

“Those Days are These Days”

**Sermon preached by Marciana Bain
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Text: Acts 2:14-24**

Let us pray. Come Holy Spirit. Give us hearts that are receptive to you, turn our eyes towards the Father, give us lips that confess his Son, Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior, and give us, your church, an unquenchable passion to boldly proclaim your gospel to the ends of the earth.

Good morning. In the verses of Scripture that we just read, Peter is testifying to the fact that God has come into the world in the person of the Holy Spirit. In verses 14-24, Peter does three things that I want to highlight this morning. The first thing he does is point to the evidence of the Holy Spirit by explaining the behavior of the disciples, the second thing he does is to share a prophecy with his listeners, and the third thing Peter does is to connect this prophecy to the gospel proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If this is good enough for Peter it's good enough for me. So this morning I'm going to testify...to where I see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in my life, in your lives, and in our life as a church, and I'm going to talk about the implications for our community. Peter's interpretation of prophecy was a simple one...in verse 14 he proclaims that in the last days the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all people. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is no longer a rare occurrence, it is no longer relegated to a few select priests, and prophets but the Holy Spirit is a gift now being given to all of God's chosen people...men and women and children and everyone who calls upon the name of Jesus Christ. Peter was firmly convinced that those days...those last days, in which God is pouring out his Holy Spirit are these days. *Those days are these days*, this is a phrase you're going to hear me repeating throughout the course of this sermon.

I had occasion to be in this sanctuary by myself for a few hours last Monday. And as I was sitting here just thinking and praying it struck me how much the interior of this worship space has changed since I began attending this church in 1989. The changes include: new lighting fixtures, a new communion table, new carpeting, a new pulpit, the welcome center in the narthex, new tiles with new family names, and many other changes. This interior space has changed quite a bit since I first began attending this church, the changes all seemed so gradual at the time, but now the transformation of this interior space was absolutely striking to me. And I began to think about what these walls might say if they could talk...what would they say about me, what would they say about all of you, and what would they say about us as a congregation?

I looked at the communion table ---and suddenly I didn't just see a communion table. I saw the space where at the December 2006 Christmas Eve service I got to hold the communion cup for the very first time and proclaim, “the blood of Christ shed for your sins” to members of my family, and to all of you who are members of my church family---and I was gripped at the work the Holy Spirit has done on my interior space, my heart, to bring me to this pulpit today. When I look at this pulpit I see the space where in the recent history of our church some of our elders and lay leaders preached sermons for the first time. And when I look at the space between the Pulpit and the organ...I see the space where in a few short weeks, super gang members will sing songs about Jesus, and role model the Christian faith for all the children of the community. And when I look at these two front rows on my left hand side, what I see is not just the place where all the teens in our congregation hang out. What I see is the place where the next

generation of Elders and Deacons and Sunday school teachers, and perhaps some future Ministers of Word and Sacrament will be called to serve God by the power of the Holy Spirit. What would these walls say if they could talk about us? What glorious testimony of God's work in our lives would they tell? They would speak of baptisms and communions and confirmation. They would speak of first confessions of faith, and life changing transformations. They would speak of the Holy Spirit.

As I looked out over the sanctuary last Monday and on how much it has changed, I began to think about how much I have changed since I first graced the doors of this humble church. I came here in 1989 as an indomitable and precocious twelve year old girl who loved God, but never in her wildest dreams thought that she would grow up to be a Presbyterian Minister. I loved God but there are limits to such things. I didn't want to become one of those religious kids. You know the kind (the kind that carry their Bibles through the halls of the Junior High). I mean that was a social crime that could seriously serve to damage a person's street credibility in Junior High. When I first started attending this church, I loved God...but loving God did not include wanting to go to youth group, it did not include wanting to go to bible study, and it certainly did not include wanting to become a minister of the Word and Sacrament. However, somewhere over the next few years, I encountered the living God in the person of the Holy Spirit here at Kirkmont Presbyterian Church, and that just threw a monkey wrench in all my plans, and gradually everything about me began to change. How many of you have a similar story to tell? A story about how you walked through these doors one way, and by the power of the Holy Spirit you left another way. How many of you can identify the first sermon where God's Word seemed to make sense to you, or the time you weren't sure that you should volunteer for something, but you did it anyway and later recognized it as the movement of God in your life. How many of you stumbled into this place thinking you had lost your faith, only to discover that you had been found by God?

