On the day of Pentecost, the world discovered a new energy source. The followers of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish “Festival of Weeks,” a harvest festival and a time to give thanks for the gift of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. The people praised God for this law which gave them inspiration and structure for their lives. The law was, in many ways, their historic power plant.

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

Acts tells us that 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 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 is 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 visited Jerusalem. The apostles suddenly spoke in a variety of languages, and the people “*were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’* *But other sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine!’*(Acts 2:12-13).

When the Holy Spirit of God filled the apostles with new energy, new life, and new ways of communicating, the people around them could not understand it. They simply assumed the apostles to be drunk. And, in a sense, the were drunk: intoxicated with God’s Spirit. God created a Powerhouse on Pentecost, which gave the apostles a sustainable source of energy. Unlike the wind of the air, this power is always blowing. Unlike geothermal, this power does not require drilling. Unlike solar, this power is available even on cloudy days. All we need 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 denied Jesus three times, saying, “I do not know him” (Luke 22:57-60). But the Spirit filled Peter with new energy, new life, and new courage in communication. 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 to stand up to the skeptical crowd and speak boldly about what God ‘s initiative on behalf of the world, based on the prophecy of Joel. The prophet said that God would pour out the Spirit on all people, and that “*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (v. 21).

The Holy Spirit energized Peter and the apostles. This new powerhouse enabled them to speak in diverse languages, to spread the good news about Jesus across the Empire, and to offer a word of gospel hope. Like The Powerhouse at Beloit College, this new life depends not on technology, but is generated by personal connections with God and neighbors; it is 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 would change their lives for the better: “*Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,” he said, “and your young men shall see visions*” (v. 17). New visions are being seen by Christians such as Shane Claiborne, who writes in his book, *The Irresistible Revolution*,that “the early Christian church was known as the Way. It was a way of life that stood in glaring contrast to the world. Of course, everyone was forewarned that in this kingdom everything is backward and upside-down — the last are first and the first are last, the poor are blessed and the mighty are cast from their thrones.”

Convinced that the Christian Way is a life-giving way, Shane and a group of friends moved into a small row house in a poor section of Philadelphia in 1997. They share food with folks who need it and run a community store out of their house. They reclaim abandoned lots and plant gardens in the concrete jungle. They restore abandoned houses and make friends with people in prison and on death row. Shane and his friends have a vision of another way to live, the Christian way, inspired by the Holy Spirit and directed toward changing the world for the better.

“The Way” (Acts 9:2) continues to draw men and women who tap into a source of power that comes from far beyond themselves: 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 keeps people burning with love for God and for the people around them, while radiating warmth and light to a cold, dark world.

Author, activist, and theologian Brian McLaren says that in the millennia since Christ walked with us on this Earth, “we’ve often tried to box up the “wind” of the Spirit in manageable doctrines. We’ve exchanged the fire of the Spirit for the ice of religious pride. We’ve turned the wine back into water, and then let the water go stagnant and lukewarm. We’ve traded the gentle dove of peace for the predatory hawk or eagle of empire. When we have done so, we have ended up with just another religious system, as problematic as any other: too often petty, argumentative, judgmental, cold, hostile, bureaucratic, self-seeking, an enemy of aliveness.” McLaren says: “In a world full of big challenges, in a time like ours, we can’t settle for a heavy and fixed religion. We can’t try to contain the Spirit in a box. We need to experience the mighty rushing wind of Pentecost. We need our hearts to be made incandescent by the Spirit’s fire.”

We can be part of the Christian Way by turning our church into a powerhouse. How can we, like the first apostles, communicate the love of God more clearly to our neighbors? What new vision can we seize to revitalize our worship, our building space, our outreach in the community? How might we, as individual disciples and as a faithful community, tap into what God’s Holy Spirit is already doing in our midst? When we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will find a whole new energy source that gives us both the courage and the ability to connect with people around us in life-giving ways. May it be so for us, here, now.

Prayer: Powerhouse God, thank You that I am part of the Church, Christ's body, and that in Him I am given the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit so that in His power I may tell of the wonderful works of God. Give me a teachable spirit so that I may learn the wonderful truths in Your Word and put them into practice on behalf of my community. Empower me with your Spirit to hear and do, to Your praise and glory, Amen.

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**Powerhouse**

Sunday, June 5, 2022 [Acts 2:1-21](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3a1-21&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Two hundred years before the birth of Christ, coal mining started in China. Then, about 800 years later, the first windmill started turning in Iran. Around the year 1700, the Maori people began to use geothermal power for cooking and heating. In 1868, the first modern solar power plant started operating in Algiers. We think of geothermal and solar power as being new technologies, but they are not. In 1859, prospectors drilled the first oil well 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 propel our cars and trucks. Human beings always need power, and for centuries, they gathered it from both the ground and the air.

In 1908, the Blackhawk Generating Station went online in southern Wisconsin. It started off as a coal-fired power plant, but multiple modifications converted it to generate electricity with power supplied by natural gas. Decommissioned as a generating station in 2010, the plant is still a powerhouse. Just a very different kind.

Beloit College took over the 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, fosters personal connections, and promotes healthy living. There is a suspended, three-lane running track, a fitness center, and a recreational gym. There is an eight-lane competition swimming pool and an indoor turf field house. 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 designed the building to reach and connect with its community. A new pedestrian bridge and publicly accessible elevator link the student union to several local paths and parks. These new ties between college, town, and river are generating a more vibrant set of community connections. They call this rejuvenated facility “The Powerhouse.” A former power plant is now creating a whole new kind of energy for Beloit College and the community it serves.