

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Mike Hotz
Revolutionary Faith
Acts 2:37-41**

My name is Mike Hotz. I'm an associate pastor here at CPC. Been on staff for 14 years. It was about the end of March or maybe the 1st or 2nd of April when I got the email in my inbox. I was down in Alabama, serving with a bunch of families on a mission trip. The email was from John Crosby, and the subject line of it was "Keep pushing." I thought, "Well, that is an interesting email. What does that mean?" Well, what it meant was back in October I had gone into John's office and said, "You know, John, I'd really love the opportunity to preach some time because over the 14 years I've been on staff, I've had a lot of great privileges and opportunities. I've been able to officiate at weddings, celebrate baptisms, walk with families who are mourning in funeral services, a lot of different types of things, but I just haven't really felt like I necessarily wanted to preach. I'm more of a doing pastor than I am a preaching pastor." That email I received was John's way of saying, "Let's take this thing for a ride."

This is my first sermon during a weekend service at CPC, and I can't begin to tell you how excited I am to be up here sharing. One of the great things about it is that John gave me the luxury of picking my own text and topic. As many of you know, this is the holiday weekend where we memorialize those who have served our country, but it is also the weekend we mark Pentecost.

Pentecost occurred 50 days past Easter and was the day when everything changed again for the followers of Jesus. Acts 2 describing the events of Pentecost is really a perfect bridge between the series on relationships we just finished and the series on the fruit of the Spirit we will begin following the all-church picnic next week. One of the marks of Christian community following Pentecost was the building of authentic relationships that bring people together in incredible and exciting, even transforming ways. And how could we talk about the fruit of the Spirit in the next series unless we first talk about the circumstances and purposes behind the gift of the Holy Spirit, which comes at this specific time we know as Pentecost. So what we mark today really does inform how we understand the fruit of the Spirit and why these qualities are important in the lives of those who follow Jesus and ultimately are God's desire for His people.

Let's first begin our time by opening our Bibles to Acts 2:37-41. That is on page 1,622 in your pew Bibles and we are going to put it up here on the screen.

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter replied, "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 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." ⁴⁰ With many other words he

warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."
⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Let's pray before we get into the rest of this message.

Lord Jesus, I thank You for this incredible opportunity to share on Pentecost Sunday. God, I thank You for the way that You have been kind of speaking to me and waking me up. I pray that the words I would say would be Your words, not just my clever interpretation of Acts 2, and that they would be words that would truly speak life into our lives. I pray this in Your Holy Name. Amen.

The words "when the people heard this" refers to the message given by Peter just moments before in response to the encounter this crowd had had with the Holy Spirit, what we call Pentecost. When we talk about the events of Pentecost, many people are drawn to the drama of the wind blowing, the speaking in tongues, the hearing of those different languages and the ability to understand them. For years, frankly, I sort of associated Pentecost with the Pentecostal tradition, you know, that charismatic tradition that is marked by some of the same qualities, the speaking in tongues, faith healing, and some other faith practices that make those of us of northern European Lutheran, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian descent just a little bit nervous. But even if we were to understand that Pentecost isn't tied to a particular denomination and is part of everyone's story, if we try to understand it simply as a standalone piece in Scripture, we miss out entirely on just how big a deal it really was. It was a big deal in the lives of the apostles, of the church, and for all generations who have followed since. You see, this day comes just 50 days following Jesus' resurrection, just 50 days after the empty tomb.

Now for us Easter seems like a very distant holiday. You might fuzzily remember this room kind of being packed out, the MPR [multipurpose room] being packed out, the Fireside room being packed out, and that great Easter dinner. This day called Pentecost doesn't seem connected at all to the events of Easter, but for the apostles and the others, there is no disconnect between the resurrection and what happens on Pentecost. Pentecost is the beginning of something that is radically different in world history. It radically changes how the children of God live, worship, and do life together and what happened on Pentecost is as vitally important for us today as it was almost 2,000 years ago.

