

Pentecostal Power: The Seven Missional Acts of Acts (Part 2)

Acts 2:29-33, 40-47; 3:17-26; 4:1-22; 5:12-14, 41-42

Those of you who are regular church-goers: a question for you. Do you ever feel like you just aren't *feeling* the reality of the Christian faith? Like, you come to church, but you're just not *feeling* it?

Do you ever *really* feel it. But then you wonder—maybe it was just that the organ postlude was special; maybe it was the caffeine; maybe it's just that we sang my favorite hymns.

If so, I'm with you.

How do we make our faith feel more real? I don't know the answer. But let me propose this: if what we desire is to experience the nearness of God, and the grace of Jesus, then perhaps it's time to respond to the pouring out of the Spirit's Pentecostal Power.

Act 2 of the 7 missional acts in the book of Acts is "Pentecostal Power." Let's see what it involves, and we'll finish by seeing how it can make our faith feel more real.

So, what's Act 2, Pentecostal Power, mean? It means 4 things:

1. Power to Go Public
2. Power to Proclaim
3. Power to Persevere
4. Power to Procreate

1. Power to Go Public

First, Pentecostal Power is the Power to Go Public.

Last week we saw that after the death of Jesus and before Pentecost, there was a period of uncertain waiting. First the disciples were utterly terrified as Jesus was arrested and tried and condemned and crucified. Then they were confused but hopeful, hearing reports that Jesus was alive again. Then they were overjoyed when they encountered the risen Jesus and learned from him.

But still, they were underground. And Jesus told them to wait, even as he ascended to heaven. They waited.

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What's the matter? Were they not ready for their mission?

They were *emotionally* prepared for their mission: they became joyful in hope. They were *intellectually* prepared: they came to understand the Scriptures with Jesus as the glorious climax.

What did they lack? They weren't yet *spiritually* prepared. They lacked the spiritual propulsion necessary to go public. Pentecostal Power, the pouring out of the Spirit on the people of promise, pushed this small band of disciples out from their upper rooms and their secret cellars. Pentecostal Power catapulted these Jesus people out toward the hopes and needs and fears of their community.

Many of us who are following Jesus are rather private about our faith. We don't want to seem obnoxious, intolerant, pushy, or fanatical. We want to respect everyone's right to believe what they believe. Folks: this is great. The Peter who preaches and publishes the good news in the middle of the Pentecost feast is the same Peter who calls us to treat our neighbors who believe differently than us with gentleness and great respect. But he still tells us to be ready to give a reason for the hope we have.

Our faith is not a private matter. We are not a Luke 24 or an Acts 1 people. We are a Pentecostal people, an Acts 2 people. We cannot put the Holy Spirit back in some bottle. The Spirit is poured out!

And going public does not simply mean that we rent a building on Sundays and put up a sign and maintain a website. Going public means that we take our intimate fellowship, our IN, and we make it available to everyone OUT there. Look at 2:42ff — Our devotion to the Scriptures, to fellowship, our meals, our prayers are not hidden from public view. Our willingness to look out for one another's material needs is not private. We do it with sensitivity, but our generosity is no secret. The Jesus movement is considered a weird, fringe Jewish sect, but that doesn't stop them from meeting in the temple courts—in front of God and everyone—every day. Instead of being in spiritual quarantine, they're moving from house to house, filling their bellies with good food and filling one another's hearts with gladness.

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We're done hiding. We're done policing our boundaries. We're no longer afraid of what might happen if someone thinks our shared life is strange; we're under the influence of Pentecostal power now!

2. Power to Proclaim

But the Pentecostal community is not just doing their religious thing in the public square, where other people can overhear them. They have become a community of proclamation.

You know, from a secular perspective, Switzerland is perfect, right? Every gemeente has its beautiful, old church. And all the religion happens in those walls. Secular Switzerland can smile when it hears the bells and take a selfie in front of the bell towers. But no one has to hear a word about Jesus anywhere else. The museumification of Christianity is almost complete in this country.

But if I could start a campaign, its slogan would be this: normalize talking about the things that matter most to you with the people who matter most to you.

Yes, public worship counts as public proclamation. But let me ask you this: do you think it was any less taboo to talk about Jesus in Jerusalem's markets in the months following Jesus' death and resurrection than it is to talk about Jesus in a Zurich cafe today? Proclamation takes the form of public speeches by Peter here in these chapters. But that's not all there is to it. The Jerusalem Christian community could not stop telling the good news that had given them birth.

