

**The church is formed by the Spirit for the glory of Christ.**

**Acts 2:1-24**

Stories are vital to the human experience. Not just merely for entertainment but teaching us, granting insight, learning culture, tradition, and hopefully, the better values of life.

Among the most endearing stories are those when the losers become winners. When the group of misfits somehow come together and their team identity becomes more important than their individual identity.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy surveils the struggle of one such group; with a bigger mission, they learn to make the journey together each playing their part. For those of us less literarily inclined, The Mighty Ducks trilogy tells much of the same story! (Bad News Bears) The rag-tag group of those overlooked by the elites, the less-than and neglected, united and given a purpose that redefines their lives.

Spoiler alert. This is also the story of the church!

Those brought to their senses, realizing their need for a Savior, meet Jesus. The God-man that gives of his own life to achieve forgiveness for our rejection of God and his way. Bringing nothing but our need he lavishes grace upon us. Giving identity as his brothers and sisters, reclaimed from judgment and death, given life, hope, and eternity when we believe in him. He also gives us a place of belonging.

The under-performers from every segment. Even the elite that realized their success wasn't enough. Brought together by something other-worldly and good. Given a new identity, new purpose, and the taste of real life. This is the story of our formation as a body.

This is the story of Pentecost. The harvest feast, fifty days after Passover. For the church, the arrival of the Spirit as the animating force within each heart uniting for a shared purpose.

No coincidence that we are in the midst of a series on what it means to be the church when Pentecost comes. Maybe we will even experience some of the same excitement of that day today!

This shift in the life of the church, this new work, is the fulfillment of a promise.

Jesus after his resurrection spent forty days with his disciples, teaching, restoring, and preparing them for what was to come. Eager people. They had seen his life, death, and resurrection. They desired the kingdom.

**Acts 1:6–8** “So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [7] He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (ESV)

The promise of power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses.

**Luke 24:45–49** “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (ESV)

These followers would be empowered, formed, the Spirit building a people, in power for a purpose.

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## **Power**

Misfits made good. The disciples were viewed as misfits (there was no reason for this lot to be together) but they had been with Jesus. After the resurrection, everything changes. Still, there was a sense they were in a holding pattern, waiting on the promise and wondering what it would be.

We can imagine what it was like in that place. Like a team in the locker room tired and not sure what the second half had in store.

Were they recounting to each other what they knew? Maybe retelling stories of the ministry of Jesus, “remember that time he multiplied that barely bread?!” Or maybe they were reciting Scripture, staying rooted in their hope with expectation. Knowing what they were meant for can’t begin until the Spirit comes.

**Psalm 23:1–4** “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. [2] He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. [3] He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

[4] Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for **you are with me**; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (ESV)

Suddenly... the Spirit comes and knowing about the presence of God becomes experiencing the presence of God.

This is the moment power is unleashed on the church. A people formed in forgiveness and empowered for mission.

It is fascinating to me that this is the vital component. Jesus didn’t say, go study, wait until you have all the words right and the history together, then go be witnesses of me. He didn’t demand confidence in their pedigree or performance. He didn’t even give them a little graduation ceremony from his ministry to the next level.

We are not against learning, study, and preparation. But in being for those things we can’t miss what drives the church from this moment in Acts 2 through today. It is the power brought by the Spirit. And when the power comes, the church hums...

“John White, the psychiatrist and missionary and author, tells us of his experience of the Spirit's manifestation:

“On one occasion it was as I prayed with the elders and deacons in my home. I had tried to teach them what worship was . . . We then turned to prayer. Perhaps

partly to be a model to them I began to express worship, conscious of the poverty of my words. Then *suddenly* I saw in front of me a column of flame of about two feet in width. It seemed to arise from beneath the floor and to pass through the ceiling of the room. I knew—without being told—knew by some infallible kind of knowing that transcended the use of my intellect, that I was in the presence of the God of holiness. In stunned amazement I watched a rising column of flames in our own living room, while my brothers remained with their heads quietly bowed and their eyes closed . . .

“How could I live and see what I saw? Garbled words of love and of worship tumbled out of my mouth as I struggled to hang on to my self-control. I was no longer trying to worship; worship was undoing me, pulling me apart. And to be pulled apart was both terrifying and full of glory.” (When the Spirit Comes with Power, p. 87–88)

In the upper room the Spirit rests on each of them and fills them and their mouths open. There is no indication in Scripture that the Spirit has stopped working in this same way. Beyond the highlight of one way the people are gifted, tongues, we have to see that they are empowered.

