and it is much too early to be drunk.” They have simply been filled with the Holy Spirit. Now I know that many members of most churches would not want to appear to be drunk in the spirit. We want to appear to be “cool”, “calm” and “collected.” But we need to receive the spirit of God that can set a fire inside of our souls that will melt our “cool” away and set us ablaze for the cause of Jesus Christ.

I want to have happen to us what happened to Peter. The last time anybody had heard anything from Peter prior to Pentecost, he was telling people on three separate occasions that he did not know Jesus. However, once the power of the Holy Spirit came upon Peter, he was walking boldly throughout Jerusalem telling anyone who would stop and listen, that Jesus Christ was Lord. I want that boldness, and I hope that you want it as well. I hope that all of us want to have the power and the boldness and the desire to share our faith and live openly for God.

I want our church and churches everywhere to reflect the diversity that was seen on the Day of Pentecost. The miracle of Pentecost included the fact that people from all over the world were present in Jerusalem on that day, and each of them heard the sermon by Peter in their own language. The appeal of the Gospel was made to the whole world at one moment in time, and those who responded to that message came from Asia, North Africa, Europe and Arabia. Pentecost saw people from all races and regions of the world coming together under the power of the Holy Spirit. That sad and obvious fact does not have to remain the same; as on the day of Pentecost our churches can reflect the diversity of the human family. We just need to open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit that can bring this to pass. It happened once, and it can happen again.

I want our church to grow like the church grew on the Day of Pentecost. At the end of that day, 3000 souls were added to the church, and more souls were added every day. The need for salvation is no less urgent, but the response the world gives to our preaching and our evangelistic efforts is far different than it was on the Day of Pentecost. We really are asleep in the spirit most of the time. We go through worship without any energy. We rarely sing the congregational songs with enthusiasm. We do not attend Bible study and Prayer meeting. Little wonder that when people do visit us in their search for a church home, they end up somewhere else. We need some power! We need the Holy Spirit.

Imagine all FAUMC filled with the power of Pentecost; let’s pray for that to happen. Imagine FAUMC determined to reach everyone in this city for Jesus Christ; let’s pray for that to happen. Imagine FAUMC with so much energy and excitement going on inside that it spills out into the communities around us; let’s pray for that to happen, as well. Imagine FAUMC with a pulpit blazing with truth. Imagine our Chancel and Hand Bell choirs with voices and music thick with praise. Imagine our laity praying until the Spirit of the Lord comes down. Imagine our Youth saying “Yes” to serving God and God’s people through the power of God that is at work within them. FAUMC you may seem powerless today but we can turn this city upside down if we just receive the power God first poured out on the church on the day of Pentecost. Come, let us get plugged into that Holy Spirit power and light up the city of West Bend and beyond! Amen!