

# Acts 1: 6-8 - On Being Spiritual and Spiritually Empowered?

## Embracing the Holy Spirit

Sunday before Ascension  
May 2018

### Acts 1: 1-11 (ESV)

#### The Ascension

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>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.” <sup>9</sup>And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup>and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

### John 15:12-14 (ESV) From Gospel for the day

#### Commands on Love

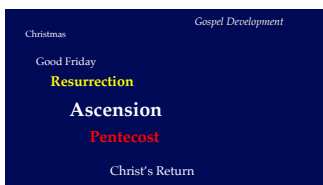
<sup>12</sup>"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you."

#### Message

### Intro:

As this church we follow a yearly calendar that marks the significant points of the Gospel story.

Today we are nearing the end of one phase of the Gospel story and anticipating the next.



Since his resurrection - which we mark as ‘Easter’- the risen Jesus had been meeting with his disciples. He has been helping them understand what happened and telling them what is going to happen. That is the natural place for people of faith - seeking to understand what happened and holding hope for what is going to happen so that we may then live in faith today.

This coming Thursday is marked as Ascension or ‘hemelvaart’. This day marks the beginning of a gap between Jesus’ ministry based in the world and his ministry flowing through the Spirit of God with him based in heaven and not in the world. Pentecost will mark the full engagement of that new phase of God’s saving work in Christ.

Right through his ministry in the world, Jesus had been preparing his disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit he shared with the Father. Jesus’ return to the Father at his Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit in power at Pentecost are key parts of that happening.

So I would like to focus this month on considering and hopefully embracing more of the Holy Spirit so that Pentecost is more of a living reality. For those who value a series consider the month of May a series on embracing the Holy Spirit

### Definition.

Let me start with a basic question: What do we mean by ‘spirit’? In English and Dutch -if you think of ‘geest’- it is used in various ways and this can be confusing.

spirit / geest = animating principle

The best description I have for defining spirit in the way the Bible talks about it is as the ‘animating principle.’ Spirit is that which makes something alive as a living being and represents their quality or character of life.

A stone has substance and form but it has no life. There is no indication of spirit in a rock.  
 A plant has substance, form and life - even very sophisticated life - but there is nothing to indicate a spiritual dimension as if it is a living or personal being.  
 Animals have substance, form and some degree of spirit in different ways for each species.

The biblical vision is that God is Spirit. God is the ultimate and essential animating principle. Nothing exists without God and nothing lives without ultimately receiving its life from God.

God is living in and of God's own life and exists out of his own being.  
 Then the precious reflection of St John, is that the essential quality of God's Spirit, that which makes God to be God, is love, self-giving, life-affirming, other-blessing, self-sacrificing, creative love.

*We could now fall down in awe and worship here at the enormity of this!*

The Judeo-Christian faith holds the insight that God's spiritual life is our essential human life.  
 God formed humanity from common dust and breathed his spirit into the human family.  
 Like so many other life forms we are flesh and blood ordered by DNA, yet that essential animating spirit of love from God was at some point shared with or invested in the human family.

What I am saying here is the first frame of the Gospel. It's very good news.  
 We are made by God in love for relationships of love in personal dignity and fellowship with others.

Contrary to the voices from both the Ancient Near East when the Book of Genesis was written and today's streams of Atheistic-Scientism:

- We are not cosmic byproducts of matter, time and chance.
- Neither are we
- merely flesh and blood defined by DNA.
  - nor simply naked apes governed by instinct and desire ennobled by civilization.
- All those dimensions are real but actually incidental.

Resting on these incidentals alone is like thinking a building is all about paint and wallpaper or cars are essentially wheels. The incidental is then confused with the essential.

What really defines us is our spiritual essence. The love in which we were conceived in the heart of God makes us human.

- The form, colour and substance of our bodies are incidental.
- Our intelligence is incidental.
- Our creativity is incidental.

As such they are all possible idols distracting us from our true essential being.  
 What makes us to be us as human being is the extent to which we share God's Spirit, the Spirit of love for others and for God.  
 PThis is all really good news and foundational for what Jesus said about us and the Holy Spirit.