So how does Pentecost connect with the Easter resurrection of Jesus? It begins with where Jesus found the apostles on that Easter morning. Jesus had to go looking for them. You see, they didn't necessarily believe the good news immediately. They were hiding in the upper room, and Jesus had to appear to them because they had the doors locked. They were afraid. Maybe they were afraid of the crowds of their fellow Jews who yelled, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And that they would maybe come for them next. Or maybe they were afraid of the Roman guards who were convinced that they had stolen the body and were coming to find them. At any rate, Jesus doesn't just appear to them once, He appears to them multiple times over the next 40 days, teaching them, encouraging them, talking with them about the Kingdom of God, and convincing them that all He said was really true. Finally at the end of those 40 days, He tells them to return to Jerusalem and wait again in that upper room. "How many days?" "Not many days," He promises them until they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. What they came to understand was that Jesus had them waiting for a purpose, a big purpose. In Acts 1:14 it says

during those few days before the encounter with the Holy Spirit, they did one simple thing, together, as a community.

¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Scripture is really pretty specific. It even says they did this “with the women.” It is somewhat unusual in the scriptural witness for there to be a mention of women. To include the phrase “with the women,” I think implies that they weren’t just present but that they were an integral part of what was happening because it was that important everyone needed to be present. So what did the apostles and the women do after Jesus spent that time with them? Well, what they did until the Holy Spirit came was, they devoted themselves to prayer. Nothing more, nothing less. Prayer.

I don’t know about you, but I am not very good at waiting whether it is for something good to happen or something bad to happen, in hospitals or whatnot. I am just not good at waiting. It feels like doing nothing. In some ways I think prayer can feel that way to us because it is hard to see what impact prayer really has. I am a doer. I am a planner. I assess. I analyze situations so I will know what the right play is when the time comes.

David Platt has a great book, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream*. I don’t think it is in the bookstore, but I do suggest that you maybe go find a copy. Platt’s hypothesis is that our culture has somewhat shifted in how we understand Jesus. It is a great book to kind of dig in a little deeper and separate our cultural understanding of Jesus from what Jesus wants us to understand. Platt says, “The dangerous assumption we unknowingly accept in the American Dream is that our greatest asset is our own ability.” The things that we make happen are the things that are most important, to be doers.

Now don’t get me wrong. I believe that each of us is gifted with amazing talents and abilities and that it makes sense to understand and maximize these talents, but in our culture, we have come to trust our individual talents more than God. When we trust in our talents more than in God, it is an easy next step to begin giving ourselves credit for all the great things that happen. When we do that, we give in to the fallacy that the goal of life is to make much of ourselves. The Gospel of Christ says something very different. It says that the goal of the Gospel is to make much of God. This sense that success rises and falls on our ability has also infected how we do church. In our culture of affluence and influence, we can fool ourselves into thinking that it is our good plans, our good activities, that lead to a successful church and more often than not, they don’t require the power of the Holy Spirit to do anything at all.

About 26 years ago a young guy graduated from Bethel Seminary. He took his first call in south Minneapolis, a little church known as Calvary Baptist Church. When he took that call, they were a small church, maybe about 28 people. They couldn’t even meet in their sanctuary because the ceiling was literally crumbling in, and so they met in a room. I think one of the unique things was that the church called this young pastor not with a dream of what their future would hold but that he might help them close their doors. They had grown tired of ministry at 26th and Blaisdell. They had kind of lost their sense of the plan and the purpose for their church.

Well, young pastors are foolish. They don’t give in to the notion that any church is supposed to

die. They believe churches are supposed to be vibrant and relevant and slowly by slowly as they prayed and fellowshiped together, God added some people to their numbers. Some of those people that He added to their numbers were the area's homeless because 26th and Blaisdell is at one of the major crossroads for people who are homeless. They serve a meal there at Calvary Baptist, but rather than just doing it on a day that is convenient, they do it after their worship service. People who are homeless can first come and worship and receive God, and then go and share a meal together down in the church basement and watch the Vikings or another game on the TV down there.

Slowly but slowly people were added to their number and just this last year, over 50 babies were born into their congregation. There are about 200 people there now. There was a day that a financial advisor who advised a rather wealthy man was sitting in the pew, and he shared with his client the great things that are happening at this little church. Just a couple of weeks ago this man of great wealth anonymously wrote a check to Calvary Baptist in an amount--I won't tell you the number--that would make even CPC blush. He had a vision that this little church that should have closed in on itself and just taken care of these little babies needed to continue to look outward and bless their community and share the story of the Kingdom of God.

