

"POWER WITH A PURPOSE"
ACTS 2:1-21
THE DAY OF PENTECOST
MESSIAH, BOERNE
MAY 28, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.

TEXT: ACTS 2:1-21

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

IN 1961, A WALL BEGAN TO BE CONSTRUCTED BETWEEN EAST AND WEST BERLIN. WHILE EAST GERMANY SAID IT WAS BUILT IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS CITIZENS FROM THE EVIL INFLUENCES OF THE WEST, THE WALL ACTUALLY KEPT LARGE NUMBERS OF EAST GERMANS FROM FLEEING THE COMMUNIST EAST AND ENTERING THE DEMOCRATIC WEST IN ORDER TO ENJOY ITS POLITICAL FREEDOMS AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY. ALONG WITH A MILITARIZED BARRICADE THAT SEPARATED EAST GERMANY FROM WEST GERMANY, THE BERLIN WALL FORMED THE "IRON CURTAIN" WHICH WOULD REMAIN STANDING FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS, A SYMBOL OF THE POLITICAL DIVISION BETWEEN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES AND THE COMMUNIST EASTERN BLOC. IN 1989 THE WALL BEGAN TO FALL, AND MANY FACTORS WERE INVOLVED IN ITS REMOVAL AND THE REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY. BUT ONLY AFTER MASSIVE CITIZENS' UPRISINGS, OFTEN BEGINNING IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES SUCH AS ST. NICHOLAS' IN LEIPZIG, DID THE NECESSARY POLITICAL CHANGES TAKE PLACE TO TEAR DOWN THE WALL AND REUNITE EAST AND WEST GERMANY. SUCH IS THE STRENGTH OF "PEOPLE POWER."

WHILE THE BERLIN WALL WAS BOTH BUILT AND TORN DOWN BY HUMAN BEINGS, A MUCH MORE EXTENSIVE AND POWERFUL WALL CONTINUES TO SEPARATE PEOPLE FROM EACH OTHER AND FROM GOD, THAT IS, THE WALL OF SIN. WHEN ADAM AND EVE DISOBEYED GOD'S COMMAND NOT TO EAT OF THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL, THEY FELL INTO SIN, AND ALL CREATION FELL WITH THEM. IMMEDIATELY A SPIRITUAL SEPARATION AROSE BETWEEN GOD AND HIS CREATION, AND BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN, ADAM AND EVE TRIED TO HIDE FROM GOD'S HOLY PRESENCE AMONG THE TREES TO ESCAPE HIS JUDGMENT. AS THEIR PHYSICAL DESCENDANTS, WE HAVE INHERITED THIS SEPARATION FROM GOD DUE TO SIN, AND WE CONTINUE TO CONSTRUCT THE WALL HIGHER AND HIGHER BY OUR OWN SINFUL DEEDS. THIS WALL OF SIN STANDS IMPENETRABLE AND IMMOVABLE BY "PEOPLE POWER." ALTHOUGH PEOPLE TRY TO REMOVE IT ON THEIR OWN, WE ALL REMAIN POWERLESS APART FROM JESUS CHRIST. IN OUR TEXT TODAY, HOWEVER, GOD TELLS US ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM HE SENDS TO HIS CHURCH—TO YOU AND TO ME—IN *POWER WITH A PURPOSE*: POWER TO UNIFY, POWER TO PROCLAIM, POWER TO CONVERT, AND POWER TO SAVE.

ALL PEOPLE ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BECAUSE OF THE SPIRITUAL SEPARATION CAUSED BY SIN. ORIGINAL SIN, THE INHERITED SIN OF ADAM AND EVE, HAS SO CORRUPTED HUMAN NATURE THAT PEOPLE ARE BLIND TO THE DEPTH OF THEIR SPIRITUAL NEED FOR FORGIVENESS AND LIFE AND INSTEAD ARE FILLED WITH SINFUL PRIDE AND THE DELUSION OF SPIRITUAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY. PEOPLE TEND TO

THINK THEY'RE NOT SINNERS, OR AT LEAST NOT AS BAD SINNERS AS MOST OTHER PEOPLE, AND THIS LIE OF THE DEVIL KEEPS US FROM TRUE REPENTANCE AND TRUST IN GOD OUR SAVIOR. THIS IS ILLUSTRATED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ACCOUNT OF THE TOWER OF BABEL. THE FLOOD HAD DESTROYED EVERYONE ON EARTH BECAUSE OF THEIR WICKEDNESS EXCEPT FOR NOAH AND HIS FAMILY. THE CITIZENS OF BABEL WERE SINFUL DESCENDANTS OF SINFUL NOAH. THEY WERE FILLED WITH SINFUL PRIDE AND WANTED TO BUILD A TALL TOWER AS A MONUMENT TO THEMSELVES INSTEAD OF WORSHIPING GOD AS THE SOURCE OF THEIR LIFE AND ABILITIES. SO GOD PUNISHED THEIR SIN BY CONFUSING THEIR LANGUAGES SO THAT THEY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER AND CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER. THUS, SIN SEPARATES US FROM GOD AND EACH OTHER AND FROM DOING HIS WILL BY WORKING TOGETHER IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH THE MOST IMPORTANT TASK HE GIVES US: TO MAKE MORE DISCIPLES OF JESUS, THE MESSIAH.

