

Calvary United Methodist Church
June 9, 2019

THE PENTECOST MESSAGE

8:30 AM Service

Rev. Dr. A. Robert Cook

Children's Message:

Matthew 22:15-22

We ask the kids to come forward. This has been particularly one of my fondest things to do. Come sit close today. And, yes, come on up. Juliette, good to see you.

So, today is the day of Pentecost. What in the world is that? Well, it was a harvest celebration, it was the beginning of a harvest, but if you have been paying attention and have been eating your fruits and vegetables...do you like fruits and vegetables? Do you? Do you like fruits and vegetables? What is your favorite? (Broccoli.) Really? Alright! Good for you. How about yours? What's your favorite? (Child speaks.) You like carrots. And yours? Do you have a favorite vegetable or fruit? (Oranges.) She likes oranges. How about onions? They are really good for you. (Child speaks.) He doesn't like onions either? (Child speaks.) He likes onions? How does your mom like onions? How about you? What is your favorite? (Child speaks.) Salads, really? I'm impressed. That's really good. Well, they give you power, you know.

The harvest festival means that all the fruits and vegetables are coming in and so now you are seeing strawberries, blueberries, blackberries. Within a few weeks you'll see cherries just in the stores. Later on you will go to farm stands and you can find things like cantaloupes and watermelon and, well, there are a lot of really wonderful vegetables that you are supposed to eat because they do make you stronger and better and they include your eyesight like carrots. Right? Things like that are really good for you and they give you power.

So, the Pentecost festival was about a harvest that was coming and it came forty days, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection and that's when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon the whole earth, upon everybody that God's Spirit would be in each person and it's already there in you. It's already there to give you this kind of power you need to be a wonderful person and a really nice sister or brother.

Now, we think about that with flashlights, so have a flashlight. It doesn't seem to work. So, what does it need? (Batteries.) It needs batteries. Once you get the power then...I took them out, you knew that right? Once you get the power then you can put it back together and, up, I bet it has to be put in right. Well, you can't do this on your own. You need God's help with this. God wants to give you everything you need to do this right.

God wants you really to do well in school because when you are going to school and you get the summer off now, studying and learning is really good and it is important and you are going to be going to first grade this coming year? (Second.) Second already. (And I used to go to

pre-school.) Are you going to go again in the fall? (I don't know.) I bet you will. How about you? (Child speaks.) That's good.

You know, if you keep going...well, I think I've gotten to about the 25th grade. I really have, you know, if you count all the years. It's a lot of education. Ah, look, it works. You do this right, you get power. The power is already there, you just have to turn it on and God gives it to you. And you might just say, "Lord, lead me." A simple prayer. Or, "Guide me." Or sometimes, "Help!" And when you pray, God gives you power.

So, let's just take a minute and we will pray, ok?

So, thank you, Lord, that you give our kids power. There is lots of stuff for us to learn and not just the stuff we find in books, but how to live, how to listen, how to learn, how to really pay attention and you give us that power so that our lives show forth your blessing and they are good and it feels good. Bless our kids whom we love. Amen.

Ok, it's been a pleasure over this year to be with you guys. I have really fallen in love with you all, and that's the truth.

Message:

Would you pray with me as I pray with you that God will help us to understand this Word today?

Gracious Lord, guide us today. Your words challenge us all the time, not to embarrass or show us up, but to draw us closer to you so, indeed, by the power of your Spirit draw us close to you. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Three common things that you are very aware of and acutely attuned to: sugar, salt and fat. These are the things that increase our weight, that drag us down with the guilt of over-eating. I know that first hand and I would imagine all of you, and you don't have to give a show of hands, know the guilt of over-eating. And that's because there is a natural preference within us for salt and sugar and fat.

Now the makers of snack foods absolutely know this and they specialize in products that sell because that is what they are about. Things like salted caramel snacks, cookies, Oreos, ice cream...these are my vices here, candy, you name it, all have those three tastes in one. You taste the sugar and, boy, it's just right there, and then the salt and then the fat kind of blends together so it's so creamy in your mouth. And you just want more and just thinking about it actually increases the desire because it is already there. That's when the guilt kicks in...oh, I ate too much, right?

Now, to avoid the trap of salty, sweet and fatty, you need more than just willpower and more than just discipline and those are not easy to come by, because if you want to keep the weight off, and I'm working on it, you need the power to resist the messages that your brain sends that desire this stuff. And I bet everybody here has had that where you get up one day, one afternoon or one evening and you say: What's in the refrigerator? What's in the freezer? Are those little frozen eclairs still there? And you got salt, sugar and fat all in one if you get one of the little frozen eclairs. I kind of like them, we all do.

Now, your brain is sending messages because you've learned to eat this stuff and it releases Dopamine in your brain that says: More, always more. Now, having a diet buddy or some kind of a group together, that does really help a lot, but you still need a change because your brain says: We want these things, especially the sweet, the salty and the fatty and it demands more.

