

EMPOWERED – WEEK 2

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH ARE WE BECOMING?

Acts 2:42–47

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we talked about how the Holy Spirit empowered ordinary people to continue the work Jesus began.

Pentecost was not just a dramatic spiritual event. It was the beginning of a transformed people.

When people think about Acts 2, they often think about the dramatic moment:

the rushing wind, tongues of fire, many languages, Peter's bold preaching, and three thousand people responding.

And rightfully so. Pentecost is a defining moment in the Church's history. But the greatest miracle of Acts 2 was not only what happened in a moment; **the greatest miracle was what those people became afterward.**

Anyone can have an emotional experience or respond in a charged atmosphere. **But Acts 2 shows us something deeper.**

It shows us what happens when the Holy Spirit reshapes people over time.

The Spirit formed a community—

- not merely a crowd,
- not merely an audience,
- not merely consumers of religious experiences,
- but a people.

And before they could become that kind of people, some things needed to change.

That is true personally, spiritually, and in churches too.

Pressure often exposes what is unhealthy, because transformation rarely happens when we are comfortable.

Often change begins when something forces us to confront reality.

I've experienced some of that personally with my own health. For a long time there were warning signs: stress, exhaustion, poor habits, and constant pressure.

Eventually I realized something needed to change, because without real change things would not get better—they would get worse.

Not because my body was the enemy, but because what was sustainable in one season was no longer sustainable moving forward.

Sometimes the body tells the truth before the mind wants to admit it.

What I learned is this: **hard seasons often reveal what needs to change for health to return.**

Sometimes we ask God to remove the pressure, but often God wants to use it to transform us.

And I think many of us have watched something similar happen here at St. John's. Difficult seasons can expose what is unhealthy, unsustainable, or no longer capable of carrying us forward.

But Acts 2 reminds us of something important:

Before the Church could become what Jesus intended, some things needed to change. The disciples could not remain locked in the upper room forever.

- Fear had to give way to faith.
- Isolation had to give way to community.
- Self-preservation had to give way to surrender.

The Holy Spirit was not simply helping them survive. The Holy Spirit was transforming them into a different kind of people. And that is still what God does in every healthy church.

Not merely restoring what was — but forming us into what we could become through surrender to Him.

And that leads to the question at the center of this message: What kind of church are we becoming?

Because every church is becoming something. Every believer is becoming something.

The question is not whether we are being formed. **The question is: what is forming us? And what are we becoming?**

1. THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES

Acts says: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." That word devoted matters.

Not casually interested. Not occasionally involved. Not spiritually curious. Devoted. **The Holy Spirit changed their priorities.**

The Christian life was never meant to be something added onto life occasionally. The early believers reordered their lives around Jesus.

- And notice what they devoted themselves to:
 - teaching, fellowship, prayer, worship, shared life.
- Not flashy things. Not celebrity personalities. Not entertainment.

Ordinary practices that slowly shape people over time. And honestly, I think this is one of the things modern Christians struggle with the most.

- We want transformation without immersion.
- We want spiritual maturity without surrender.
- We want fluency in the things of God while remaining immersed primarily in everything else.

I learned something similar through language. I was born in Germany, and German was my first language. But after moving to the United States, I slowly lost fluency.

Eventually I realized that if I wanted it back, **casual exposure would not be enough.**

So for about a year I immersed myself in German—listening, watching, and reading until fluency returned. **I knew enough to recognize what I had lost.**

Little by little, understanding returned. And within about eighteen months, fluency came back. Why? **Because immersion changes us.**

Whatever consistently surrounds your mind, heart, attention, and habits eventually shapes who you become.

Spiritually, many people spend little time around the things of God and wonder why maturity feels distant.

Meanwhile we are immersed daily in fear, anger, consumerism, division, comparison, distraction, and noise—then wonder why peace feels foreign.

Acts 2 shows us something different.

- The early Church immersed themselves in:
truth,
prayer,
community,
worship,
shared life,
and the presence of God.

That language of immersion matters because Acts 2 is often called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The word baptize comes from the Greek word “baptizo,”

- It literally means:
to immerse,
to submerge,
to overwhelm completely.

The image is total immersion. These believers were not simply inspired by God occasionally; they were immersed in His presence, and the Spirit began permeating every part of life.

And that is the picture we see in Acts 2. These believers were not simply inspired by God occasionally. They were immersed in the presence of God. The Spirit began permeating every part of life:

- their relationships,
their worship,
their priorities,
their generosity,
their conversations,
their daily habits,
their understanding of community.

And church, that matters because discipleship is not merely adding a little bit of Jesus onto an otherwise unchanged life. **The Holy Spirit does not simply make us slightly more religious. The Spirit transforms us from the inside out.**

And slowly, consistently, through immersion in the things of God, these ordinary believers became a different kind of people.

2. THEY BECAME A DIFFERENT KIND OF COMMUNITY

Acts says the believers were together and had everything in common. The miracle here is not forced uniformity. It is transformed hearts.

The people in Acts 2 did not suddenly become identical. They became unified. The Spirit loosened the grip of selfishness.

- People became generous.
Open-handed.
Aware of one another.
Responsible for one another.

And this is where transformation becomes visible.

Anyone can sing songs. Anyone can attend services. Anyone can post Bible verses online.

- But when people begin:
forgiving one another,
serving one another,
praying for one another,
carrying burdens together,
sacrificing for one another,
choosing unity over preference —

that is evidence the Holy Spirit is at work. A healthy church is not built merely on shared opinions. It is built on shared surrender. And that is difficult because surrender always costs something.

