

The Colors of Spiritual Power

Sermon for the Day of Pentecost, June 8, 2025

Readings: Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17, (25-27); Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Sermon text: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. Acts 1:8

Power. There are different kinds and colors of it. and the Holy Spirit is very much involved.

Next week, Trinity Sunday I will talk about the difference between power over and power with, a classic community organizing distinction.

This morning I thought I’d try out my new Calkins theory of the colors of spiritual power. Let me know if this flies. I use the different liturgical colors—the various colors we use for the altar over the year—to talk about the different kinds of power. This morning we have red—which I will get to—but next week and for many weeks thereafter we will see green. Green is big, a dominant characteristic of the power of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the giver of life—as we declare in the Nicene Creed. Hildegard of Bingen called this power *veriditas*, green power, the force that through the green fuse drives the flower, in Dylan Thomas phrase. Just look around, it is evident in the explosion of life, given the chance. It is evident in human creativity, as we are made in the image of God and empowered to be co-creators—for good and ill.

We will explore this aspect of the power of the Holy Spirit in the season of creation—part of the season of Pentecost, in September.

We have time, Pentecost and Epiphany—another green season—together make up the majority of Sundays in the liturgical year.

We have just come off of Easter—which together with Christmas are the white seasons. White is the color we use for Incarnation and Resurrection. The unique power of God manifest in the Son Jesus Christ—entering this world in a powerful way at Christmas, rising back to new life on Easter. The transcendent power here is unique to God in Christ. And for funerals—when we will enter into the resurrection power of God.

Preparing for those two seasons we have Advent and Lent—traditionally clad in purple—with a beautiful blue also used for Advent. Lent is the season for self-examination, repentance. Advent for preparation, both for the coming of Christ

and for the day of judgment. The power of the Holy Spirit in this color is the power to make us see our own nature, need for God, our sinfulness, waywardness, lostness. And to turn around, to see the hand of God reaching out to hold us, save us, lift us. The purple power is interior and introspective.

But today we wear red in commemoration of the red power of the Spirit—the tongues of flame, the burning passion. The color of fire and the color of blood—the courage and faith of the martyrs. Those who witnessed even to the death.

This is the power of the Spirit I would like us to think about in more detail this morning. The power Jesus promised the disciples when he said before ascending to the Father, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). The power to be witnesses of Christ: as we pray, ‘And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord’.”

This is the true Pentecost power, the power to speak in the tongues of truth, and compassion. The power to listen and to hear and understand the word of God in whatever tongue it is told.

How do we get the courage to witness, the compassion to reach out? How do we proclaim the gospel so as to stir repentance, spread forgiveness and sow the seeds of the reign of love?

We have to be a bit careful here. Gifts of eloquence, intelligence, powers of personality—they may be used for self centered reasons even in the name of Christ. Many a preacher has been proud of his own voice. Counted converts like scalps. Humble-bragged of church planting or growth (Paul kind of does this).

And of course we see this everywhere in the world. Humans are given great powers. Reservoirs of energy and ingenuity, guided by ambition and vision, can build empires of power and glory and wealth. Human towers of Babel. All will collapse in the sands of time if not built on the foundations of justice and truth.

But to receive the power of the holy Spirit such that it is now you who have the power but the power of God working in you—overcoming the hesitations of humility, the awareness of weakness, despite the challenges of the many other tasks and opportunities we have each day to do so many things—but instead to see Christ in the face of the one standing before us, to actively listen, genuinely seek to understand, offer to help, to pray, just to be present. Isn't that something to consider a small miracle, given our distracted present. The power of screens and self interest. the competing demands of family, work and who knows what else. It is a small miracle, to give one's full attention to another—and I think that

is the gift of the holy Spirit. As the saying goes, people may not remember what you said but they will remember how you made them feel. That is the most effective evangelism,

Another quiet gift is to understand, to have compassion, the power to stop the rush to judgement. I just rewatched Twelve Angry Men, the great Sidney Lumet film starring Henry Fonda as the lone juror who said let's not rush to judgement and condemn this young man to death. Let us consider the evidence carefully and see if there is not reasonable doubt.

Jesus told his disciples that there would come a time when they would be called to court for believing in him. That they should not fear, should not agonize over what to say—the Holy spirit will give them words. But that still means they had to trust his promise, had to let go of the fear and loosen the tongue—and speak the truth. The holy spirit gifts us the gift of courage, to speak, stand up, be counted even when it is to our cost, in the name of love and truth and mercy. To love and serve as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.

The color is red. For martyrs, for Spirit, for courage, for truth. For Christ.

Amen.

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