Now, sometimes what you get is a higher power and that higher power is a physician looking down at you and saying: well, if you continue this way, you probably have a year or two at best. That does get people's attention. You know, and they say: Well, you have now entered a pre-diabetic stage, right? Or they say: How much do you spend on getting new clothes each year? Now, I'm not trying to make you feel guilty, I'm sharing from my life, okay? So you need power.

Jesus has provided the power for us to live the life that he has called us to. It is a life of faith and of trust and it is filled with his presence, where if you pay attention he will override the stuff in your brain. He will instruct, he will guide because he indwells us. Move over he has given us one another as a precious community to care for one another, to live out this precious faith and this amazing hope that we have. So, we have the power and the energy to live as Christians ought to live with love towards God and neighbor with self-control to stay focused in and for the service of others, using the gifts of the Spirit that Jesus has given for every good work because he has given us the power.

And this is what Pentecost is about: power—the kind of power that is ours every day to be faithful followers of Jesus in an unfaithful world which gives us the power, yes, to say no to all those things that are not good for us because our body is something that is a gift from God. And stewardship of this world likewise and ecology is also a gift from God and it is the remembrance each day that Christ's presence is in us and that he has instructed us so that we can go about the unspectacular work of living, of loving, of forgiving, of reconciling, of serving one another, of being the hands and heart of Jesus in this beautiful, if broken, world.

So what does all that have to do with serving God or Caesar?

Well, in today's Gospel, Jesus and the Pharisees are debating what it means to be someone who has faith in God, but has to live in a world where the political and the economic powers divide our attention and all allegiances. Do we align ourselves with God, our Creator? What

do we have to do with Caesar, who is a symbol of worldly power?

So the discussion that Jesus was having with these religious leaders focuses in on the Emperor and his coin—giving to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's very much a part of everyday life, although the secret is Caesar doesn't own much. He was going to give it up anyway. God has it all. And I will tell you this, that giving to God sounds nice, but let me tell you, people believe that giving to Caesar is a whole lot more fun and you know that and I do.

So, how did Jesus do this? We purpose to put God first. Jesus didn't do this because, hey, I can open my shirt and I have a big red "savior" like superman there. He didn't do that. He set aside his divinity to become one of us, one with us, completely human, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit. He puts God first in this way and is led by the discipline of the Spirit. He is empowered and charged up each day by the Holy Spirit, which is your secret power and mine too. And he gives us his Spirit with power to live as his faithful powers. That's why this day of Pentecost is so important. But just like the trio of salty, sweet and fat trip us up, so too does the lure of Caesar's power, that we are tempted, we fall, we collapse in guilt. But we don't have to because first of all, Jesus loves us and second, he gives us power.

Now, on that day of Pentecost, Peter preached the word of hope that God had sent the Spirit to lead, to guide, to teach, to renew, to give a living hope, to make a brand new start for the whole world and we have the same hope today. This can be a brand new day for you. The resurrection of Jesus makes us unafraid to die and the Spirit's power at Pentecost makes us unafraid to live. That we belong to God—come what may—for this life and life eternal and so we are able to live with faith, hope and love.

So the Spirit energizes us with faith, which means trusting God, stepping out for the next faithful step, daring to do something that makes a difference for the good. And faith gives us the grace to see what can be. We have many ways to choose a future. You choose a future every day. The future isn't something that fate bestows on us; we make choices and God gives us the grace to make the good ones. And it gives us the kind of energy to make dreams realities.

Secondly the Spirit energizes us with hope, that our hope is in what God can do through us and in us and our hope is that God makes our lives count, that our lives make a difference. And what we do is not in vain when we give this to God.

And the Spirit energizes us with love of the most unselfish kind. This is the kind of love that forgives and restores and reconciles and heals hearts and minds and families and communities, that the Spirit gives us the power to live wisely and well, to live without fear, that we can love this world even though it is a dangerous and hostile world far from God. We don't shut ourselves off from it. We don't close our eyes and say it is just us and nobody else. Instead we look out with the eyes of compassion and we find that we can do this because we can love

the Creator who loves us without reserve and gives us the power to love even the most unlovely.

Now what Peter proclaimed to that crowd nearly 2,000 years ago is still the Good news for us today: that we are not left just with an inspiring memory and this weird thing about tongues of fire and all...what in the world was that, right? It means that the fire of the Holy Spirit is in us and even though I've chosen to retire, I have the fire of ministry within me. It's burning in my belly, that we have the reality of Jesus' presence who comes to us by the power of the Spirit within.

Now, when our culture talks about power, you hear things like influence, leverage, movers, shakers, rainmakers, those kinds of things. But when people experience the power of the Spirit, you don't hear things, you see things, like compassion, servant leadership, generosity, humility, genuine transformation. Where you see such things, you know that Pentecost is still happening.

So, trust him; do as he asks; stay close. When you fall, get you get back up. I love eight pounds. In the last three days I gained three. I checked this morning. I'll work on it tomorrow. But this is the kind of power that can change a life and transform a world and by his power, your life will show without words that Christ is alive in you. Amen.