

"Down and Out"      Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Acts 2:1-21  
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church  
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"Stay in the city until you receive power from on high and then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world." That's what he said. That's what Jesus said before he ascended into heaven.

And the disciples have been obediently huddled together somewhere in Jerusalem for about 10 days. The book of Acts tells us they numbered about 120. That's a pretty good-sized group to be gathered together in one house, yet that is the impression we are left with from the Bible. They are not venturing out in any public way. They are waiting.

They haven't taken a vow of silence, though, so they must be talking - - talking incessantly would be my guess. They are talking about Jesus and all the events they have witnessed, the things he has told them. They are probably trying to figure out what he meant by this "power" they were going to receive. And they are no doubt marveling that they should have been lucky enough to have been close to Jesus.

But, if they thought their spiritual experiences were just for themselves, a private association with Jesus that was theirs and theirs alone, things were soon going to change. If they thought their calling was to be a quiet, reserved, cautious group ... that would soon be a thing of the past.

For, you see, early this morning, this Pentecost morning, there was a

loud sound - - was it like a siren, or a train streaming by, or an airplane taking off, or a twister touching down...? We don't really know. All we do know is that it was loud enough to get everyone's attention and draw them close to where the disciples were.

The Spirit had come down and now it was driving the disciples out into the world.

Just as a crowd was gathering, drawn by the sound, the disciples were pouring out into the street speaking fluently in languages they had never studied. It was the miraculous gift of the Spirit, sending them out to tell the good news of the saving love of God in Christ Jesus.

It seems the language of the Spirit is the language of every human heart, capable of breaking down human walls of separation and division with the message of God's reconciling and redeeming love in Christ.

If the disciples had thought they could keep it to themselves or treat their faith as a personal "warm fuzzy" experience of the holy, if they thought the message of salvation was just for their benefit, they quickly found out that it couldn't be kept under wraps. The Spirit wouldn't let that happen. The Spirit had fallen on them. They were being driven out into a whole new world, a world in which the message would be given to all people and all would understand it in their own language.

It was an education, to say the least. And it was an education in the classic sense of the word. At its root, the word education is a combination of the Latin words "e" and "ducare". It means "to lead out". Education takes us from where we are and leads us somewhere else. When someone becomes educated they are led to new

understandings, new areas of knowledge, new insights and new directions for further study.

Many of our graduates are heading off to further study and no one knows what the next few years will bring. They will be led out to new vistas and new horizons. It is an exciting time and we share with them both the celebration of achievement and also the excitement for what the future holds.

But it is always important to remember that education's role is to lead us out from where we are to where we are meant to be. It may be personal, but it is not private, and it is not just for our benefit.

If the vision Ezekiel received was just for his benefit we would never have heard of it or of the way in which God's Spirit knits things together and causes life to spring up where before there was only death and destruction on every side. This was a vision of hope given to those who had given up on hope and needed to be shown that life could be different, that God had a purpose and a plan for their lives.

The disciples had been well trained by Jesus. All that he had said and done was not just for their benefit but was to equip them to turn the world upside down, beginning in Jerusalem and then in Judea and Samaria and into the whole world. Pentecost gives us just a foretaste of that holy endeavor that the Spirit began in them.

If the message of the Gospel was just for a select few, most of us would never have heard the word. But God's plan seems to be to allow everyone to hear the good news on their own terms, in their own language, to know that the God of the ages is their God too. This spiritual education leads us out to understand ourselves and the world around us differently, to see things in a new and glorious light, to know that we are all part of the body of Christ because the heart of

Christ's love is beating inside each one of us.

The education each of us has received both inside of and outside of the church is not just for our benefit. It is to equip us to see things differently and to be led out into the world to make a difference; to be people of strong character who live with honesty and integrity, people who are able to integrate the good news of God's love for them and the good gifts they have received and to use them for the common good.

We live in a society where the word "me, me, me" can quickly morph into the word "mean", where knowledge and ability and skill are used for "my" good rather than for the common good, and where we are afraid that being kind and gracious and caring is synonymous with being weak and stupid and easily duped.

Can we, as followers of Christ, trust God enough to allow God to lead us in whatever way God sees fit? Can we remain open to the idea that we might not be in control of how God's Spirit will lead us out? Can we remember that the saving love of God in Christ may be very personal but it is not private and it is not just for our own benefit: It is the truth that sets us free and gives us the courage to move forward in faith, hope and love into the future that God already has in mind for us.

This is the message of Pentecost and the gift of God's Spirit. It is our annual reminder that God isn't finished with us yet and the gifts we receive are meant to be used and shared because we hold them in trust. They are not "ours". They are not just for our benefit, but to equip us for the work that God has in mind and God has in store for us.

Amen.