

***Let us pray... Everlasting God, who implants your living Word in the minds and on the lips of all who proclaim your truth: Grant that we, as followers of Jesus, might proclaim your Gospel in our own generation with grace and power. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen.***

Good morning, Thank you for being with us today.

If you were to ask any gamer about how to win and grow in the game, in today's online games that is, being able to amass special coins or artifacts can lead to increased power of your avatar. These "power-ups" fill up the avatar's role and allow the gamer to accomplish activities that would have eluded them without these special powers. Now they can impact how well they can make change in this virtual environment and overcome challenges.

Power in the real world looks a little different. By Oxford dictionary definition power can be the "capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Or as a verb it can be to supply (a device) with mechanical or electrical energy." But today, since we are real living beings and not an avatar, how does an individual find themselves filled with power?

In today's Gospel lesson from Luke, we read that Jesus, returning from the wilderness, is "filled with the power of the Holy Spirit!" Yes! ...the power of the Holy Spirit! Does Jesus look different or is it his actions, his body posture, his demeanor? We know that as he returned to Galilee to the city of Nazareth, his childhood home, that along the way he was healing and teaching.

As baptized followers of Jesus we know that through our faith, we too, are filled with the Holy Spirit. But what does it look like for us to be filled by the power of the Holy Spirit? How have you been filled? What does it feel like? What does it look like? And what does it mean for us to have this **power** of the Holy Spirit?

If we return back to Paul's letter to the Ephesians Chapter 5, we heard the Apostle Paul describe for us what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. He sees it as *...praising God through song and letting our inner selves sing for joy.* Certainly, one way to demonstrate how filled with the Holy Spirit we are.

While Apostle Paul has described some ways that we can show we are filled with the Spirit, others think that it's speaking in tongues that means being filled with the Spirit. Now that's a gift that has eluded me. As we lean in more to the concept of being filled though, we can uncover other ways. Being filled with the Holy Spirit may come quietly and humbly. This subtle way fills us with experiences of renewal, obedience, courage to be a living witness to God's love, and allows us to willingly share the gospel. It's not really a "Eureka! Moment" now I've got it! but more like submitting to the presence of God...it's freedom from the power of sin...it's living into our fruits of the Spirit.

In our lesson today from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians as we read about how the fruits of the Spirit can be seen as the many components of the body. And today's passage ends with the idea that we all have gifts that together are the Body of Christ. Paul then asks us to consider our gifts...that is are we apostles or prophets or teachers or do we work miracles, or do we have gifts of healing, or speak in tongues or are we the interpreters?

These questions help us to see that we have **ALL** been anointed with spiritual gifts and the gifts are not all the same. When we humbly and obediently embrace our gifts, we will not let our egos or self-righteousness define us, instead it is the opening of our hearts and minds and our obedience to being Spirit-filled that allow us to acknowledge and humbly share our gifts.

As we listen and respond to being filled with the Holy Spirit, how can this obedience inform on our ministries and reflect we are true followers of Jesus? We find in Luke's message today, what many interpret as the summation of Jesus' ministry. While the scroll of Isaiah was given to Jesus, he found and read the specific prophetic passage to let us know the prophecy is fulfilled. Jesus read:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ,because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed, go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Many theologians agree this is the introduction of Jesus' ministry being made public – for he has now been anointed, and now filled by the Holy Spirit, Jesus now takes actions on behalf of the poor, the captives, the physically challenged, and

the oppressed. Not everyone in the crowd will be pleased with Jesus' ministries and we'll read more about that next week.

As members of the Jesus movement, it means we too, have our ministries led by this same example. And that we too, will need the courage to continue to see our ministries through even if our actions are not accepted by others.

During the time of Jesus, the custom in the synagogue was to read the scripture standing and then preach as one sat. So, we see that Jesus sat after reading the scripture that affirms his ministry and fulfills the prophecy. As he sat to preach his inaugural sermon, it was limited to just 9 powerful words as he stated: "*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*" Yes, we know the scripture is now fulfilled and we know and rejoice that we are the beneficiaries.

As we are filled with the Spirit, we can use our fruits, our gifts of the Spirit, to have impact in our communities as well. We can take actions to support those who are trying to achieve a living wage, we can help those facing physical, emotional, and mental health challenges. And in fact, in Arizona today, we can come together to protect our most vulnerable, bringing awareness to the 9 laws waiting to be passed that will withhold services from our young people seeking help with gender expression and criminalizing those who help them.

We hope through our readings today, we can begin to better identify when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, this past week, while our St. James family has experienced a difficult time, we recognize that the Holy Spirit was indeed very present. Allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through us, it was the listening and being empowered to act on that, that we found we submitted and obeyed. The result is that we were able to bring comfort, peace, and enfolding love to an anxious and final situation. What a blessing for those who answered the call this week! Their actions blessed all whom they touched and what a wonder for us to know that the Spirit is strong within our St. James' family!

The power that comes from the truth, the empowerment we receive from the Holy Spirit, the love we experience and share from Jesus, these are our human "power-ups"! We are more than avatars in an artificial world, we are living humans strong in our faith that has us listening to, being embraced by, and being filled with the **power** of the Holy Spirit. | Amen.