I'm a preacher, and you're paying me to publicly proclaim Jesus. We pay missionaries to do it around the world. But all of us together are a proclamation people right here in our networks of friends and colleagues and neighbors. Open your home, your heart, your life, your love to those people, and you'll never need to "bring it up." You will be asked for the reason for the hope you obviously have. Then, proclaim it. Just say something about what Jesus has done for everyone, and what he's done for you. It's not a sermon. It's not a big production. It's just your privilege as a part of the proclamation people empowered by Pentecost. If we're going to be a Pentecostal people, we're going to be a proclamation people.

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3. Power to Persevere

Power to go public, and power to proclaim. Third: power to persevere.

What's gotten into Peter!?

Remember Peter's macho talk? "I'll never deny you, Jesus, even if I have to die for you!" Remember his tough guy tactics? He cuts off the ear of the servant of the High Priest when Jesus was arrested. It didn't last.

Pretty soon, it was deny, deny, deny. "I was never with him. I don't even know him."

What's gotten into Peter? He's a different man! He isn't just preaching publicly. Pentecost has given him the power to persevere! His sermons have cut people to the heart, and that's uncomfortable. And his exaltation of Jesus as King of Kings has really upset all the wanna-be kings of the religious establishment.

So, 4:1, they arrested Peter and John and threw them in jail. He bears witness in his trial the next day. They warn him (18) not to speak the name of Jesus again. Peter says, sorry, I can't obey that order.

Because of his boldness, two things happened: people joined him in being bold, and those same people also joined him in suffering disgrace (5:41) for Jesus' sake. In the face of people's need, they persevered in preaching grace and truth. In the face of people's threats, they have the Pentecostal power to persevere. They left their trial "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for" Jesus' name. And they "never stopped" proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

4. Power to Procreate

Pentecostal power is the power that pushes the church to go public. It's the power to proclaim. It's the power to persevere when that proclamation becomes provocative. The last thing to say about Pentecostal Power is that it is the power to procreate.

Over and over in the book of Acts, Luke reports drama, trouble, in the life of the early church. But over and over, often right after a dramatic episode, you know what

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he says? He says “and the word of God grew.” Peter preaches, then (2:41) 3k were added. The disciples took their fellowship public, and (2:47) many were added. Peter and John are jailed, but (4:4) many believed and the church grew. All *kinds* of weird stuff happened in Acts 5, but “nevertheless (5:14) more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

As soon as the church comes out of quarantine, and the Spirit infects the church, every event seems to become a super-spreader event.

I come from America. In America, you can grow churches. You can grow them BIG. You can do it by having slick programs and great tech and a better looking preacher than you all are stuck with. You can get a big church without any help from the Holy Spirit, as one Korean pastor visiting America noted.

But that's not procreation. It's emotional and spiritual manipulation. It's an appeal to people's consumer instinct. People move from church to church. But the church is competing, not procreating.

Procreative power comes from one source only: from *God*. If we are in the business of providing religious goods and services, then we better start doing it better than other churches or we'll be out of business. But if we are a church birthed by the resurrection and fueled with Pentecostal power, then procreation will be a natural part of our life together. The sheer power of the resurrection of Jesus, the pure force of the enthronement of Jesus on God's right hand, the majesty of the grace of Jesus poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, beginning at Pentecost — this first makes *us* into people of the new birth. And that same Pentecostal Power makes it impossible for the church not to procreate.

Conclusion

When we move from Act 1 to Act 2 in the life of the church, our uncertainty doesn't go away. But what does go away is our inaction. It was impossible for the disciples, after Pentecost, *not* to go public, to proclaim, to persevere, to procreate.

“Don't speak that name!”

“*We must.*”

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“Don’t move out into the community.”

“Impossible.”

“Don’t mess with the status quo.”

“Sorry, but history itself has reached its climax and nothing is ever going to be the same.”

Once Jesus, and all that he has done for us, has captured our hearts—

Once Jesus, and his majesty, has captured our imaginations —

Once Jesus, and all his sovereign grace, has captured our wills —

We can’t *not* move OUT.

You know what will happen as we do? The reality of Jesus’ presence, closer to us than we are to ourselves, full of grace and truth, will become more and more tangible to our hearts, souls, and spirits. His grace will become more tender to us. His truth will become sweeter to us. His name will be like honey on our lips and his Spirit like water to our souls. We’ll be dependent on him for everything.

Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. But Jesus becomes more beautiful and believable as we, with Pentecostal Power, go public, proclaim, persevere, and, by God’s grace, procreate.

May it be so among us.