



Pentecost Sunday— June 8, 2014

I will pour out my Spirit

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

In today's text, as well as in the theology of the whole book of Acts, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is both the sign of the church's mission and the instrument that launches it. Just a quick glance through the first half of Acts shows the Spirit:

- Enabling the believers to preach God's word (Acts 2:4)
- Empowering a variety of signs and wonders (Acts 3:1-10)
- Giving leaders courage in the face of threats (Acts 4:29-31)
- Confirming for Peter and other early church leaders that the good news wasn't only meant for insiders but for everyone (Acts 10)
- Providing guidance in major decisions (Acts 15)

It's not that the believers in Acts are super-Christians, something altogether different from regular believers before or since. What we see instead is the unusual openness to transformation that has become the hallmark of renewal in the church and that the Holy Spirit uses to both dramatic and organic effect.

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have tended to move back and forth between two poles: thinking of the Holy Spirit as "a Hawaiian breeze" that wafts gently over the structures and institutions the church has put in place, and recognizing the Holy Spirit as "a Chicago gale" that upsets expectations and calls for radical reliance on God. Likely, many of the readers of *Leader* come from congregations more comfortable with

a "tame" Holy Spirit. Yet it's important to recognize that the Spirit's power is not always "subtle, fragile, or polite." Even today it can be electric, atomic, and volcanic" (*Feasting on the Word*, Year A, volume 3, p. 17).

The people at True Vine Tabernacle in Elkhart, Indiana, know this electric, atomic, and volcanic power well. The congregation's tagline ("Where the Spirit of the Lord moves") alerts both visitors and regulars to expect and look for the Holy Spirit's presence and leading in their individual lives as well as in the congregation's corporate life.

Why such attentiveness to the Spirit? For some, it is a matter of survival, of putting into place patterns that replace a lifestyle of addiction or other forms of brokenness. "There are brothers here, sisters here, who prayed for me on my journey" testifies one member in a video introducing the congregation (www.truevinetabernacle.org).

For others, it is an awareness of the deep needs of the world and of their own city of Elkhart. True Vine Tabernacle opens its doors to the Elkhart community by offering Bible studies for men, women, and youth (Wednesday and Thursday evenings); by providing guidance, counseling and support; and by a weekly Friday evening intercessory prayer service for the needs of the community and for members' spiritual growth.

For all, it is a thirst for the spiritual power that comes with music that lifts hands in praise, sermons that rock with joy, and testimonies that electrify both speaker and congregation. This is a congregation that prays exuberantly, that extends itself for its neighbors, and that welcomes its children and youth as vital partners in faith.

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"I do a lot here," said one of the high schoolers who is part of the worship team, "and I grow a lot here. I get my identity here."

"We're not afraid to pray for spiritual gifts," said one of the adults.

"When the Holy Spirit is moving, sometimes it makes me uncomfortable," said another. "I have to ask myself: Am I going to fit God into a box or let him do what he wants with us?"

ORDER OF WORSHIP

The worship resources that follow look somewhat different from what's often published in *Leader*. On a normal Sunday morning at True Vine Tabernacle, a prayer team gathers at 8 a.m. to pray for that morning's service. Sunday school is from 9 to 10, followed by a time of fellowship during which refreshments are served with an eye toward those who may have arrived hungry. The ushers circulate during this time, enjoying the fellowship themselves. They greet visitors, partnering them with people in the congregation with whom they might connect in one way or another. During the worship service, the ushers care for adults or children who have a need of some kind, keeping an eye on the pastor and supplying whatever's missing, and tending to mics and projection.

At 10:30, the worship team gathers. They start a song before anyone else comes into the worship space. When the ushers open the door to the sanctuary, the congregation enters into worship that has already begun. All of the words the congregation sings are projected on a screen; members of the worship team (which includes the pastors) are always listening to new music and bringing new possibilities to their weekly practice, which is both a time to practice and to worship. The group discerns together: Is this song, old or new, for one of them, or for the group, or for the congregation as a whole? Leading a congregation well means knowing that congregation well, so the worship team works with a variety of musical styles that speak to their people, usually gospel, rock, or contemporary Christian music.