What happens following Pentecost is not about the apostles' abilities or skills but about what happens after they have waited in prayer for something that is beyond their abilities, something that is beyond their comprehension. It is about God's perfect plan being made complete in imperfect people. Prayer opens us to the reality that there is a plan and a purpose beyond ourselves. Acts 2 where we find the story of Pentecost can really be broken down to four or five parts, but the part I would like us to focus on is about the person of Peter and what happens after he speaks.

Scripture describes that a large crowd had gathered in response to the commotion in the upper room. Some were amazed by it and immediately kind of got what was going on, but there was a whole host of others who simply thought they were drunk and out of their minds. It is at that moment that Peter steps forward to clearly explain it as a fulfillment of prophecy and as a proof that Jesus was Lord and Messiah. You see, for Peter the Holy Spirit had so moved and so empowered him, a man who just 50 days earlier had denied he had even met Christ, his speech causes an entire crowd to realize that Jesus is the Messiah and that they needed to ask for forgiveness for murdering Him. Peter found his voice on Pentecost Sunday.

It is right here that everything that Jesus had spoken about Peter begins to make sense. This is the moment if you are watching one of those national treasure movies or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when the key is inserted into the mechanism and all the dials, winches, and pulleys start to move into place and the gates to the treasure are unlocked. This is the fulfillment of when Jesus said,

¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church....

It is at this moment when the third act of God's story begins. The first act is that of creation. The second is the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the third act is the age of the church, the assembly, the community of believers, the followers of the Way, who are propelled by the power of the Holy Spirit. It all begins with that simple phrase, "When the people heard this." Like the drivers at the Indianapolis 500 this morning will hear from the podium, "Start your engines!" it

is off to the races for the church, for all of us, on the greatest adventure in world history.

⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

About 3,000 souls were added to their number, added for a unique purpose that continues to this day. You see, the very thing that Peter proclaimed and that the early church lived is still what we proclaim and live, that Jesus was raised from the dead and that through Him our sins are forgiven, putting an end to the agony of death. We have the same mission statement as Jesus, who said in Luke 4,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

That is the Easter good news! That is why Pentecost is so important to the Easter story because it is the indwelling of the good news. The formula for living this way isn’t very complicated. It is not based upon our abilities or skills. It is based upon how we started our last series on relationships. It starts with repentance and forgiveness. By repenting and asking for forgiveness, we are released from the guilt of our past. We are given the freedom of grace just as Peter was released from his guilt by grace. If you haven’t made this move in your life of asking for forgiveness, very little of what I have to say next will make any sense because it will seem like just more rules. The world wants you to believe it is about working harder. **Revolutionary faith is believing you are forgiven and then living as that forgiven person.**

I am learning that when you are preparing a message, God has a funny way of showing you exactly what He wants you to share. On Tuesday Kathy Nielsen, our local urban intern, and I went up to Kwanzaa Presbyterian Church in north Minneapolis in response to an email their pastor had sent. Pastor Alika Galloway had said that she was under a lot of stress because she suffers from asthma and had double pneumonia and wasn’t able to get to some of the things she needed to do. She contacted CPC and so Kathy and I went up there. We prayed just a simple prayer that God would show us where He would want us to engage. We went up there and talked about ways we could come alongside them as they pursue God’s vision for their community in a time of great stress.

One of the other things that stresses out our friends up at Kwanzaa is what happens on any given day directly across the street from their church. You see, that is the corner that has the highest incident rate for prostitution in the city of Minneapolis. It would be like just across the highway here. Women and girls selling themselves, oftentimes survival sex because they have young people at home, and they need to put food in their mouths. They have no way to earn the money to do that, and so they do the thing that is most detestable.

Well, Kwanzaa is the kind of church that doesn’t protest that. They don’t try to humiliate or shame people. They open up their doors and invite people in and speak a word of forgiveness to those women and girls. When we went up there on Tuesday, we walked into a room that had a table in it and a bunch of women sitting there who had come to learn about volunteering at the shelter, Northside Women’s Space. Alika said to one of the women at the table, her name is Michele and she gave me permission to share this, “Give us your two-second faith story.”