"God seems to give whatever manifestations he pleases at different times. They are not the essence." Piper

This is what forms them as a body. What builds them into a spiritual house. Mark this, the church does not exist where the Holy Spirit is not at work. Sure there may be crowds gathering around shared values and politics or personality. But the Body is formed in power by the Spirit and he keeps empowering us.

**1 Corinthians 12:4–11** “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; [5] and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11]

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” (ESV)

We can't be the church without the Spirit's power. We are dependent. And that is not a lamentable position to be in because the one who promised delivers, the Spirit has come and he remains poised to grant us this same forming power today.

Spirit-filled Christianity is a paradox: cultivating a posture of perpetual emptiness and need that brings with it a perpetual fullness. Those that hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled...

"We are to bank on his daily, indwelling presence and grace, walk in the obedience of this faith, and pray day and night for the outpouring of power from on high. But we cannot make the Spirit come. When he comes, he comes suddenly. He will never become anyone's bellhop. He loves and he serves. But he keeps his own hours. He knows what is best for us." Piper

And when he comes, the church is formed.

Power might be revealed in gifts like this, in the miraculous. It is also revealed in being together when it is absurd to others that we would call these people family. When we become an image of the Kingdom of Heaven. And this power is revealed in the harvest... the souls that turn to Christ.

## **Purpose**

Formed in power for the purpose of witnessing of Christ, that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name.

Here the Spirit's power comes not as something kept for the individual (personal bonfire), but to blow the seeds of the Kingdom to the furthest reaches. Each of us an ember made bright when we are gathered, transformed by the fire among us.

"In your local church, God is cooking up his future kingdom. When we look around, we don't see that glorious kingdom so much as broken, wounded, and messed-up fellow Christians on a journey... That is why God has sent the Spirit into us - to transcend our natural abilities to love one another and to transform

our inability to dwell with one another in a way that witnesses to God's grand experiment, the church." Scot McKnight

Their worship told of the mighty works of God. It draws others in... and Peter preaches.

**Acts 2:37–39** “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” [38] And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (ESV)

It is what the church is meant for. Sent to make disciples as we go, teaching them all that Jesus said and did, and baptizing them into the body, into the Kingdom.

Making clear that from Creation, humanity born in the image of God was destined to dwell with him forever. But the corruption of sin enters the world through deception and we have been falling for it ever since. Even so, God raises a people to be different, and in the fullness of time, comes himself to remove former distinctions, calling all the stars in the sky children of Abraham, blessed by this Jesus who is the Savior of the world. Life is found in turning to him, repentance and belief.

Formed for a purpose. Surely in the church, we will find belonging, care (spiritual and physical), friendship, and learning. But we must as a priority find **mission**. This is what the power is for. This is what brings glory to Jesus, that others would believe in his name, find forgiveness in his finished work, gain identity in him and new life, joining the body that is formed in power for this purpose.

"...the Holy Spirit brings new life to those who believe in Jesus Christ, and with that life comes a continuing power to those who are continually filled. It means fire in our lives, individually burning away the chaff and flaming out to those around us (*and corporately refining the church and supernaturalizing us for evangelism*). It means the truth of God going forth from us in a way we would never have dreamed of - the divine utterance of God through us." Kent Hughes

And because the purpose is not done, the power is still on. As long as world evangelism is not finished the promise of extraordinary power to sustain and carry forth the work is still valid.

**The church is formed by the Spirit for the glory of Christ and the expansion of his kingdom!**

*Recognize our formation* - that it is a work of the Spirit, not of clever marketing or personality but of power for a purpose. Rejoice in that and let it motivate us on the mission.

*Pursue it more* - petition together for this ongoing power (even in new waves) that we would claim our purpose and see souls added to the kingdom.

Prophetic vision (Southlands friends) - the image of a basin of water with a flame, one fire, that eventually consumes the whole thing and spills over... Oh that this would be upon us!

This is our story. Those from the furthest reaches, trusting in Christ for salvation and life. Living with hope in him and the comforting work of the Helper. Misfits made a family, formed by the power of the Spirit for the purpose of making much of Jesus until he returns.

“Pentecost is a signal fire of the kingdom, a sign that that the entrance to life is open to all peoples & nations & tongues, that Mercy triumphs over judgment.”  
David Cassidy

May the Spirit empower us with this same fire, with this same message, for the glory of Christ.