The worship service begins with a 30-minute block of singing and praying led by the worship team. This block includes up to six songs, chosen both for words and music that help "usher people before the throne of grace and speak to God" in praise and adoration. Following this time, most of the worship team sits down. With light music playing in the background, the pastor greets the congregation and introduces visitors, who are greeted with applause. As one member of the planning team said, "The first time I came here, I felt embraced!"

Sometimes the pastor offers a word of encouragement or a Scripture verse. This is also the time for announcements and the occasion for people in the congregation to share words of praise or prayer requests. People's birthdays are recognized with a round of singing "Happy birthday," a special Bible verse dedicated to them, and a time for those who are celebrating to come forward and be prayed for. Those who are celebrating anniversaries are also invited forward. Since so many of the neighborhood children who attend True Vine Tabernacle come from broken homes, the congregation wants them to see what a good marriage can look like. The pastor invites couples to say a few words of love to each other and to kiss, then he prays for them.

The deacons then join the pastor for five to ten minutes of leading out in prayer for the joys and concerns mentioned earlier. The ushers come forward, lead a prayer for the offering, and pass the plate while the worship team leads a song. Children ages four to nine are dismissed to children's church where they have a Bible memory activity, hear a Bible story, and have some kind of craft or interactive time with the teacher.

Meanwhile, in the sanctuary, the Scripture for the day is projected on the screen and read, and the sermon is delivered. It is always followed by an altar call: What have people heard and how do they want to respond? If people don't know Jesus, this is a time to make that commitment. Those who need healing can ask for it. Music playing in the background provides some privacy as people coming forward are met by pastors and deacons who lay hands on and pray for them. Those who do not come forward are invited to support those at the front with their prayers. When this time of prayer ends, the pastor dismisses the congregation . . . until they gather again for one of the many church activities each week.

VISUALS

The main visual for a service inspired by the Acts 2 text is the congregation itself, gathered in worship and expecting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Additional visuals could include red, yellow, and gold cloths on a table at the front with lots of candles or oil lamps. If you have projection capabilities, consider creating a slide show of images of flames, doves, or people in worship. You could photograph people from your own conference or congregation if you plan ahead instead of if you start early enough. There are also several online sources for images that are publicly licensed (see www.freetch4teachers.com/2011/06/9-places-to-find-creative-commons.html#.UnElwhDjU9M and www.flickr.com/creativecommons/).

MUSIC

The music the group suggested for this service is all contemporary Christian music. You can purchase MP3 downloads at amazon.com for under \$2 each; look for lyric sheets and chord charts through online vendors or Christian music licensing organizations like CCLI or Onelicense.net.

If your congregation doesn't appreciate contemporary Christian music, consider choosing a block of songs from the hymnal or its supplements that have an effect similar to the ones listed in the order of worship. *Sing the Story (STS)*, pages 102–7, feature texts especially appropriate to the theme of receiving the Spirit, but you may also find suitable texts in the next section ("Watch for God among Us," SS 108–24). *Hymnal: A Worship Book (HWB)* 129 ("Fire of God, Undying Flame") and 364 ("Spirit of God, Unleashed on Earth") are both cited in the scriptural index as inspired by the Acts text. In addition, hymns 298–304 are listed under the heading, "Activity of the Spirit." Given the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Bible as well as in the life of the church, the small number of hymns specifically about the Spirit's work is notable—and maybe a call to writers of texts and tunes!

For a song set that draws on music in the hymnal and supplements but reflects the spirit of the set suggested by the True Vine Tabernacle worship team, start with a heartfelt call to worship (for example *Sing the Journey* 9, "Come, Now Is the Time to Worship") followed by a simple, repetitive song that prepares people to receive the Holy Spirit (for example *HWB* 298, "Veni Sancte Spiritus"; *STS* 104, "Come, O Spirit, Come"; or *STJ* 33, "Come, Holy Spirit, Descend"). Follow these with a livelier tune and rhythm, perhaps with a text emphasizing the unity the Spirit brings (*HWB* 304 "There Are Many Gifts" or *HWB* 293 "God Sends Us the Spirit"). Round out the set with a shout of praise (*HWB* 87, "Great Is the Lord" or *STJ* 19 "I Will Call upon the Lord").