Michele said, “Well, my two-second faith story is, I sold my body for eight years. I ran an escort service for six years. I was addicted to meth for four years, and then one day I understood that Jesus forgave me, and I walked away from it all.” Now that is the kind of God that I believe in, the kind of God who redeems prostitutes. You see, Michele wasn’t at Northside Women’s Space to seek help. She was there *to* help. She wanted to use her story, her experiences, her sense of forgiveness, to bring other women and girls to see that they are forgiven, too.

Revolutionary faith is believing that you are forgiven and then sharing that good news with others in real and tangible ways. If we look at the example of how the 3,000 lived following this moment, I think we get a strong sense of how we are called to live and prepare for the power of the Holy Spirit. There are **markers of a Christian community** that is being led by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The early Christians gave themselves to **teaching**. Just as between His resurrection and Pentecost, Jesus taught the apostles about the Kingdom of God. The community devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, learning the same thing. I would ask: how are you devoting yourselves to a better understanding of Jesus? Do you seek opportunities to hear and understand what it means to follow Jesus? I strongly encourage you to think beyond what happens here in worship as teaching. Maybe it is a Bible study like Bible Study Fellowship or Community Bible Study, but it doesn’t need to be something that big. It just needs to be something that puts you in a place of teaching, and I encourage you to take that step.

Another marker of a community that is empowered by the Holy Spirit is that of **relationships**. It is impossible to have things in common the way Scripture talks about if there is no relationship. Following Jesus is not an individual activity, something done in isolation. Life is too hard and is filled with messages that will wear you down. The words of the world will confuse and frustrate you if you don’t have others around you. The kinds of relationships that our community is supposed to have are those that draw others in. Where are you building relationships? Do you have a group of people that you are journeying with? It doesn’t need to be a particularly big, well-thought-out group, but it does need to be a group where you are willing to risk more than a conversation about the weather. It needs to be a group where you are able to go deeper in authentic ways.

Having relationships and things in common led the early church to a kind of **service** that extended the care of the community to those beyond the community. This created in the wider community a sense of favor for those who followed Jesus. It allowed them to be viewed very generously and graciously by all those around them, so much so that others wanted to join what was going on. People asked, “What makes you so different?” It was the way that they served one another that made people want to join them. How are you sharing care and resources? Giving in the offering plates that just went by us is a good start, but how are you spending your time? One of the thoughts that Kathy and I shared with each other as we were heading up to Kwanzaa was just this idea of traveling on the road like the Good Samaritan. You know, you are not going to meet too many prostitutes unless you travel the same roads that they do, and I would ask, what roads are you travelling? Are you making yourselves available to those who need you most?

Another thing is **evangelism**. Now I know evangelism sometimes strikes up some negative connotations. I admit I am far more comfortable *showing* what I believe through my actions than

sharing with words. But the simple question is what if Peter had never shared on Pentecost Sunday? The reality is that very rarely are any of us asked to address crowds of strangers the way that Peter was. More often than not, the opportunity to share comes up because of a relationship.

I work with a ministry called Young Life, and one of their major messages is earning the right to be heard. Who have you earned the right to be heard by? Last weekend John and Laura talked about sharing that last 10 percent, that hard 10 percent in conversations. Evangelism is a little like that. If you have relationship with somebody, maybe they have just come to mind, what is the next 10 percent that you need to share with them?

Most importantly, though, the community of followers is marked by **prayer**. It is in prayer that we shut out the noise of competing voices so we can hear what God is saying. What does your prayer life look like? While I certainly believe that God answers please-help-me prayers, the prayers I think He really delights in are the please-show-me prayers so that He can speak into our lives and show us where He wants us, what His plans are for us. When Kathy and I met Michele, that was an answer to a please-show-me kind of prayer. What does He want to show you?

So what does it mean for you to live into a revolutionary faith that believes that you are forgiven and empowered? What would it look like for you to find your voice like Peter? Why don't we go to prayer right now and ask God what that would look like in your life?

Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit and for this weekend to share about the promises of Your Holy Spirit. God, I pray for each of us that we would come to a deep understanding of what it means to be forgiven and then to **live into** and be empowered to share that we are forgiven. That is really the simple story of Your Son, that we are forgiven and that because we are forgiven, we can live as free people. God, I pray that as we think about what it is to share our faith, that You would give each of us a powerful voice. We each have a story to share and I would just ask, God, that You would give us the power to do so and that You would be glorified if we share Your story in our lives. In Your Name I pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.