When I look at my own history with Kirkmont Presbyterian Church---one word comes to mind "Transformation." When I look at the history of the people sitting in these pews...that same word is appropriate, *transformation*. That transformation is not haphazard, it is not slipshod, and it is not our own work. It is nothing less than the power of the Holy Spirit who nudges us to make that first confession of faith, who nudges us to take that first step of Christian discipleship, who nudges us towards a holier life. Sometimes we don't realize this transformation when we preoccupy ourselves with the doldrums of everyday life, but when we have eyes to see it, the movement of God in our lives is everywhere. So this morning I ask you to just take a moment and catch your breath...to ask the question, Where is God calling us to go? Who is he calling us to be...what is the voice of God's Holy Spirit saying to you this morning?

Acts chapter two is an amazing passage of Scripture. It is what happens when the Holy Spirit gets a hold on people. In verse 14, the disciples are accused of being drunk...and if we read this chapter to the end we learn that 3,000 individuals were added to the church that day...because of the movement of the Holy Spirit. We all have a history with the Lord that probably didn't start this morning, and likewise these disciples also have a history with our Lord, and it didn't start in Acts 2 with bold proclamations of the gospel.

When we talk about the Holy Spirit and about transformation there is a tendency to crave those things on our terms, and to be distraught when transformation doesn't happen on our terms. Maybe there are those of you this morning that are hard pressed to be able to identify the movement of God in your life. Maybe the still small voice of God's Holy Spirit seems more like the non-existent voice of the Holy Spirit. And if there is anyone here who is in that boat today, be encouraged because the history of the disciples with our Lord is also a history punctuated by waltzing forward and backwards in faith...a history that includes Peter's grand attempt to walk on water, and his failure because of his lack of faith, a history that includes the disciples attempting to follow Jesus but not always understanding who Jesus was and what he was here to

do, a history that includes some of Jesus' best friends falling asleep in the garden of Gethsemane when he was praying. Sometimes we too are sleeping disciples, or the ones who find ourselves neck high in water and begging for Jesus to put us back in the boat. This is a part of the experience of living your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, this is not where we stay. God has a plan for us and it involves us, transforming us, and calling us into newer, deeper, richer life of faith.

You see if we fast forward fifty days after Passover, and ten days after Christ's ascension, suddenly these riff raff, fisherman and tax collectors, are preaching the gospel in languages that they don't even know, and with a zeal that gets them accused of being drunk. What has happened to these people? There is one simple answer...Pentecost has happened. The still small voice of God's Holy Spirit has blown in like a mighty wind, and they will never be the same.

Pentecost is one of the three great festivals of the Christian Church. The other two are Christmas, and Easter, and it is just as essential to understanding our Christian faith as Easter and Christmas are. But of the three holy days I think we devote the least attention to Pentecost. There are whole liturgical seasons devoted to preparing our hearts and souls for Christmas and for Easter. However, in our culture, and even in our churches, Pentecost seems to slip by quietly and unnoticed.

Yet Pentecost is anything but a quiet day. The Holy Spirit arrives at Pentecost like a mighty blast of wind to rouse sleepy disciples, to replace their fear with boldness, to equip them for ministry and to build up God's church. It is only in the light of Pentecost, in light of the Holy Spirit that we can truly grasp the significance of Christmas, or Easter. It is only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit that we are capable of recognizing the Bible as the living Word of God. It is only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit that the church becomes more than just another community interest group. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that the knowledge of God becomes a life changing truth.

