

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

May 28, 2023 – DAY OF PENTECOST, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Stop Trying and Start Trusting*”\*

Acts 2:1–21 (The Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles)  
Psalm 104:25–35, 37 (God’s Spirit creates and renews the Earth)  
1 Corinthians 12:3b–13 (The Spirit imparts diverse gifts to Christ’s one Body for the edification of all)  
St. John 20:19–23 (Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit with peace and mercy)

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For a moment, let’s step away from first-century Jerusalem, and travel to West Texas during the Great Depression. There, like many ranchers and farmers, Ben Yates had a lot of land—and a mountain of debt. Mr. Yates couldn’t make enough on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on his mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes and food, his family—like many others—was forced to live on a government subsidy.

Day after day, as Ben grazed his flocks over those rolling West Texas hills, he was greatly troubled about how to make ends meet. Then, a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well, and Ben signed a lease contract. Just below eleven hundred feet, they struck a huge oil reserve, and its first well pumped out 80,000 barrels a day. Thirty years after the discovery, a government test showed that the subsequent, larger wells *still* had a potential flow of 125,000 barrels daily!

And Mr. Yates owned it all. The day he purchased the land, he received the oil and mineral rights. Yet, all that time, he’d been living on relief. A potential multi-millionaire, living in poverty. The problem? Ben didn’t know the oil was there, even though it belonged to him.

Now, a lot of Christians, possibly even some who are here this morning, are like Mr. Yates. We are heirs of a vast treasure and yet we’re living in spiritual poverty. Through our salvation by Christ, we are entitled to the gifts of God’s Holy Spirit, His energizing power and wise guidance, yet we live unaware of the fortune that is ours.

So it is, on Pentecost, the Church gathers to remember and celebrate how rich we are, and to learn more about tapping the well of spiritual energy, which, if we open the valve far enough, will gush godliness into our hearts, souls, and lives.<sup>1</sup>

Before we get to that, let’s go back farther than West Texas in the Great Depression, to the Creation of the World, and look at how God operates. In Genesis 1:2-3, we read: “The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” In order to create the world, did God need the consent of a planning commission, a building permit, a contractor’s license, articles of incorporation, or any of the stuff without which we think we can’t accomplish anything? No! All the Creator of the Universe needed were His Spirit and His Word.

Psalm 33:6 (NIV) confirms, “by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.” Here, the Hebrew word for “breath” is “*ru’ach*,” which means both breath or wind, *and* mind or spirit, particularly the Spirit of God. Further, “*ru’ach*” carries the sense of a living, breathing, spirit that imparts life itself, inspires moral character, and endows men and women with various gifts.<sup>2</sup> That is why in today’s Gospel lesson, St. John (19:22) records that Jesus “breathed on [the disciples] and said [to them], ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Although God imparted His Holy Spirit in a special way to the apostles at Pentecost, all of Scripture is replete with descriptions of the Holy Spirit’s work, from the dawn of time until its end. Altogether, the Spirit of God is active in creating and maintaining the world and everything in it; He works to convict humankind of how pointless sinful life is without God; kindles in us the awareness of God’s presence, righteousness, and judgment; then leads us to faith in Christ and our salvation; and empowers believers to serve the world in mission and ministry.<sup>3</sup>

Writing after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was daily guiding, equipping, and empowering the Early Church, St. Paul states in Romans 8:14-17 (NCV): “The true children of God are those who let God’s Spirit lead them. The Spirit we received does not make us slaves again to fear; it makes us children of God. With that Spirit we cry out, “Father.”

And the Spirit himself joins with our spirits to say we are God’s children. If we are God’s children, we will receive blessings from God together with Christ.”

The true children of God are those who let God’s Spirit lead them. Instead, we get so preoccupied with our abilities or inadequacies, our credentials or lack thereof, the resources we do or don’t have. We’ve got to stop trying, and start trusting. God can do a lot with a little—after all, He created the Universe out of nothing. Just imagine what He can do with you, if you let Him. It’s not like God got stuck with you, and has to help you. You’re not God’s “Plan B.” He had His eye on you from the get-go. Ephesians 1:4 (NLT) tells us, “Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.” And how is God going to work in Your life? The same way He created and maintains the world; the same way He spoke Jesus into His mother Mary’s womb; and the same way He transforms the bread and wine of the Eucharist into Christ’s Body and Blood: Through His Word and Holy Spirit.

The more you delve into, understand, and inwardly digest the Bible, God’s Word, the more power for living you will gain, because the more God’s Word becomes part of your very being, you will be able to wield the greatest weapon for fighting temptation, sin, and the devil, the same one Jesus Himself used—Holy Scripture.

And the more you welcome God’s Holy Spirit into your heart, mind, and life, the more power for living you will gain, because He will teach and guide you with wisdom and authority, give you godly insight and discernment, all the while changing and transforming you into the person God intends for you to be.

This morning, I invite you to remain at the altar rail after receiving Communion—and kneel if you would prefer to—so that you can be anointed and prayed for, either to receive a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit, or for a renewal of the Spirit’s work in you, both of which will give you increased power for holy living, and just possibly one or more gifts of the Spirit, as God chooses.

But all of this is not so that you can feel good or have some sort of personal power to lord over others. God fills us with His Spirit to do HIS work and ministry in the world, to live lives that glorify Him, not us.

Jesus told His disciples in Acts 1:8, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses.”

Power can be used in two ways: it can be unleashed, or it can be harnessed. The energy in 10 gallons of gasoline, for instance, can be released explosively by dropping a lighted match into the can. Or it can be channeled in a controlled burn through the engine of a Honda, and used to transport a commuter 350 miles. Explosions are spectacular, but controlled burns have lasting effect, they have staying power.

The Holy Spirit works both ways: At Pentecost, He exploded on the scene; His presence was like “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). Thousands were affected by that one burst of God’s power, as faith grew by leaps and bounds, Jerusalem was nearly flooded with the waters of baptism, and the apostles ministered with signs and wonders as they carried out the same work Jesus did on earth.

But the Spirit also works through the Church today—the institution to which God gave birth at Pentecost, so that we could begin to tap the Holy Spirit’s power for the long haul. Through God’s Word and Sacraments, and the worship, fellowship, and service we share together, Christians are provided with staying power.<sup>4</sup>

Today, it is my prayer that whatever you’re facing, whatever you are going through, that you will receive the gifts, grace, mercy, and peace that accompany the presence of God’s Holy Spirit, as you open yourself to His love that is supremely manifested in the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In John 6:63 (NLT), Jesus says: “The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing.” So stop trying, and start trusting.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen*.

<sup>1</sup> Adapt: N. George-Hacker, “By God’s Word and Holy Spirit,” 27 May 2012, St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, Cobleskill NY. Used with permission.

<sup>2</sup> Adapt: Dan Roudsaw, “Come, Holy Spirit,” [SermonIllustrations.com](http://SermonIllustrations.com), 13 May 2002 <illustrations@CLERGY.NET>. Used with permission.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (Unabridged), BibleWorks™ Commentary.

<sup>4</sup> See: Gen 1:2; Ps 33:6 & 104:30; Job 26:13 & 33:4; Isa 34:11-17; Ps 139:7; Jn 14:17& 15:26; 1Co 2:14; See also Ro 8:16; 1Co 2:11-14; Jn 16:7-11; 1Co 14:24-25; Ac 1:8; Jn 15:26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Adapt: Unknown Author, [SermonIllustrations.com](http://SermonIllustrations.com), 2 June 2003 <illustrations@CLERGY.NET>. Used with permission.