

Power
[Acts 2:1-21, Galatians 5:22-25](#)
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This fall, after ten years of construction and over forty years of planning and arguing, the Site C Hydroelectric Dam will enter into full operation, generating forty-six hundred gigawatts of electricity every year and changing the landscape of the Peace River valley in northern BC forever. Site C is the third dam built along that stretch of the Peace River - if you look at the satellite pictures on Google Maps, you can see the enormous reservoirs that were created when we built the first two dams back in the 1960s - the first and largest dam created Lake Williston, which is BC's largest body of freshwater and one of the largest reservoirs in the world. Every time we build a dam, the world around that dam is fundamentally transformed - forests and farmlands are flooded as deep valleys become lake beds, formerly inaccessible cliffs become beachfront property. When the Three Gorges Dam was built in China in the 1990s, over 1 million people were displaced as their homes and communities were flooded by the waters of the Yangtze river. When the Aswan Dam was built across the Nile in the 1960s, multiple ancient Egyptian temples and ruins had to be moved to new locations to rescue them from the rising waters. Every time we build a dam, the world around that dam is fundamentally transformed, but we do this because we need power. Our world runs on electricity, and we need to find cheap ways to generate as much power as quickly as we can to run our homes and factories, our cars and computers. We have lots of river valleys and forests, but we want more power.

And this is true of more than just dams. Every method we've developed for generating power changes the world in some way. When we burn coal and natural gas, we pump carbon dioxide into the air that changes the climate and warms the planet. When we use nuclear energy, we produce toxic waste that needs to be buried in safe containment facilities deep underground, and every so often there's an accident, and the land around the plant becomes contaminated, dangerous to human and animal life for centuries. Even eco-friendly options like solar panels and wind turbines change the environment around them in some way, disrupting bird migration routes, requiring rare-earth minerals to build batteries for power storage. We need power to run our world, and we are willing to transform our world to gain more power, and then we use that power to keep transforming our world, changing our environment to suit our needs and put us firmly in control.

Of course, this isn't anything new. Human beings have always changed the world around us to make ourselves more comfortable. There was never some happy golden age where we lived in perfect harmony with creation. For thousands of years, ever since we stumbled our way out of the garden of Eden, human beings have been clearing land for agriculture, rerouting water to irrigate our crops, digging up precious metals from the ground to make weapons to fight with and money to fight over. And the stronger we get, the better we get at using power to change the world and changing the world to gain power. When Alexander the Great conquered the known world, everywhere he went he built cities modeled after the cities of his homeland, Greek architecture, Greek culture, Greek language, and he named all these cities after himself - hundreds of identical cities across the

middle east, all named Alexandria. And when the Romans took over the remnants of his empire, they carried on the same work - they built aqueducts to carry water, walls to hold back their enemies and a massive road network connecting all these cities together, so that their armies could move quickly and efficiently to put down rebellions and maintain control, and some of those roads are still being used today, two thousand years later.

These empires did exactly what empires are supposed to do, what empires have always done – they used their power to transform the world to gain more power, to make themselves stronger, so that the whole world was shaped and molded by their unyielding pursuit of power.

So you would expect the same thing to happen at Pentecost. Before his ascension, the disciples had asked Jesus if he was now going to restore the Kingdom – if he was going to use his power to transform the world around them, to establish a new empire that would shape and mold the world so that they could have more power and control, so that they could do to the Romans what the Romans had done to them. And Jesus did promise that some day soon, they would receive power – the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they would carry that power to the ends of the earth. That's what Jesus promised his disciples, and that's the promise those disciples are waiting to be fulfilled on that fateful day, as the early church gathers to pray together in that little house in Jerusalem, waiting for God to give them power so that they can change the world. And as they wait, and as they pray, the Holy Spirit descends on the church in a mighty rush of wind and fire. Power descends on the church, more powerful than anything any human being

