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Sermon Series: *Not Business as Usual*, No. 6

A New Power

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Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4

Not business as usual.

I don't have to tell you that that phrase could describe just about everything in our world these days: every plan, every event, even many of our relationships, from grocery shopping to haircuts to manufacturing to graduations to eating out—to worship, it's all **not-business-as-usual**.

We tend to live our lives with this illusion that we're so big and strong and independent, and yet this tiny—microscopic—virus has turned our world upside down.

And many are suffering because of it.

Now, here in central Kentucky, where the impact of the actual sickness has been relatively mild, we may be tempted to forget this; but still, even here, many are losing jobs, losing income, losing a sense of stability and predictability.

And, as the economy continues to stagnate, for an increasing number of people, life is becoming more and more and more "not-business-as-usual."

And frankly, you know, we have it good here compared to some people and places in our nation—and around the world even more. We need to remember that and give thanks to God for that—and then pray for those places where conditions, both medically and economically, are nowhere near as good as they are here.

All this—what's happening in our world—has been called unprecedented, and although it could be considered that in just the span of your lifetime and mine, history tells us that what's happening now is not truly unprecedented.

Major upheavals due to sickness or economic collapse or natural disasters have certainly happened before—even world-wide ones. Most of them have been destructive and deadly—some far more than others—and many far more than this.

The world has been through many "not-business-as-usual" episodes.

And of course, when we consider the idea of "not-business-as-usual" times, we nearly always presume that not-business-as-usual equals bad.

And many times, it does.

But not always.

Actually, today marks one of those not-business-as-usual moments that changed our world forever—and not for bad, but for good!

Of course, I'm talking about Pentecost—Pentecost Sunday, the day we remember and celebrate the arrival of God's Holy Spirit into our world, poured out upon His body—His Church—as flames of fire on the heads of those first disciples.

That's what I thought of when I saw this piece of glass [hold up stained glass] at a yard sale years ago—the flame of God's Spirit at Pentecost.

I guess if you're a musician, you might see a treble clef. If you're into grammar or English, this might make you

think of an ampersand—or maybe a question mark. I suppose for an arsonist, it might look like a flame of fire.

For me, it reminded me of the Holy Spirit and His coming into the world, which the Bible records for us in the book of Acts. We get the prediction by Jesus, and then just a bit later, we get the account of the fulfillment of just what Jesus said would happen.

I'd like to read that for us today—two passages: Acts Chapter 1, verses 4 through 8, and then Acts Chapter 2, the first four verses.

Acts 1:4-8 tells us:

On one occasion, while Jesus was eating with His disciples, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And then—Acts 2:1-4 describes how that came to be:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

The coming of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of God—into the world may well be the most important, yet most misunderstood and even neglected, event in the Bible.

Theologian Charles Carter wrote, "just as the whole of the Jewish economy looked forward to and found its fulfillment and meaning in Christ the Messiah crucified, dead, and victoriously resurrected, so does the New Testament economy find its fulfillment and significance in God the Father's fulfilled promise of the baptism of His Spirit upon believers."

The coming of the spirit is to Christianity what Jesus is to the Jewish concept of messiah.

Is that an overstatement? No, it isn't.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is as important to followers of Jesus as Jesus Himself is important to God's plan of salvation for the world.

Why?

Well, in answering that, we could just appeal to Jesus' words themselves, where He told those first disciples, "*Look, don't even leave Jerusalem until you receive the promise of God the Father.*"

It's a command of Jesus: "don't leave until you receive."

What does that mean?

Receive what? What's the promise?

Well, Jesus tells us that back in Luke 24 when He told the disciples, "*Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*"¹

There is a promise of power, of strength, of ability that comes from God Himself – to be given to followers of Jesus.

"So, don't leave," Jesus says. "Don't take off – don't get anything underway." You see, Jesus had already given them a mission; He'd already given them work to do: to be His witnesses, to represent Him, to tell others about Him, to preach and teach and heal, to make disciples – and to live as He lived before the world around them.

"But," Jesus says, "don't do it yet. You have to do this first: wait until you receive this promised power."

This was essentially Jesus' last earthly command to those who would follow Him.

Back in the 70's and 80's and I think into the 90's, the catchphrase for the American Express traveler's check and credit card was, "Don't leave home without it."

Some of you will remember a fellow by the name of Carl Mauldin saying that in their advertisements, "Don't leave home without it."

What does that mean? Well, it means if you are going to go out and accomplish what you intend to accomplish in your day, you're going to need your American Express card to do it. So, don't forget it. Don't misplace it. Don't leave home without it, or you won't be able to do what you need to do successfully.

I wonder if American Express got their idea from Jesus, because He's saying the very same thing here about this promise of power – this promise from God of enablement, strength, ability: the divine oomph from God to accomplish what Jesus asks us to do while representing Him in this fallen world.

That's what Jesus said to wait for.

And they did. They waited.

Now, did they wonder what on earth He was talking about? Oh, I'd think they did.

We don't really get any sense at all that they knew just how that power from on high would come to them. I don't think they had any idea, really, what the promise kept would look like.

I know Jesus said in John 14, "*I will ask the Father and He will give you another counselor – the Spirit of truth.*"

So, they knew that, if they remembered it – but OK, a promise, a power, a Spirit of truth. They'd heard all that, but they didn't grasp how it would work.

I mean, right there in verse 6, one of them asked Jesus, "Oh, is this the time you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Even right here, they were thinking in terms of armies arriving – to give Israel back their independence from those filthy Romans.

They were thinking earthly stuff. They were thinking earthly stuff.

Which is the human problem, isn't it? Here's God – wanting to do some enormous, miraculous, tremendous, celestial, Kingdom thing.

And they're stuck on earthly politics.

How often that happens to us, too.

God's working up here – and we're stuck down here in our thinking.

They hadn't yet put it all together.

And who would have?

I mean: who has ever really, accurately predicted how God would do what He wants to do? God does things so far beyond our ability to even conceive how things might possibly be done – and He does that on a regular basis.

He's full of surprises – all the time.

I mean, how many times does God do something in our lives – He provides in some way; He empowers in some way; He teaches us something; He inspires something in us – and we're just left speechless? We would have never thought of that in a million years. We would have never done it that way – but God did.

And His way worked so much better. His way was so much more complete, more fulfilling, more thorough than any way we ever would have imagined.

That's just how God works.

That's what God meant when He told Isaiah, "*You know, Isaiah, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*"

God wasn't insulting Isaiah – or belittling him – or bragging about Himself. He was just explaining how differently He thinks – just because of who He is.

Jesus invested three years telling all who would follow Him and listen to Him, "OK, this is how God's kingdom works; this is how His people act; this is how they respond to good and bad; this is what they value; this is how they live – what they prioritize, what they're to accomplish with their lives.

And you twelve – you're the "they"!

You're going to live as the *Sermon on the Mount* says to live, and you're the ones who are going to be my witnesses, and you're the ones who are going to do even greater things than you've seen me do. And those who believe who come after you: they're the "they" too! They're going to do all these things, too.

And – of course, if you'd been listening at all to Jesus for the three years He was saying all this stuff – I mean, let's be honest. You'd come away thinking, "In your dreams. I mean, I can't do that. That's not who I am. Even at my best – even if I want to with all my heart, I can't make myself think that way, do those things, and respond in those ways."

And Jesus says, "Oh yeah – I know. That's the purpose of the promise. That's the purpose of the power. I know you can't be this and do that – that's why you have to wait for the gift. You won't be able to do much of anything I say – apart from your receiving of the gift."

D.L. Moody put it well when He said, "You might as well try to see without eyes, hear without ears, or breathe without lungs as to try to live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit."

Here's the thing: Jesus doesn't apologize one bit about the difficulty of what He asks of His followers. It is a narrow road He asks us to walk – He said that Himself.

Jesus asked a lot of His followers. And He still does today.

I mean, we're saved by grace – by Jesus' work on our behalf, yes.

¹ Luke 24:49

But the same one who died to save us said there is a cost—a great cost to consider, should we choose to follow Him.

And much like those earliest disciples, when we hear His words to us today, so often, *too* often, when we sense that He's saying this or that about the decisions we make or the steps we need to take in order to really follow Him, or when He starts talking about the cost, we tend to either ignore Him or at the least reduce His commands to earthly terms.

