

TITLE: "Rowing or Driving?"

TEXT: Acts 2:1-11 (NT p. 119)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

Introduction – Rowing or driving

When I was 12 or so, my mother, two sisters and I moved to a home on the ocean in Massachusetts. Early one morning, after a huge storm, I found a damaged row boat washed up in the marsh. I repaired it, painted it and found a couple of mismatched oars. It was a pram, a flat-bottom skiff, so I could only row around the harbor, but it gave me some freedom and independence.

The father of one of my friends owned a 42 foot boat that he used for commercial fishing. When school was out, my friend and I started working on the boat. Whereas I used to be confined to the harbor, now we plowed through the seas and fished up to 20 miles out in the ocean. In the harbor I used to catch fish that weighed a pound or two, but on the boat, we caught them up to 40 pounds. Although paddling in my pram was fun, driving that POWERFUL 42 foot boat was an adventure, let me tell you.

We have a similar opportunity as Christians. We can spend our lives paddling around in a harbor where life is predictable, safe and secure OR we can trust the POWER of the Holy Spirit, go out into the seas of life and work to change the world for the better. That is what the Holy Spirit will do for you. It will give you the power to TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH, the power to CHANGE YOURSELF and the power to CHANGE THE WORLD for the better.

1. The power to TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH

The Christian life is a series of hills and plateaus. In our pilgrimage of faith, we climb to a level place in our relationship with the Lord and then we remain on that level place until we decide to climb higher. How long we stay on that plateau of faith depends upon how willing we are to take a leap of faith in order to grow to the next spiritual level. Spiritual growth always REQUIRES commitment.

I spoke to someone recently who was dealing with serious problems and was having trouble believing that God could resolve those problems. I encouraged him to make a commitment to come to church each Sunday. Just as a car is manufactured to run on gasoline, so God CREATED each of us to run on God and when we DON'T worship God, things DON'T go right in our lives.

He said, "But Sunday is the only day I can relax and do my own thing."

Someone else told me she was having problems because she couldn't believe that God loved her. The only way to experience God's love and begin to trust God is to spend time alone with Jesus. I recommended that she start her day with quiet prayer, immerse herself in God's love and read a Christian devotional. Right now I am reading the devotional "Jesus Calling" by Sarah Young. Great stuff!

She said, "But I don't LIKE to get up early in the morning."

We all would like Christian life to be easy. We would each like to do what WE want to do and then have God give what we need to DO what we want to do. ...Won't happen. God has a pilgrimage of faith for each of us, and it is a beautifully unique plan tailored for our uniquely individual selves. To move forward on this pathway of faith, we HAVE to make a commitment, not knowing how we possibly can, and then trust the POWER of the Holy Spirit to GIVE us what we need to do it.

How do we GET the POWER of the Holy Spirit? Ask God for it in prayer.

What do we get when we TAKE a leap of faith? Love, joy and peace. I don't know what rewards you are looking for in life, but nothing, in my book, can beat love, joy and peace. God WILL give you love, joy and peace if you are willing to risk taking a leap of faith in order to grow in faith.

2. Power to CHANGE YOURSELF

The Holy Spirit will also give you the POWER to change yourself. I spoke to someone recently who said, "I wish I could stop smoking."

I said, "There will ALWAYS be something you cannot do by yourself. That is why we need God. I encouraged him to pray and ask God to give him a date when he should stop smoking. Then, when that day came, to throw away his cigarettes and trust God for the POWER, each and every minute of each day, to stop." I said this because many people I have told this to have done it and, as long as they stay close to the Lord, they don't smoke.

The same is true of pornography. I recently attended a seminar and heard about how easily accessible pornography is on the Internet. According to the psychologist who gave the talk, pornography is a disorder of intimacy and causes relational problems with spouses and other loved ones. People into pornography, CANNOT stop by themselves. They need the POWER of the Holy Spirit to break porn's hold upon them and they need the power of the Holy Spirit to keep you from looking for it each and every moment of each and every day and night.

We should never be ashamed of our sins and addictions whatever they are. Guilt is something God does NOT use to get us to turn from sin. LOVE is what God uses to release us from the hold of sin. God says to each of us, "If you have faith in my son, I love you and I WILL give you the POWER to resist the temptation to sin if you cling to me each moment of the day and night."

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3. The power to CHANGE THE WORLD for the better.

Finally, if you trust God, God will help you to CHANGE THE WORLD for the better. Whether you go out and buy an item for our weekend backpack program each month. Serve on the kitchen cupboard staff, give to one of our mission programs, serve on a church committee, take steps to preserve our environment or help people in need in our community, making the world a better place is one of the things the Holy Spirit will enable you to do.

Let me close with a story. It's from the book *Moments for Pastors* by Robert strand:

It was early in 1945. As U.S. forces pushed deep into Okinawa they came across a village unlike any they had seen. Here at Shimabuku they were met and welcomed by two men who invited the troops in as "fellow Christians."

Correspondent Clarence W. Hall described the hamlet like this: "We'd seen other Okinawan villages, uniformly down at the heels and despairing; by contrast this one shone like a diamond in a dung heap. Proudly the old men showed us their spotless homes, their terraced fields, fertile and neat, their storehouses and granaries, and their prized sugar mill.

Searching for an answer as to why this one village was so different from all the rest, Hall uncovered an incredible story. Some 30 years before, an American missionary on his way to Japan had paused at Shimabuku and stayed only long enough to make two converts and leave them a Japanese translation of the Bible. These two new converts, with only instructions to read the Bible and live by it, began sharing their faith with neighbors. Before long the whole town had accepted Christ and for 30 years had been following the Bible completely.

They had adopted the Ten Commandments as their legal code and the Sermon on the Mount as their guide for social conduct. In their schools they taught the Bible, and in their courts made decisions on what God's Word said. Hall noted that they managed to create a Christian democracy at its purest. The result was that there were no jails, no bars, no drunkenness, no divorce, and a high level of happiness!

The young war correspondent was so moved by the experience that he later requisitioned a jeep and investigated the town more fully. He attended a primitive but deeply spiritual worship service and came away more impressed.

After the war came to an end, hall began to wonder what had happened to the tiny hamlet. Fifteen years later he went back there to find that while modern civilization had swallowed Okinawa, the spiritual influence of Shimabuku remained.

On leaving town back during the War many years before, his jeep driver had said, "So this is what comes out of only a Bible and a couple of old guys who wanted to live like Jesus." Then, with a glance at a shell hole beside the road, he said, "Maybe we're using the wrong weapons to make a better world."

Conclusion – A better weapon

There IS a better weapon to make a better world. It is the Holy Spirit. In our text for this morning, we heard how the Holy Spirit changed a group of 11 frightened men into a force that changed the world. We here this morning are the result, 2,000 years later, of the POWER of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

And if you ask God for that same Holy Spirit, it will empower you;
 To take your next step of faith
 To change yourself and
 To change the world for the better.

Amen.