AT PENTECOST, GOD SENT THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH WITH POWER TO TEAR DOWN THE WALL OF SIN AND TO UNIFY THE NATIONS IN CHRIST. THE SPIRIT ARRIVED AT PENTECOST WITH SIGNS AND WONDERS: "A SOUND LIKE A MIGHTY RUSHING WIND" (V 2), "DIVIDED TONGUES AS OF FIRE" (V 3), AND THE SOUND OF MANY DIFFERENT LANGUAGES (V 4). THE EARLY CHURCH HISTORIAN JEREMIAS ESTIMATES THAT THERE WERE ABOUT 185,000 PEOPLE DWELLING IN JERUSALEM AT THE TIME OF THE FEAST OF PENTECOST, AND WHEN THEY HEARD THE SOUND AND THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGES BEING SPOKEN, THEY GATHERED BEFORE THE

DISCIPLES. ST. LUKE IDENTIFIES SIXTEEN PEOPLE GROUPS IN OUR TEXT HEARING THE DISCIPLES SPEAK IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES ABOUT THE MIGHTY WORKS OF GOD. THAT MESSAGE WOULD HAVE INCLUDED THE LIFE, DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST. WHILE SIN SEPARATED THE NATIONS, BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, GOD WAS UNIFYING THE NATIONS THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

YOU SEE, WHILE PEOPLE MAY SAY THEY SINCERELY DESIRE UNITY AMONG THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH, IT WILL NEVER BE ACHIEVED BY "PEOPLE POWER" OR ANY OTHER POWER APART FROM GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. SIN INFECTS US ALL, CORRUPTS US ALL, AND SETS US AT WAR WITH EACH OTHER. WHEN TREATENED BY OUTSIDE FORCES, PEOPLE WHO ONCE ACTED IN SELF-INTEREST BEGIN TO ACT SELFISHLY AND IN GROUP INTEREST, A KIND OF "TRIBALISM." SEPARATIONS OCCUR ACCORDING TO NATION, LANGUAGE, TRIBE, FAMILY, RELIGION, GENDER, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION. TRUE UNITY IS ONLY CREATED BY THE POWER OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKING THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. ALL OTHER UNITY IS MERELY AN ILLUSION. THEREFORE, GOD GAVE THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL TO ALL PEOPLE GROUPS (MT 28:19-20).

BEFORE THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ARRIVAL AT PENTECOST, THE DISCIPLES BEHAVED LIKE NORMAL HUMAN BEINGS. ACCORDING TO A RECENT STUDY (2006), PUBLIC SPEAKING IS THE NUMBER ONE FEAR AMONG U.S. CITIZENS, EVEN GREATER THAN THE FEAR OF RATTLESNAKES. THE DISCIPLES ALSO WERE AFRAID TO TELL OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS.

BUT ONCE THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME, THE DISCIPLES BEGAN PROCLAIMING THE WONDERS OF WHAT GOD HAD DONE (V 11). EVEN PETER, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY DENIED JESUS THREE TIMES, STOOD WITH THE ELEVEN AND ADDRESSED THE CROWD OPENLY CONCERNING JESUS ON THE BASIS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES (V 14).

IN PETER'S PENTECOST SERMON, HE BOLDLY PROCLAIMED THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD. IN THE VERSES JUST FOLLOWING OUR TEXT (VV 29-36), PETER PROCLAIMS A CONTEXTUALIZED GOSPEL, THAT IS, A GOSPEL MESSAGE FOR JEWS AND TO JEWS. PETER TALKS ABOUT KING DAVID AND HIS PROMISED DESCENDANT, THE MESSIAH, WHO WOULD REIGN ON HIS THRONE FOREVER (2 SAM 7). HE SAYS THAT JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE TO DAVID, AND CITES DAVID'S PSALM WHERE HE PROPHESES HIS RESSURECTION AND ASCENSION TO THE FATHER'S RIGHT HAND IN GLORY. PETER THEN BOLDLY PROCLAIMED, "LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL THEREFORE KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT GOD HAS MADE HIM BOTH LORD AND CHRIST, THIS JESUS WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED" (ACTS 2:36).

NOW, WE MAY NOT RECOGNIZE PETER'S SERMON ON PETECOST AS A GOSPEL MESSAGE CONTEXTUALIZED TO A JEWISH AUDIENCE BECAUSE WE ARE BIBLICALLY LITERATE GENTILES. IN FACT, WE MAY BE SO WELL AQUAINTED WITH THE SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS THAT PETER'S PROCLAMATION TO THE JEWS GATHERED AT PENTECOST (ACTS 2) AND PAUL'S PROCLAMATION TO THE GENTILES GATHERED AT MAR'S HILL (ACTS 17) MAY SEEM EQUALLY EFFECTIVE TO US. BUT THE FIRST OF

THESE SERMONS WAS FOR RELIGIOUSLY EDUCATED JEWS AND THE SECOND WAS FOR PHILOSOPHICALLY EDUCATED PAGANS. GOD WANTS US TO BE EFFECTIVE PROCLAIMERS OF THE GOSPEL TO THE PEOPLE OF OUR COMMUNITY AS WELL, SO WE NEED TO BECOME WELL AQUAINTED WITH THE PEOPLE AND THE NEEDS OF OUR AREA SO THAT WE CAN MEANINGFULLY CONTEXTUALIZE THE GOSPEL TO MEET THEIR SPIRITUAL NEED FOR SALVATION.

