*Pentecost Sunday: POWERHOUSE*

Acts 2:1-21

June 5, 2022:

Pentecost Sunday

In 1908, the Blackhawk Generating Station was constructed in southern Wisconsin. It started off as a coal-fired power plant and was renovated in seven stages through the 20th century. Eventually, it generated electricity with power supplied by natural gas. Then, in 2010, the plant was decommissioned as a generating station.

But it is still a powerhouse. Just a very different kind.

Beloit College has taken over this riverside powerplant and turned it into a student union building focused on recreation and wellness. The college retained the architectural features and industrial equipment from the original Blackhawk Generating Station. But now the building generates physical fitness, personal connections and healthy living.

Picture this: A suspended, three-lane running track runs through every section of the building. The structure houses a fitness center and a recreational gym. There is an eight-lane competition swimming pool and an indoor turf fieldhouse. On top of this, the student union includes a coffee shop, student lounges, club rooms, conference center and auditorium, plus numerous spaces for conversation, collaboration and study.

But this new facility is not designed only to benefit students, faculty and staff. The college also wanted to use the building to reach and connect with its community. So, a new pedestrian bridge and publicly accessible elevator link the student union to a number of local paths and parks. These new ties between college, town, and river are generating a more vibrant set of community connections.

And what is the facility called? The Powerhouse. A former power plant is now creating a whole new kind of energy for Beloit College and the community around it.

New energy was also discovered on the day of Pentecost. The followers of Jesus were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate a Jewish holiday called Pentecost, or “The Festival of Weeks.” It was held to give thanks for the gift of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The people of God were thankful for this Law, which gave them inspiration and structure for their lives.

The Law was, in many ways, their historic power plant.

But then, when the Holy Spirit entered a house full of Jesus-followers, it created a new kind of powerhouse. It filled the apostles with new life, enabling them to communicate with diverse group of people, speak boldly to a large crowd in their own languages so they’d know the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and fulfill the prophecy of Joel, which said,

*And it shall come to pass afterward,*

*That I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;*

*Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,*

*Your old men shall dream dreams,*

*And your young people shall see visions.*

*Even upon the menservants and maidservants*

*In those days, I will pour out my spirit.*

Joel 3: 28

The Spirit generated a more energetic and vibrant community of faith, which was connected in new ways with the surrounding community, and indeed, throughout the whole world.

The apostles needed power. And they got it in an unexpected way.

Acts tells us that when the day of Pentecost had come, the followers of Jesus

*“were all together in one place. And suddenly 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. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the spirit gave them ability”* (Acts 2:1-4).

The Holy Spirit of God came with a “Sound like the rush of a violent wind.” Like the “wind from God” that swept over the face of the waters on the first day of creation. Like the breath that Jesus breathed on His disciples when he said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Wind, breath, Spirit – they are all the same creative and lifegiving gift from God.

Presbyterian author Frederick Buechner said that Spirit is “the power of life that is in you. When your spirit is unusually strong, the life in you unusually alive, you can breathe it into other lives, become literally inspiring.”

That’s exactly what God did on Pentecost. God “breathed, and continues to breathe” into creation, says Buechner. God’s breath, (and somewhere in scripture it says that “life is in the breath,”) so God’s *life* filled the apostles and inspired them, giving them the ability to go out and speak about God’s deeds of power to the Jews from every nation who were living in Jerusalem. The apostles were suddenly able to speak in a variety of languages they had never learned, and the people were “amazed and perplexed,” it says.

Yes, when the Holy Spirit filled the apostles with new energy, new life and new courage energized by excitement, the people around them simply assumed they were drunk. In a sense, they were . . . drunk on God’s wind, God’s breath, God’s Spirit . . . God’s life.

God created a Powerhouse on Pentecost, which gave the apostles a clean and sustainable source of energy. Unlike coal, oil, or natural gas, the Spirit does not contribute to climate change. Unlike the wind of the air, it is always blowing. Unlike geothermal, it does not require drilling. And unlike solar, it is available even on cloudy days. All you and I have to do is ask for it.

A prime example of the Spirit’s power is found in the speech of the apostle Peter. This was the same Peter who had denied Jesus three times, saying, “I do not know him,” “I am not [a follower of Jesus],” and “I do not know what you are talking about!” But once the Spirit came to him, Peter was filled with new energy, and new courage . . . new life, right?

Acts tells us that Peter raised his voice and addressed the crowd, saying, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose.” The Holy Spirit gave Peter the courage he needed to stand up to the skeptical crowd and speak boldly about what God was doing in the world, based on the prophecy of Joel. The prophet had said that God would pour out the Spirit on all people, and then “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (v. 21).

Peter and the apostles were energized not by electricity generated by coal-fired power plants or wind farms. No, their energy came from a new kind of powerhouse, in which the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak in diverse languages and offer a word of Gospel hope. Like the Powerhouse at Beloit College, this new life was not dependent on technology. Instead, it was generated by personal connection with God and neighbors, and it was spread through conversation and collaboration.

Such spiritual power is needed today, if we are going to be a part of a church that brings life, joy, and hope to the world. Peter told the crowd that God’s Spirit was going to change their lives for the better: “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,” he said, “And your young people shall see visions.”

New visions are being seen by Christians such as Shane Claiborne, who writes in his book, *The Irresistible Revolution,* that “The early Christian church was known as The Way. It was a way of life that stood in glaring contrast to the world. Of course, everyone was forewarned that in this kingdom everything is backward and upside-down – the last are first and the first are last, the poor are blessed and the mighty are cast from their thrones.”

Convinced that the Christian Way is a life-giving way, Shane and a group of friends moved into a small row house in a poor section of Philadelphia in 1997. Since that time, they have shared food with folks who need it, and run a community store out of their house. They have reclaimed abandoned lots and planted gardens in the concrete jungle. They have rehabbed abandoned houses and made friends with people in prison and on death row. Shane and his friends have seen a vision of another way to live – the Christian way. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit and directed toward changing the world for the better.

Men and women have been drawn to “The Way” (Acts 9:2) since the earliest day of the church. They have tapped into a source of power that comes from beyond themselves -- a power that is not found primarily in programs, policies or institutions, but in the Holy Spirit of God. This Pentecost power is an energy source that can keep people burning with love for God and for the people around them,. while radiating warmth and light to a cold dark world.

You and I – yes, even us – we can be a part of the Christian Way by turning our congregation into a powerhouse. When we do this , we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, an energy source that gives us both the courage and the ability to connect with power around us in life-giving ways, ways that might even turn their world upside down.

Amen.