- It means learning to value mission above preference.
Health above comfort.
Unity above ego.

And honestly, our culture disciplines us in the exact opposite direction. Our world trains us to consume everything according to preference.

- “What do I like?”
“What do I want?”
“What works best for me?”

But the Spirit forms people differently.

The Spirit teaches us to ask: “What helps us become who God is calling us to be?” That is a completely different mindset.

The early Church understood that following Jesus was not merely private spirituality. It was shared life.

And one of the reasons the early Church became so powerful was because the world saw a kind of community it could not explain.

People from different backgrounds. Different generations. Different experiences. Loving one another like family. And church, that still matters.

Because we live in a deeply lonely world. We are more digitally connected than ever before and yet relationally isolated. People are desperate for authentic community.

- Not performance.
Not image management.
Not pretending everything is fine.

Real people. Real struggles. Real grace. Real transformation. And that kind of community does not happen accidentally. It is formed slowly through surrender to the Spirit.

St. John’s is smaller today than it has been in a long time, but it is also spiritually healthier than at any point in the little over two years I have been here—and health always comes before growth. What gives me hope is that I am seeing signs of that health: people praying for one another, caring for one another, and engaging more deeply in the life of this church. I am seeing growing hunger for Scripture, more joy in sharing what God is teaching, and a stronger culture of prayer, welcome, and shared burdens. That is healthy soil, and healthy soil is where lasting fruit begins to grow.

3. THEY WORSHIPED WITH JOY AND SINCERITY

Acts says they ate together with glad and sincere hearts. The Spirit did not make them colder. The Spirit made them more alive.

There was joy. Wonder. Authenticity. Gratitude. Not manufactured excitement. Not performance.

Real joy.

One of the great tragedies in modern Christianity is that many people have experienced religion without transformation:

activity without life, attendance without joy, tradition without awe.

But Acts 2 describes people who had encountered the living Christ, and it changed how they lived every ordinary day.

Their faith shaped their meals, friendships, generosity, priorities, conversations, homes, and daily lives.

The Spirit was not merely changing what they did on Sabbath; He was reshaping who they were becoming. And church, discipleship is not merely learning information about Jesus.

It is slowly becoming more like Him. The goal of discipleship is not simply knowing more Bible verses. The goal is that the life of Jesus would be formed in us. The Holy Spirit does not merely make us more religious; He makes us more like Christ.

- Becoming more loving.
More patient.
More gracious.
More courageous.
More faithful.
More surrendered.

And that kind of transformation cannot be manufactured artificially. It happens through ongoing surrender to the Holy Spirit.

4. THEIR LIFE TOGETHER BECAME A WITNESS

Acts says: “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Notice: people were drawn not merely to a sermon, or a program, or a personality! **They were drawn to a transformed community.**

The world saw something different.

- In a divided world: they displayed unity.
- In a selfish world: they displayed generosity.
- In an anxious world: they displayed joy.
- In a performative world: they displayed sincerity.
- The Church became visible evidence that Jesus was alive.

And I think that matters now more than ever.

Because people today are not merely asking: “Is Christianity true?” Many are asking: “Does following Jesus actually change people?”

Acts 2 answers: **yes**. Not perfectly. Not instantly. Not without struggle. **But genuinely. The Holy Spirit still transforms ordinary people.**

And when transformed people begin living together in transformed ways, the Church becomes a witness to the world. Church growth in Acts was not driven primarily by marketing strategies but by transformed lives.

It was driven by transformed lives.

- People saw hope.
People saw love.
People saw authenticity.
People saw grace.
People saw a different way to live.

And they were drawn toward it. Because healthy churches become evidence that Jesus is alive.

CONCLUSION

Before the disciples could become the Church Jesus intended, something needed to change.

Fear had to give way to faith. Isolation had to give way to community. Self-preservation had to give way to surrender.

And maybe the same is true for us.

Maybe some of us have been asking God simply to remove pressure, while God is trying to use the pressure to transform us.

Maybe God is exposing habits, patterns, attitudes, or fears that can no longer carry us forward.

Not because He is condemning us. But because He loves us too much to leave us unchanged.

And maybe for some of us, the hardest part is not believing God can change things.

Maybe the hardest part is letting Him change us. The question is not simply: “What kind of church do we attend?”

The deeper question is: What kind of church are we becoming?

Because the Holy Spirit is still forming people and building His Church—not into a crowd, but into a people who reflect the life of Jesus together. A people marked by prayer, joy, sincerity, courage, generosity, and love; a church where the Word of God is opened with hunger, burdens are carried together, people are welcomed and seen, and our life together becomes visible evidence that Jesus is alive.

INVITATION

Today, maybe the Holy Spirit is speaking to you about surrender.

Not shame, guilt, or condemnation—transformation.

Transformation.

Maybe God is inviting you into deeper devotion—into a life where Scripture, prayer, worship, and community are no longer occasional, but central.

Maybe He is calling you out of isolation and into community.

Maybe He is calling you out of isolation and into community—asking you to stop spectating and start participating, to open His Word during the week, to pray with others, and to make room for the Spirit to form you.

Maybe He is asking you to trust Him enough to change.

Because Jesus is still forming His Church.

And He is still transforming ordinary people into something beautiful for the glory of God.

If you would like prayer this morning —

for healing,

for surrender,

for renewal,

for courage,

for transformation —

I want to invite you to come forward as we pray together.

But let us respond to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Because God is not finished with us yet.