AFTER PETER PROCLAIMED HIS SERMON TO THE JEWS GATHERED IN JERUSALEM, ST. LUKE WRITES THAT

THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART, AND SAID TO PETER AND THE REST OF THE APOSTLES, "BROTHERS, WHAT MUST WE DO?" AND PETER SAID TO THEM, "REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT" (ACTS 2:37-38).

THROUGH PETER'S PROCLAMATION, THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN POWER TO CONVICT THE HEARERS OF THEIR SINS SO THAT THEY MIGHT SEEK FORGIVENESS. THEN PETER PROCLAIMED TO THEM THE ANSWER TO THEIR NEED: REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM, FORGIVENESS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AND, AS JOEL PROPHESES, "EVERYONE WHO CALLS UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED" (V 21).

ST. LUKE CONTINUES BY TELLING US THAT, "WITH MANY OTHER WORDS [ST. PETER] BORE WITNESS AND CONTINUED TO EXHORT THEM, SAYING, 'SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS CROOKED GENERATION.' SO THOSE WHO RECEIVED HIS WORD WERE BAPTIZED, AND THERE WERE ADDED THAT DAY ABOUT THREE THOUSAND SOULS" (ACTS 2:40-41). THREE

THOUSAND PEOPLE IS A LOT TO BE ADDED TO THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM ON PENTECOST, BUT WHEN COMPARED TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF ESTIMATED PILGRIMS IN JERUSALEM, IT WAS LESS THAN ONE PERCENT OF THOSE PRESENT (0.984). UNFORTUNATELY, ALTHOUGH THE DISCIPLES PROCLAIMED THEIR EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION IN MESSIAH JESUS, MANY OF THE PILGRIMS IN JERUSALEM REMAINED UNBELIEVERS. SUCH A SMALL RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL WAS TO BE EXPECTED, FOR JESUS HIMSELF SAID MANY TIMES DURING HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY, "MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN" (MT 24:16).

LIKewise, WHEN WE TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS AND FEW RESPOND, WE SHOULD NOT BECOME DISCOURAGED. THIS DOESN'T MEAN THE HOLY SPIRIT ISN'T POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE WHEN WE PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL TO OTHER PEOPLE SO THAT THEY ARE CONVICTED OF THEIR SIN BY THE LAW, CONVERTED TO TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST BY THE GOSPEL, AND SAVED ETERNALLY. THIS IS THE RESULT OF THE UNBELIEVER'S SINFUL NATURE REJECTING THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH THE GOSPEL TO SAVE THEM, JUST AS JESUS SAID, WEEPING,

O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, THE CITY THAT KILLS THE PROPHETS AND STONES THOSE WHO ARE SENT TO IT! HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER AS A HEN GATHERS HER BROOD UNDER HER WINGS, AND YOU WOULD NOT!

BECAUSE OF PEOPLES' SINS, THEY WILL CONTINUE TO REJECT THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK TO UNIFY, TO CONVICT, TO CONVERT, AND TO SAVE, BUT WE ARE NEVER TO STOP PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL BY WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT CALLS PEOPLE TO SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST. DESPITE THE

FACT THAT FEW WILL BELIEVE, WE ARE SENT IN POWER TO CARE FOR ALL AND TO SHARE WITH THEM THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS FOR THEIR SALVATION, FOR GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL AND HE PROMISES, "EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED" (V 21).

DEAR FRIENDS, ON MAUNDY THURSDAY JESUS PRAYED TO THE FATHER FOR THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH. HE SAID:

I DO NOT ASK FOR THESE ONLY [THAT IS, THE DISCIPLES PRESENT IN THE UPPER ROOM], BUT ALSO FOR THOSE WHO WILL BELIEVE IN ME THROUGH THEIR WORD, THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE, JUST AS YOU, FATHER, ARE IN ME, AND I IN YOU, THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE IN US, SO THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE THAT YOU HAVE SENT ME.

AT PENTECOST, JESUS' WORDS WERE FULFILLED AS PEOPLE HEARD IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES THE DISCIPLES PROCLAIMING "THE MIGHTY WORKS OF GOD" IN JESUS CHRIST (V 11). BY THAT SAME SPIRIT GIVEN TO US IN HOLY BAPTISM, WE ARE ALSO CALLED TO BEAR WITNESS TO OTHERS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, FOR HE IS THE SAVIOR OF ALL. AMEN.