has ever experienced before. The same power that spoke creation into being, the power that set the stars in their orbits and fashioned every atom out of nothingness, power that exists beyond the boundaries of the universe, suddenly that power is right there, filling that little room, filling the hearts of that little gathering with incredible, unimaginable power. And you would think that this would finally be the moment that God restores the kingdom to the disciples, just like they've always wanted. The disciples have been given power, and now they're going to use it, they're going to use this power they've been given to transform the world around them, to shape and mold and remake it in their own image. That's what human beings do with power. But that's not what happens here. The Spirit's power doesn't transform the world. The Spirit's power transforms the church. The Spirit's power doesn't transform the people outside the room to make them the way the disciples want them to be. The Spirit's power transforms the people inside that room so that they can speak to and be heard by the world around. It would've been just as easy for the Holy Spirit to make everyone else gathered in Jerusalem that day understand the language that the disciples all speak – Aramaic – so that the words of Jesus could be reliably passed on in the exact language that Jesus himself used, so that every follower of Jesus from that point forward could communicate in one language, nice and simple and comfortable. But that's not what happens. The Spirit gives power to the church, and that power transforms the church, so that they are able to speak in every language under heaven, so that Christ's words are translated again and again and again to make every single person in Jerusalem able to hear and understand - in their own language – the word of God.

When the power of the Holy Spirit enters the world, that power doesn't transform the world, it transforms the church.

Because that's how the Holy Spirit works. Christ didn't send his Spirit to establish a kingdom, not for the disciples or for anyone else. The power of the Spirit didn't enter that room to let the disciples stay just as they were, to reshape their world so that they didn't need to change, so that they could stay safe and comfortable and use their power to protect themselves from anything and everything different from themselves. The transformation that the Holy Spirit brings starts here, in the church. It starts by entering into each and every disciple of Jesus Christ and making us new, making us different, changing our words and our hearts to produce the fruit of the spirit. The power of the Spirit doesn't come to conquer the world out there, it comes to conquer the world in here – our own sinful desires, our willingness to use power to destroy and control, these are the things the Spirit conquers, terraforming and transforming our hearts so that instead of barren desert and rocky wastes, we become a garden bearing fruit, growing love and joy and peace, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. When the Spirit entered into Jerusalem on Pentecost, the transformation was in the disciples, in the church, as they stopped looking for the kingdom to come out there in the world and welcomed the kingdom of God coming into their hearts and lives. They allowed themselves to be changed, transformed, so that God's word could be spoken in new and unexpected ways to new and unexpected people. The Spirit brought power into the hearts of the disciples, and they were forever changed by that power, and because of that power transforming their hearts, those disciples changed the world. Those disciples

transformed their world forever, not through control, not through power, but through love. Through the fruits of the spirit, growing in their hearts, the disciples transformed the world.

And the Spirit is still at work in us today, all these years later, as we gather in this little room as God's people, waiting for the world to be transformed. Over the centuries there have been plenty of times when the church has fallen short of who we are meant to be – when we have used the power we've been given to try and force the world around us to change to suit our desires. Instead of letting God's power lead us in new directions, to use new languages and expressions to reach new people with God's love, we've held on tight to what we know and what we like, we've tried to make others learn our ways in our words instead of following the Spirit's guide. Through crusades and inquisitions and residential schools, the church has a terrible history of using power the way the world uses power, to control, to conquer, to make ourselves more powerful no matter what the cost. But each and every day, God's Spirit still calls the church back, to follow, to serve, to be transformed. Each and every day, God's Spirit comes to us and pushes us away from our selfishness, away from our pride, and reminds us of who we are meant to be, reminds us of the power that is at work in us, growing the fruits of the spirit so that the world can be blessed through us. Following Jesus means being willing to let go of everything but Jesus, trusting in his Spirit to guide us as we step into something new, as we use new words, new cultures, new metaphors, new stories to tell the same truth that has been passed on down through the centuries from that upper room in Jerusalem: Jesus Christ is alive, his Spirit is with us, and everyone

who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. We can share that message with our words, with our actions, with our love, with all the fruits of the Spirit that God is growing within us, and as we are transformed by the Spirit, as we let go of everything but Jesus and let his power make us new, we have God's promise that the Spirit will work in us, and through us the world will be transformed. Thanks be to God.