My first real experience of the Holy Spirit happened here at Kirkmont Church, as I was listening to a guest preacher named Rev. Stanley. Rev. Stanley was the step-brother of Elvis Presley. And for me as a precocious and somewhat snarky twelve year old...anticipation of Rev. Stanley was a virtual field day for my sarcasm. I conjured up images of a man with lamb chop sideburns and big glasses and a rhinestone studded clerical robe. I contemplated whether this preacher's liturgical movements would include the occasional swiveling hips or curling lips. I made jokes in the car all the way to church that Sunday morning, but little did I know that the joke was on me. Rev. Stanley was a real firebrand preacher, the kind we don't hear very often in Presbyterian pulpits, the kind who worked up a sweat as his voice rose to a fevered pitch (the kind who aren't afraid to hold an altar call at the end of their sermons if the spirit moves them to do so. He was the kind who invited miserable sinners, including precocious twelve year olds, to come forward and repent before the Lord). I don't remember the content of Rev. Stanley's sermon, but I remember my encounter with the Holy Spirit that day. I remember with every prideful fiber in my body not wanting to go forward as he began that altar call. I sat resolute, and I gripped that pew so hard that my knuckles turned white. A tornado could have come through the place and I would have still been sitting there.

And then I remember something stronger than a tornado knocking me forward and kneeling me down before these very steps. And I knew that my life would never be the same after that day. What happened to me that day was the Holy Spirit making himself known to me in no uncertain terms, and it was under his care, that I made my first forays into youth group, into bible study, and finally into Christian leadership. I have had encounters with the Holy Spirit since then, most of them not so dramatic and none of them can be linked to the King of Rock, but all of them can be linked to the King of Heaven and Earth. And so when I stand here in this pulpit, in this church, it is to proclaim that the Holy Spirit is with us here on this Pentecost morning....calling us to a deeper, richer life of faith in Jesus Christ.

The call of the Holy Spirit may not look the same for all of you, as it did for me, but the Holy Spirit is calling. The Holy Spirit is calling some of you to first confessions of faith, some of you to Christian leadership---the Holy Spirit is comforting those of you who are in need of comforting, the Holy Spirit is guiding those of you who are confused, and the Holy Spirit of God is at work in this place to transform form us rag tag bunch of suburbanites in Beavercreek, Ohio into bold ambassadors of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:17 tells us, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” When Peter shared this prophecy, what he was saying was that (those last days) were these days, and the Spirit of God had now broken into this world. God’s Holy Spirit is being out on men and women and children, and we are a part of that this Pentecost morning.

The disciples were in the midst of a time of transition; a time between the Ascension of Christ and before Christ returns in glory. As Christians today we are in the midst of this same transition, the transition between the Ascension and the second coming. Sometimes after Easter has happened, it is easy to feel like our sole objective is to twiddle our thumbs patiently and wait for Christmas to come along, as if the space between Easter and Christmas is empty space. But that space is not empty space. It is the space of Pentecost, punctuated by the indwelling and the equipping of the Holy Spirit, punctuated by the preparation of our hearts for the task that God has called us to. The Easter message of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not where the story of the Gospel ends. Make no qualms about it, the Birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ *is* the only true foundation for the Gospel, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is precisely where the Gospel begins. Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ is precisely where our journey of faith starts (not where it ends), and our journey continues when we are sent out into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit as we testify about Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the parlance of this church these ideas can be summed up by our mission and vision statement to: Go, Grow, and Glorify. The Holy Spirit is at work here at Kirkmont Presbyterian church: in the discernment and work of our PNC, in the lives of lay readers and guest preachers, and our lay members and staff members who have preached the Gospel to us. The Holy Spirit is at work in this church calling volunteers for VBS, calling parents to register their children, and preparing all those who would make their first confession of faith, who will take new steps of faith in their life with Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work in all of you. This day is the Lord’s Day. This Day is Pentecost. May it be a day when the Holy Spirit blows through this sanctuary like a mighty wind and settles on each one of us.

Acts 2:17, 21 “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’ ” “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Amen.