

Empowered: Power for a New Beginning

Acts 2:1–21

Today is a special Sunday in the life of the church. Today we celebrate Pentecost—the day the Holy Spirit was poured out and the church was empowered for its mission. And today we also celebrate something else extraordinary: the 100th birthday of Beverly Keaton. Today the church celebrates its birthday. And how fitting that on the birthday of the church, we also celebrate a life that has spent so many years helping carry Christ's church forward.

These two celebrations belong together, because both Pentecost and Beverly's life remind us of the same truth: God builds and sustains His church by the power of His Spirit through faithful people across generations.

- Pentecost is not only about how the church began, but how the church continues.
- And Beverly's life is a living witness to that continuing grace.

When you stop and think about it, Beverly's life is itself a testimony to the sustaining power of God. One hundred years is a long story of God's faithfulness. And for 65 of those years, Beverly has not simply attended St. John's—she has helped carry St. John's through her presence, her prayers, her service, and her steady faith.

Think about all that she has lived through:

- wars,
- economic depression,
- cultural upheaval,
- technological revolutions,
- presidents,
- movements,
- moments when the world seemed stable,
- and moments when it seemed like everything was falling apart.

And yet here she is—still worshiping, still serving, still encouraging, still part of the body of Christ. That reminds us of something important this morning: people do not endure like that on their own, and the church does not endure like that on its own.

- The church is not held together by human strength alone.
- The church lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is the story of why the church still exists at all.

- The church was never merely a human organization.
- The church was born, empowered, and sustained by the Spirit of God.

The Church Begins in Dependence

When we come to Acts 2, the disciples are in a season of uncertainty. Jesus has ascended. The crowds are unpredictable. Religious opposition is real. Rome is still Rome. And this small group of believers is gathered in an upper room with no strategy that could possibly explain what God is about to do.

- They are not building a platform.
- They are not launching a campaign.
- They are waiting on God.

That matters, because the church was not born through human brilliance. It was born through surrender, prayer, and dependence upon God.

- Not strategizing.
- Not building a platform.
- Not launching a campaign.
- Waiting.

Jesus had told them, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.” Waiting rarely feels powerful to us. We prefer action, plans, measurable progress, and visible results. But before God sends His people out, He teaches them to depend on Him.

That is still true for us at St. John’s. If we are not careful, we can begin to think the future of the church depends on better plans, better programs, better messaging, or better timing. Those things may have their place. But Pentecost reminds us that the church does not live by human strength. The church lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So what does dependence on the Spirit look like now? It looks like praying before planning. It looks like listening before rushing. It looks like serving faithfully without needing recognition. It looks like making room for God to do what only God can do.

- That is why the church has outlived empires.
- Outlived persecutions.
- Outlived every prediction of its collapse.

Because the church belongs to Christ, and Christ continues His work through the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit Empowers Ordinary People for Mission

Acts 2 tells us that a sound like a mighty rushing wind filled the house, tongues as of fire rested on each of them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The signs were dramatic, but the point was not spectacle for its own sake. The miracle pointed outward.

People from many nations were in Jerusalem, and suddenly they heard the wonders of God declared in their own languages. That is mission. The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples so that other people could encounter Jesus. The Spirit does more than stir our emotions; the Spirit sends us in witness.

People from many nations were gathered in Jerusalem. And suddenly they heard the wonders of God declared in their own language. That is mission. **The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples so that other people could encounter Jesus.** And that is still what the Spirit does.

- The Spirit turns fearful people into courageous witnesses.
- The Spirit gives ordinary people holy purpose.

And notice who God chose to fill. Not the elite. Not the powerful. Not the already celebrated. Fishermen, tax collectors, ordinary men and women—people the world might overlook, but people God was ready to use.

- You do not have to be famous to be used by God.
- You do not need a platform to be faithful.
- You do not need influence to bear witness.

Sometimes the most powerful testimony is not a dramatic platform moment, but a life that continues to say, “God has been faithful to me, and I will be faithful to Him.”

- That means you do not have to be famous to be used by God.
- You do not need a stage to be faithful.
- You do not need influence to bear witness.

That is part of what we celebrate in Beverly today. Not celebrity. Not status. Faithfulness. For decades she has offered St. John’s the kind of witness that cannot be manufactured: steady love, persistent service, prayerful presence, and the quiet strength of someone who keeps showing up.

Some people preach sermons with words. Others preach sermons with endurance, kindness, consistency, prayer, and service. Beverly’s life has been that kind of sermon.

Never underestimate the witness of a faithful life. Especially in a world where everything feels temporary.

Pentecost Is for Every Generation

Then Peter stands up and explains what is happening by quoting the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” Notice how wide that promise is.

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” And notice the language:

- Your sons and daughters will prophesy.
- Your young men will see visions.
- Your old men will dream dreams.
- Young and old together under the same Spirit.

Pentecost was never meant to create generational division. It creates generational unity through the Spirit of God. A Spirit-filled church is not a church of only the young or only the old. It is a church where generations need each other.

The church needs the energy, questions, courage, and passion of younger generations. And the church also needs the wisdom, patience, memory, and testimony of those who have walked with God for many years.

We need saints like Beverly who can say with credibility, “I have seen the faithfulness of God across time.” And we need younger believers who are ready to receive that testimony and carry it forward.

That matters, because we live in a culture obsessed with what is new, fast, and disposable. But the kingdom of God is not built on disposable faithfulness. The church is built generation by generation.

- One person teaching another.
- One generation blessing another.
- One saint praying faithfully year after year.

For 2,000 years, the Spirit of God has sustained the church through ordinary, faithful people. That is the story of Pentecost—not just one dramatic moment long ago, but the ongoing presence of God among His people.

God Is Still Pouring Out His Spirit

Maybe that is the word some of us most need to hear today: God is not finished with His church. Not globally. Not here at St. John’s. And not with you.

- Still saving.
- Still restoring.
- Still empowering.
- Still calling.
- Still sending.

The same Spirit poured out in Acts 2 is still at work today. And maybe some of us need that reminder personally.

Maybe you came in tired, discouraged, spiritually dry, or wondering whether God still has purpose for your life. Pentecost reminds us that God specializes in new beginnings.

The disciples walked into that upper room uncertain and afraid. They walked out empowered and transformed—not because they became impressive people, but because the Spirit of God filled them.

And the same God still meets people today. He still breathes life into weary hearts, restores hope, and empowers ordinary people for holy purposes.

Closing Invitation

One hundred years ago, Beverly entered a world she could never have imagined. Two thousand years ago, a small, frightened group of disciples stepped into a future they could never have imagined. And through all the change, all the uncertainty, and all the upheaval, the Spirit of God has remained faithful.

- The gospel is still being preached.
- Lives are still being changed.
- Hope is still being offered.
- And the Spirit of God is still moving.

So the question this morning is not whether God is still able to work. The question is whether we are still willing to say yes.

- Yes to prayer before planning.
- Yes to witness instead of fear.
- Yes to service without needing recognition.
- Yes to learning from those who have gone before us.
- Yes to investing in those who are coming after us.
- Yes to becoming the kind of church that depends not merely on human effort, but on the presence and power of God.

So today we celebrate Pentecost. We celebrate the church empowered by the Holy Spirit. We celebrate Beverly's 100th birthday and the witness of a life marked by long obedience and steady grace. And we ask God to do in us what He has always done in His people: fill us, sustain us, and send us.

May God make us a people who carry that witness forward—young and old together, filled with His Spirit, grounded in His love, faithful in our generation, and ready for every new beginning He sets before us.
Amen.