Don't hesitate to "marinate" in a song by singing it more than once if that seems right, and connect the songs in the set by talking about the theme of the song you're moving into while the instruments play it quietly. This way the song set feels like an organic whole rather than song+song+song+song. The True Vine Tabernacle worship team uses a keyboard, guitars, drums, and

several singers; draw on the musical talents in your own congregation to guide and support your congregation's singing. A worship team can stand up front and face the congregation; equally effective is a "music section" near the front of the congregation and a song leader who leads with his or her voice or by conducting.

ADAPTING FOR YOUR OWN CONTEXT

Since worship planners and leaders at True Vine Tabernacle don't use bulletins, printed prayers, or the lectionary, what follows is a worship service patterned on the congregation's normal worship practice and using the Acts 2 text, which is the first lection for Pentecost Sunday.

Those who plan and lead worship at True Vine Tabernacle are savvy about and use many online resources; the worship resources that follow reflect the places they look for inspiration. While their order of worship may not fit your congregation either in style or content, it is offered without apology for its specific character. The intention of the Pentecost Sunday resources is to invite the readers of *Leader* to enlarge their worship practices. So work with what's here in any way that will serve your congregation. This may mean using the worship resources as a springboard or inspiration for your own planning, picking specific practices or ideas from the resources to try out, or taking on the whole plan as way of "walking in the shoes" of brothers and sisters in another context.



Rachel Miller Jacobs

Pentecost group: from True Vine Tabernacle, left to right: Bill Newman, Millie Newman, Elijah Lora, Nancy Lora, Alicia Gonzales, Janet Hochstetler, Norma Barajos.



June 8, 2014—Pentecost Sunday

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Texts: Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 1 Corinthians 12:3-13; John 20:19-23

TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE

True Vine Tabernacle takes two offerings every week: the regular offering and the “loose change bucket.” The money from the loose change bucket goes to a different ministry each month, connecting the congregation to people in the neighborhood.

Song set

“Spirit Break Out” Kim Walker

A slow and thoughtful song to prepare us to be free for what God wants to do in our lives

“Burning in My Soul” Brett Younker

An energetic song about the unity the Spirit gives the church

“Set Afire” Will Reagan and United Pursuit

A reflective and personal song about God’s transforming power

Extemporaneous prayers of praise by one or more members of the worship team

“I’m Sending the Fire” Eddie James

Sing only the chorus, over and over, as a way of “marinating” in the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out not only on the early church but on those in this worship service.

Welcome, announcements, sharing

This is the “church family time” when the pastor greets the congregation, visitors are introduced, testimonies or praises are offered, prayer requests are made, and the pastor offers the congregation a brief word of encouragement or a special verse, perhaps drawn from one of the day’s readings listed above.

Consider inviting those who are celebrating birthdays or anniversaries to the front for recognition and a blessing. Close this block of time with intercessory prayer. While the pastor only could offer this extemporaneous prayer, consider inviting several elders or deacons to join him or her and to work together as a prayer team in leading the congregation’s spoken prayers.

I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT

Offering

Ushers come forward and one or more of them lead in prayer before passing the plate(s). A good song for the offering time is *HWB* 389, “Take My Life.” On this day especially we remember that we return to God not only a portion of our money but our very lives, including our will and our love.

Children’s time

If your congregation doesn’t have children’s church, consider planning for a children’s time that teaches the children (and the congregation listening in) about how to pray. The Holy Spirit is poured out on children too, and not

in some mini version. The temptation of many adults is to pray *on behalf of* the children, but praying is something we only learn by doing, so resist this temptation and make space for the children to offer their own prayers.



Tell the children that when we pray, we simply speak to God from our hearts—much as we would tell a trusted human friend what we need, what we’re thinking about, and what makes us happy. We can pray for ourselves, for our families, and for the world. Don’t hesitate to remind the children of the prayer time they just witnessed a few moments ago.

Invite the children to take a moment to think of what they want to tell God. Then tell them that one of the ways Christians through the ages have kept each other company in prayer is by putting their hands on the shoulders of the person who’s praying. Demonstrate what that looks like, perhaps allowing the children to practice on a volunteer.

Then ask: “Who wants to start our prayer time?” Prompt the group of children to gather around this child and lay hands on him or her while the child speaks a prayer. Continue with as many children as want to participate.

EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON GOD’S NAME WILL BE SAVED

Scripture reading

At True Vine Tabernacle, the Scripture for the day is projected on the big screen and read by the pastor. If you’d like to project the Scripture that’s being read, as long as you’re using lectionary texts, http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/pdf/Ax_DayofPentecost.pdf provides beautifully formatted texts in several visual options. Please note the “Terms of Use” entry at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/faq2.php?aname=copyright#copyright>.

Sermon

Sometimes at the beginning of the sermon, the pastors at True Vine Tabernacle project a video version of a skit or adapt a written script that is performed by people in the congregation. The Skit Guys are a favorite source of inspiration. Two options are listed below. The first is a 2½-minute video; the second is a script for a three-person drama.

- <http://skitguys.com/videos/item/the-story-of-pentecost> (video)
- <http://skitguys.com/scripts/item/spirit-talk> (script)

One of the striking realities in the Acts 2 text is the freedom that comes with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The “disorder” is so great that at least some of the pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem conclude that these first believers are drunk. They were wrong about the source of the freedom—but also right to realize something new was happening.

What the church gained from this Spirit-given freedom was amazing: the shattering of all kinds of religious and cultural stereotypes. “No matter how you look at it, Acts 2 shows a big God with a big word at work expanding out into a big world” (*Feasting on the Word*, year A, volume 3, p. 17).

The prophet Joel points to two realities that are a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit both long ago and right now: erasing of “disqualifications” due to age (old and young), gender (men and women), and social class (slave and free); and the reality that the Spirit’s gifts are given not just for the individual but for the body.

While the gift of tongues, prophecy, and the interpretation of tongues may not be as common in some of our congregations as at True Vine Tabernacle or in the early church, it’s worth asking ourselves whether we or our congregations know how, and are willing, to wait with expectation. Are we afraid to pray for spiritual gifts, either not believing they could be given or hesitant to trust the Holy Spirit to hold sway over us?

This story challenges all of us to recognize the Spirit’s presence and claim and use our “authentic voices, gifts, and skills with which to love and serve. However, we cheapen the Spirit and her gifts if we reduce them to dwelling exclusively within the *individual*” (*Feasting on the Word*, year A, volume 3, p. 18, emphasis added). God has poured out the Spirit not primarily for our private enjoyment but for the up-building and edifying of the body. So the question isn’t only “How will I respond to the call and gift of the Spirit?” but “How will *we* respond?”



Response action

Today is an ideal day to invite people to come forward for anointing to receive the Holy Spirit (or its gifts) either for the first time or as a “double portion.” Invite people to come forward to meet pastors and deacons and perhaps members of an intercessory or prayer team, if you have one. Pair these “pray-ers” in teams of two; one member of the “team” can ask the person how they can pray for them and lead out in prayer, the other can join that prayer silently or aloud and anoint the person at the end. Small bottles of unscented (and fresh) olive oil and a box of tissues for tears or excess oil might be useful additions to each prayer and anointing station.

You may wish to anoint people on their hands or foreheads with words that grow out of your time of prayer. You could also use one of the following short phrases:

- _____ (name of person), I anoint you with oil as a sign that, through the Spirit, God has given you gifts for the common good (1 Corinthians 12).
- We anoint you with oil as a sign of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in your life.
- Through God’s sending of the Spirit, you are created, and God rejoices in this work (Psalm 104)!
- Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends you (John 20).

During this time of anointing, play some music in the background or ask the congregation to sing to provide both privacy and a sense that there’s plenty of time to do what is needed. Good song choices from the hymnal and supplements include:

- *STJ* 34 “Loving Spirit”
- *STJ* 35 “O Breath of Life”
- *STJ* 72, “One Is the Body”
- *STS* 120, “Somebody Prayed for Me”
- *HWB* 28, “Breathe upon Us, Holy Spirit”
- *HWB* 31, “Wind Who Makes All Winds”
- *HWB* 356, “Breathe on Me, Breath of God”

Blessing and sending

Invite the congregation to stand and to join hands or place hands on each other’s shoulders to receive this blessing drawn from 1 Corinthians 12:

Now there are a variety of gifts,
but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services,
but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of activities,
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.
You have received the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good:
go now to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Closing song

“Happy Day” Kim Walker and Jesus Culture

An upbeat song of gratitude for what God has done; the congregation’s “Yes!” to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit