

“Powerhouse”

Acts 2:1-21

Two hundred years before the birth of Christ, coal mining started in China. Then, about 800 years later, the first windmill was constructed in Iran. Human beings have always needed power, and for centuries, they have pulled it from both the ground and the air.

Around the year 1700, the Maori people began to use geothermal power for cooking and heating. In 1868, the first modern solar power plant was built in Algiers. We think of geothermal and solar as being new technologies, but they're not.

In 1859, the first oil well was drilled in Pennsylvania. This fueled the gas-powered automobile developed by Karl Benz in 1885. Oil and gas are at the heart of the internal combustion engines that have propelled cars and trucks ever since.

In 1908, the Blackhawk Generating Station was constructed in southern Wisconsin. It started off as a coal-fired power plant and was renovated in seven stages through the 20th century. Eventually, it generated electricity with power supplied by natural gas. Then, in 2010, the plant was decommissioned as a generating station.

But it is still a powerhouse. Just a very different kind.

Beloit College has taken over this riverside power plant and turned it into a student union building focused on recreation and wellness. The college retained the architectural features and industrial equipment from the original Blackhawk Generating Station. But now the building generates physical fitness, personal connections and healthy living.

Picture this: A suspended, three-lane running track runs through every section of the building. The structure houses a fitness center and a recreational gym.

There is an eight-lane competition swimming pool and an indoor turf field house. On top of this, the student union includes a coffee shop, student lounges, club rooms, conference center and auditorium, plus numerous spaces for conversation, collaboration and study.

But this new facility is not designed only to benefit students, faculty and staff. The college also wanted to use the building to reach and connect with its community. So, a new pedestrian bridge and publicly accessible elevator link the student union to a number of local paths and parks. These new ties between college, town and river are generating a more vibrant set of community connections.

And what is the facility called? The Powerhouse. A former power plant is now creating a whole new kind of energy for Beloit College and the community around it.

New energy was also discovered on the day of Pentecost. The followers of Jesus were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate a Jewish holiday, called Pentecost or “The Festival of Weeks.” It was a harvest festival, but also a time to give thanks for the gift of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. The people of God were thankful for this law, which gave them inspiration and structure for their lives.

The law was, in many ways, their historic power plant.

But then, when the Holy Spirit entered a house full of Jesus-followers, it created a new kind of powerhouse. It filled the apostles with new life, enabling them to communicate with a diverse group of people, speak boldly to a large crowd and fulfill the prophecy of Joel. The Spirit generated a more energetic and vibrant community of faith, which was connected in new ways with the surrounding community.

The apostles needed power. And they got it in an unexpected way.

Acts tells us that when the day of Pentecost had come, the followers of Jesus “were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:1-4).

The Holy Spirit came with “a sound like the rush of a violent wind.” Like the “wind from God” that swept over the face of the waters on the first day of creation (Genesis 1:2). Like the breath that Jesus breathed on his disciples when he said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Wind, breath, Spirit — they are all the same creative and life-giving gift from God.

Spirit is “the power of life that is in you,” says Presbyterian author Frederick Buechner. “When your spirit is unusually strong, the life in you unusually alive, you can breathe it into other lives, become literally in-spiring.” That’s exactly what God did on Pentecost. God “breathed and continues to breathe” into creation, says Buechner. God’s breath filled the apostles and inspired them, giving them the ability to go out and speak about God’s deeds of power to the Jews from every nation who were living in Jerusalem. The apostles were suddenly able to speak in a variety of languages, and the people “were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine’” (Acts 2:12-13).

Yes, when the Holy Spirit filled the apostles with new energy, new life and new ways of communicating, the people around them simply assumed they were drunk. In a sense, they were — drunk on God’s wind, breath and Spirit.

God created a Powerhouse on Pentecost, which gave the apostles a clean and sustainable source of energy. Unlike coal, oil or natural gas, the Spirit does not contribute to climate change. Unlike the wind of the air, it is always blowing. Unlike geothermal, it does not require drilling. And unlike solar, it is available even on cloudy days. All we have to do is ask for it.

A prime example of the Spirit's power is found in the speech of the apostle Peter. This was the same Peter who had denied Jesus three times, saying, "I do not know him," "I am not [a follower of Jesus]," and "I do not know what you are talking about!" (Luke 22:57-60). But once the Spirit came to him, he was filled with new energy, new life and new courage in communication.

Acts tells us that Peter raised his voice and addressed the crowd, saying, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose" (Acts 2:14-15). The Holy Spirit gave Peter the courage he needed to stand up to the skeptical crowd and speak boldly about what God was doing in the world, based on the prophecy of Joel. The prophet had said that God would pour out the Spirit on all people, and then "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 21).

Peter and the apostles were energized not by electricity generated by coal-fired power plants or wind farms. No, their energy came from a new kind of powerhouse, in which the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak in diverse languages and offer a word of gospel hope. Like the Powerhouse at Beloit College, this new life was not dependent on technology. Instead, it was generated by personal connections with God and neighbors, and it was spread through conversation and collaboration.

Such spiritual power is needed today, if we are going to be part of a church that brings life, joy and hope to the world. Peter told the crowd that God's Spirit was going to change their lives for the better: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," he said, "and your young men shall see visions" (v. 17).

Every Sunday School have our sons and daughters learning the prophecy and visions of scripture from our dedicated teachers. We are powered up in Sunday morning worship for the week ahead. Every Monday night people are powered up in A.A. and Al-Anon meetings. Tuesdays are for the counters, Ladies of the Yarn, and Band rehearsal. Wednesdays are for Girl Scouts, Bell Choir, Adult Choir, and confirmation class. Thursdays are for the Happy Sew & Sews, staff meeting, bulletin assembly, and Stephen Ministry Peer supervision. Fridays and Saturdays mornings are for two more A.A. groups. Saturdays are for men praying in our sanctuary, funerals, and 5:30 worship. We are powered up by office volunteers throughout the week, adult Bible studies, and daily warmlines. Divinity is powered up by monthly board meetings supporting our ministries, and planning council.

Our social ministries, food pantry, Parma Park support, Lutheran Metro Ministries, Great Cleveland congregations, the Hope Refugee Center, Lutheran World Hunger and Disaster Relief, and pretty much anyone who needs help – powers us up with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Divinity is powered up when tonight/last night the holy spirit covered Alexander Wilcox in the waters of Holy Baptism. Alex becomes a child of God that his parents, Brian and Sarah, and this whole congregation promise to raise and nurture as a follower of Jesus Christ. The waterfall of the Holy Spirit makes us new.

We have tapped into a source of power that comes from beyond ourselves: A power that is not found primarily in programs, policies or institutions, but in the Holy Spirit of God. This Pentecost power is an energy source that can keep people burning with love for God and for the people around them, while radiating warmth and light to a cold, dark world.

We can be part of the Christian Way by continuing to transform Divinity into a powerhouse. When we do this, we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, an energy source that gives us both the courage and the ability to connect with people around us in life-giving ways.

May the peace of God . . .

#396 – Spirit of Gentleness