## Scripture

Acts 1:8

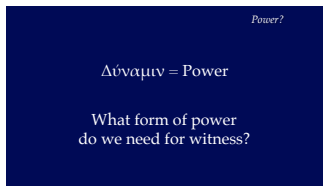
You will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will **be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

So let's now hear what Jesus said at Ascension Day about what was about to happen shortly. (Acts 1:8)

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."

To open this for us as Trinity Church I want to ask the question:

**Q:** To be a witness to Jesus in Eindhoven, Brabant, Nederland and Europe today before thinking of wider afield, what is the power you most really need from the Holy Spirit?



BTW, the Biblical Greek word for ‘power’ here is easy to remember - δύναμις - which is where we get ‘dynamo’ and ‘dynamite’ from. The Holy Spirit would come upon them and bring δύναμις / power.

**Qa:** Does anyone want to name the power you feel we need to be a witness to Jesus?

--Consider--

### Application

Once upon a time I tended to think that the power we most needed to be a witness was the miracle working power of Jesus.

It is absolutely true that the Holy Spirit empowers the church to be a sign of God’s Kingdom having come in Jesus by doing saving works as he did; healings, deliverances, wonders of provision and more in a church that is prophetic, holy, apostolic and united. I have always longed for that as described in 1 Corinthians and Romans where the gifts of the Spirit flow in the fellowship of the Spirit to the glory of Christ our head.

At the same time many Christians are luke-warm about this and non-believers do not always find it convincing. Paul was aware that miracles did not convince everyone when he said: “Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom.”<sup>1</sup>

To answer the question about what form of δύναμις / power we actually need to become witnesses to Jesus where we are today I two things come to my mind:

1. We need the power to open our mouths and speak God into our context. Typically we are like people who found the verses where Jesus told people to tell no one about him or what he has done for them!<sup>2</sup>

That is a harsh thing to say but I have heard so many excuses and so I conclude many of our mouths are tied and it will take the power of the Holy Spirit to open them to declare good things of God.

We are not alone in this. The first disciples were also keeping quiet about Jesus. They needed power to move from being frightened refugees, and validly so, hiding in their meeting room to become the unstoppable force that would turn the world upside down. Freedom like this requires much grace.

I believe we need the power of the Holy Spirit to open our mouths in witness.

*Can you accept this?*

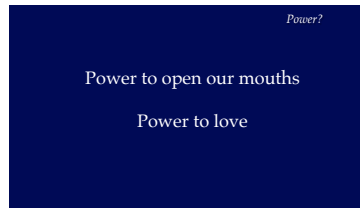
2. The second form of δύναμις / power I feel we here need from the Holy Spirit is love. Pure love is a spiritual impulse that flows from the heart of God. God is Spirit and God is love.<sup>3</sup> Love is God’s power. It’s the power in which he sent Jesus to live, die and rise for the salvation of the world to the cost of the whole Trinity.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:22

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16:20, 17:9, Mark 7:36, 8:30, 9:9 & Luke 7:56, 9:21.

<sup>3</sup> See John 4:24 & 1John 4:7.

At the ground level, love is what moves us forward in grace to others. Love empowers one to give, serve, bless and prosper another even at cost to self – love of others and love of God is empowered by the Holy Spirit who pours God’s love into open hearts.<sup>4</sup>



## Conclusion

This is a sermon so I have only given you words. If your heart is already strangely warmed that is not me but the Holy Spirit witnessing to the message.

Words in themselves fall short of bringing the power Jesus promised.

In Western Culture words typically get reduced to information and that is inadequate.

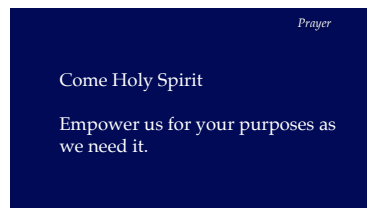
When Pentecost came it was not a download of words and information.

It was a download of spiritual power to enable the timid disciples to love each other and open their mouths in witness. It was about welcoming the Holy Spirit to become their animating principle, the essence of their life manifesting so that the world could see God’s love alive and happening in Jesus’ people.

The simplest way to welcome that power giving Holy Spirit is to invite Him and give Him room.

It’s to say: Come Holy Spirit! Come and empower me/us for God’s glory.

As we approach Pentecost this year I’d like to feature that prayer.



If you would like to be empowered for witness please stand with me to pray “Come Holy Spirit.”

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 5:5b - God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.