

Holy Spirit of Power

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Joint service June 5

Bedford and Central United Churches

Scripture: Acts 2: 1-21

Reflection: Who here remembers the 1946 tornado? I was doing some research on it and was actually listening to the radio broadcasts from that time. It was very interesting.

This 1946 tornado in southwestern Ontario is usually referred to as the "Windsor to Tecumseh" tornado, describing the twister's path of worst destruction. Tecumseh, Ont., is seven kilometres east of Windsor. The affected area was significantly larger, with damage extending across 56 km of both Ontario and Michigan.

The Windsor to Tecumseh tornado was the third-deadliest tornado in Canadian history. Seventeen people were killed and hundreds more were injured. Some 400 homes were damaged or destroyed, orchards were uprooted and 150 farm buildings were smashed. The damage was conservatively estimated at \$1.5 million.

In 1974 another devastating tornado tore through Windsor. It was the fifth deadliest in Canadian history.

By province, Ontario has the highest number of reported tornadoes in Canada, with 189 recorded between 1950 and 1997. However, this may in part reflect southern Ontario's high population density. Almost any tornado that forms is likely to be witnessed and reported.

The combined Prairie provinces experience about 60 percent of all tornadoes that occur in Canada. Together, Ontario and the Prairies are home to more than 90 percent of all tornadoes in Canada. They are deadly and

powerful. But not all power comes with such an upheaval or with such mass destruction.

Real power need not be as spectacular, or violent, or even as visible as the devastation of an F4 tornado. Understanding this valuable truth can shed much-needed light on our understanding of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

After his resurrection, Jesus was preparing his disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit. He told them And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. Paul echoed the same thought when he prayed that his readers might know and experience the mighty resurrection power of Jesus in their lives.

But what kind of power were they talking about? The awesome force of a tornado? Was it the kind of gentle power of let's say the wings of the honey bee as it flutters from flower to flower? Perhaps—both!

The Spirit does manifest his power in spectacular ways at times. At Pentecost, it came with a sound of a mighty wind and cloven tongues as of fire. In the book of Acts, the power of the Spirit shook buildings, healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons. But we don't really want to limit the power of the Holy Spirit to being all spectacular like the ending of a fireworks display.

Yet this is precisely the attitude in which we acknowledge the power of the Holy Spirit sometimes. We seek the Lord or the Holy Spirit and we don't believe it unless it comes in a big way with a big bang and with overwhelming evidence right?

We keep looking for the grand actions, and we miss the real work the spirit is doing in our lives. And you know what, that often creates a problem with the way we actually see God. Some of us even get to the point where we

doubt God's existence because God didn't answer our prayers the way we wanted God to.

God didn't heal my mother, or God didn't stop my son from being a cocaine addict, or God took my beloved husband from me. Some of The folks in the 1946 Windsor tornado who lost loved ones were probably wondering Where was God, Where was the power of the Holy Spirit to stop this storm???

We look at the world today, and to many, it may be unrecognizable. Inflation that has never been seen, causing a rise in food prices, gas, rent, homes, you name it. This terrible war in Ukraine has just reached 100 days and we wonder when it will ease because it is affecting us in ways we didn't imagine it would.

The leaders of African nations had to meet with Putin this week to plead their cases with him, that most of their wheat is imported from Ukraine, and now with the war, they are experiencing major food insecurity.

How many people, with the way things are in the world right now, are wondering where God is.

This is probably the best time for us to reach deep to find the true meaning of who God should be in our lives and in our lives. Because just when things look the bleakest, just when things look the most hopeless, is the time the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives,

bringing us to new life, ushering in new opportunities, urging us to trust more, and setting aflame our faith, so we may be assured that God is working for us to bring us into a future with hope. We cannot afford to keep missing the real power of the Holy Spirit..... Let's not miss out on what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of power! The Holy Spirit IS quite capable of doing "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that

is at work within us. Yet perhaps the most amazing thing of all is the Holy Spirit's ability to demonstrate quiet power in ways that we often miss.

I love the contrasting works of God in our Psalms for today, 104. Verses 3-4 tell of the huge mighty acts of God when our world was being created: He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.

Such beautiful, powerful theatrical acts... and then there are the demure acts of God wrapping himself in light as with a garment, as he slowly stretches out the heavens like a tent, and gently lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.

Spectacular and elaborate events, but also gentle and nurturing acts, all of God, all meaningful and powerful! This is the Spirit's ability, and oftentimes how God presents God's self to us. Gentle and Powerful. And we are presented with the Spirit's power, whether gentle or elaborate.

For instance, We have the Power to Endure..... We are extremely resilient people, aren't we? We manage to survive many, many things that occur in our lives that should really take us under.....

We are granted the Power to Love. We read every Easter of Jesus' request from his father to 'Forgive them they know not what they do'. We are capable of the same love if we just searched our hearts. We are also not granted the power to love, but the capacity to love in an immeasurable way.

We have been granted the Power to Serve. We have been given the ability to look outside of ourselves and do stuff for others who couldn't possibly give us anything in return. We have been made to be compassionate to see the suffering of others, and we have been equipped to even sacrifice who we are so that others could survive.

Brothers and Sisters, we have also been granted the Power of Today.....
Having endured the struggles of our lives, we tend to love harder, and as we love we are encouraged to serve the ones we love with much vigour and compassion..... creating an environment of joy, peace and hope..... and fueled by the Awesome power of The Holy Spirit, Thanks be to God for the spirit that was sent to us and which remains with us through all things, and for all time, Amen.

Prayer: Great God, you wrap us round with love, like a mighty, gentle mother, and you carry us like a strong and tender father, setting us on our feet to be your free, mature and joyful daughters and sons.

Now, in our weakness, we pray to you because we cannot come through life's troubles unscathed; and, with souls and bodies stressed and strained, we cannot meet each other's needs without your Holy Spirit.

We join our prayers to the prayers of Christ for those we know who are ill or troubled, and for all your suffering children who are beyond our reach of mind: we know that all are brought home to your heart in the prayers of Christ and in the silent intercessions of your Spirit, who comes from your deep heart to ours, and returns again to you with all our deepest longings. Heal us and help us, comfort and strengthen us, and deepen our joy. Let our love reflect your might tenderness and serve you healing gentleness.

We pray for our shut-ins dear God... and we include the shut-ins of Central.... We pray for those in our hearts...

Eternal God, there is a great longing in the world; people are desperate because of the suffering they endure. Earth cries out for peace; oppressed people cry for justice; women, men and children weep in sorrow and pain. How can we have any hope for the world, unless you are with us?

Through all the mystery of pain, sorrow and human vulnerability, we dare to believe that you are on our side, that your love for us is greater than ours for you or for each other. Holy Spirit, come with healing power; Spirit, gift of Christ, fill us with us God's love.

So, Living God, let praise begin, here and now with us, welling up from our hearts, rising towards the skies, until praise fills the universe and joy is unconfined: as you delight in us and we delight in you, for evermore. We pray in Jesus name....