Because, to take Him literally, we think, "Well, He couldn't possibly mean that, because there's no way I could do that."

And all the while—while we're trying to re-interpret Him and reduce Him and evaluate Him, or ignore Him—Jesus is saying, "Of course you can't do what I'm asking you to do. No person, in their own, merely human strength, could ever do what I want them to do—what I ask them to do, what I've planned for their lives and their destiny. And that is exactly why, before you jump to conclusions and either reinterpret or misinterpret what I say—and certainly before you strike out on your own, before you do anything, you need to receive the gift—the promise—the power."

We can't think of following Jesus in business-as-usual terms.

Which is why Pentecost just might be the most not-business-as-usual moment of Christian history.

Pentecost is the empowering of God's people to do God's will by the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives, and it changed everything.

The truth is, Pentecost is how it all makes sense—how Kingdom life moves from "nice-sounding, wishful thinking," to reality, an entirely do-able strategy and plan.

Kingdom life is doing the will of God, living in obedience to God, which cannot be done without the Holy Spirit within us, upon us, and working through us.

That's why Pentecost is as important as Christmas.

That's why Pentecost is as important as Good Friday.

That's why Pentecost is as important as Easter.

This side of Glory, Pentecost is the event that brings it all together and makes it work.

You see, Jesus was promised, born, crucified and then raised up again, not only so your soul and my soul might be saved.

Jesus was promised, born, crucified and then raised up again in order to save the world by using His body, the Church—you and me and every other Christ-follower, as His hands and feet in that process.

And the power behind it all is the promised person of God's Holy Spirit in His Church.

Jesus says, "You, I want you to do this for me—for my sake."

We say, "I can't do that. I don't have it in me to do that."

Jesus says, "I know that. But in the power of my Spirit, you can."

We say, "I don't have that kind of courage."

Jesus says, "My Spirit will provide that to you."

We say, "I'm not that strong."

Jesus says, "My Spirit working through you is that strong."

It's His Spirit—God's Holy Spirit—that makes obeying Him possible.

You see, with regard to this whole salvation of the world thing, God thought of everything: top to bottom and beginning to end.

Power to follow, power to do His will, power to say, "Yes, of course I will do as you ask, as long as Your Spirit will strengthen me."

And to that person—to that heart, God says, "Of course I will give you all you need—just as I always have."

This is the purpose of Pentecost: the empowering of Christ's Church for God's service—all to save the world.

It was a bold plan—certainly not business as usual.

But the funny thing is, Jesus wants it to be. Jesus wants a Spirit-empowered Church to be business as usual—a church that is willing to obey Him in radical, powerful, extraordinary ways, so the world would look at us and say, "Wow—how'd they do that? That must be the power of God, cause that's impossible in human strength—that's different—that isn't business as usual."

And so today, I think Jesus wants to know if you're ready—ready to say "yes" to God's Holy Spirit, ready to receive the gift, the promise of Pentecost. Are you ready to receive the power to be who God created you to be—so you might take up your part in God's plan to save His world?

He'll use you. He'll work through you. He'll help you, and He'll bless you in the process.

He's ready to give you the gift that makes a victorious Christian life possible and powerful.

Are you willing—are you ready to receive God's Spirit?

If you are, would you pray along with me here today?

God, I know Jesus. I know Jesus died for me, and I've said yes to Him as my Savior.

But I've not said yes to Him at times when He's asked me to do this or that, or not to do this or that, or to go here or there, because I knew I didn't have it in me to obey.

But You knew that already. In fact, You planned for that.

So, God, I want Your plan for my life.

And that means, I need Your Holy Spirit to fill me, today, tomorrow and every day after.

So that I can always have the power to trust You, to say "yes" to You, no matter what You ask of me.

God, I want to be all You want me to be.

I want to know You in the fullest way possible.

Fill me with Your Spirit.

Make me complete—completely saved, completely obedient—and completely yours.

In Jesus name, Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, and you mean it with all your heart, get ready, because the days ahead will be, absolutely, not-business-as-usual.

Amen.