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Sermon 1 May 2022

Title: The Rising Church Sermon 2: The power of the PEG (Acts 2: 14-36)

- Good morning church family—we are so glad that you’ve joined us this morning and we pray that God will give you ears to hear and eyes to see the message that the Holy Spirit wants to share with you today—it’ll change your life if you’ll let it
- Now it has been an exciting week here at LargsNaz—yesterday we met with our church board for our 2022 Vision meeting—and we prayerfully discussed and evaluated all the activities of the church and looked forward to the future and asked God to help us discern the way we ought to be doing things and the things we ought to be doing—and we’ll be telling you more about what was decided at that meeting in the coming days, and you can read about some of the details in next week’s LargsNaz newsletter—that’ll be available next Sunday—but I can tell you that you are going to be glad that you’re a part of the LargsNaz family, and we are glad that you are, too, because church isn’t just a place that you come to, it’s what all of us do every day of our lives as we live out our calling to be the Body of Christ—and there are new opportunities to do just that that we look forward to sharing with you.
- Now last Sunday evening was our Second Helping Bible study, and we just had a tremendous time of worship and discussion—we have gotten some good feedback from folks who told us that it was particularly meaningful and edifying to them, and I wanted to share with you a little exercise that we ended our discussion with, and you can do this where you are as well if you weren’t with us

last Sunday—if you're at our Sunday Brunch and you haven't done this already, you'll see what you need somewhere there, and so I invite you to take part

- Now last Sunday we concluded our sermon by saying that God uses our unique **personalities**, our **experiences**, and our **gifts**—our personalities, our experience, and our gifts--God takes the way we act and the way we communicate, the way we are, and the things we have done, the things we can do--and makes it all new—God makes us more ourselves than we have ever been before—but that's not all—the Holy Spirit gives each of us unique and individualized gifts that enable us to serve others and to follow the path that God has called us to—toward a destination that is beyond what we could ask or even imagine
- And at Second Helping we made a little tangible reminder of that powerful truth—we each got one of these—a clothes peg—for our non-UK viewers that's what they call this—a clothes peg—you might know it as a clothes pin, but here it's a peg—and we each took one of these and a Sharpie, and we talked about the power of the PEG—and if you didn't do this last Sunday, I invite you to do it today—take a marker and
- Put your name on the peg—on the other side write “power”—and this will be a reminder to you that your PEG will be empowered by the Holy Spirit—your personality, your experience, and your gifts—your P-E-G, your peg—and your PEG is a PEG like no other—because there is a calling on your life that is on no one else's—your personality, your experience, your gifts make you uniquely suited to do what the Spirit will guide you to do—no one else will be in the places, among the people that you are—and no one else has your personality—your ability to communicate, to sympathise, to connect with—no one else has

your experiences—good and bad—no one else has your story, no one else can do the things you can do—and no one else has the gifts you have been given, gifts that when combined with your personality and experience and the power of the Holy Spirit, can, and this is no exaggeration—change the world. Even if you only change the perspective and situation of one person—just one—you have for them changed the whole world. This is the power of the Holy Spirit and you are called to receive it—and not only to receive it, but to use it.

- You know after our Bible study last Sunday night, Tasha went to our downstairs neighbour's flat—he was leaving on holiday and we're feeding his cat while he's gone—and she had her peg clipped on her shirt and as they were talking, he stopped mid-sentence and asked "what is that?" and she proceeded to tell him about our Second Helping meetings and told him he ought to come along one Sunday, and she was able to share with him how God uses our personalities, our experience and our gifts to build the Kingdom—and how the Holy Spirit can transform our lives and empower us to change the world--
- So Tasha was able to use not only her P-E-G peg, her personality, experience and gifts to share the good news of the gospel, but she used her clothes peg too—and you might find that the same kinds of opportunities become available to you as well
- Now for the rest of this sermon this morning, we are going to be considering someone that Luke tells us about whose personality, experience and gifts are certainly empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete—that's a fancy word we theological types sometimes use—and that person is Peter, and so I guess I could've called this sermon "the power of Peter's PEG," possibly-- but the point I

want you to ponder is that it's not just Peter's PEG that's empowered by the paraclete, it's yours as well

- Now this is Week 2 of our Rising Church sermon series—in which we are looking at the book of Acts and asking, among other things, What can the church in the Post-Christian age learn from the church in the pre-Christian age?
- Last week we looked at the very beginning of the book of Acts—and we saw that the Ascension of Jesus provides both an ending for the Gospel of Luke—Part one of Luke/Acts—and the beginning of the book of the Acts of the Apostles—we saw how the disciples asked Jesus if he was about to restore the Kingdom to Israel—looking for political and cultural influence to be granted to their nation—then Jesus ascends—and two angels ask—what are you doing here just looking into the sky? You've been commanded to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete
- Then they choose a replacement for Judas—we didn't talk about that
- And then, at the beginning of Chapter two, we find that on Pentecost Sunday, when the Apostles are gathered in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit descends upon them like tongues of fire, and they speak to the pilgrims who have gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world—and they each hear in their own native language—and the crowd for the most part is amazed—but some mock the Apostles and say that they're drunk
- Now I think this is an important reminder that even the original church, even when it was so obviously filled with the Spirit and working miracles, was subject to critics—those who claimed that their behaviour is improper, inappropriate, uncalled for—folks who said that they are not thinking clearly, that they are not in their right mind

- And of course we still hear these same critics today
- What are you people doing?—People don't come to church anymore—you're wasting your time--you're crazy—what have you been smoking—or drinking in this case
- And Peter's response to those critics?—verse 15—these men are not drunk, it's just 9 o'clock in the morning
- Apparently Peter had never been to a major airport—like Atlanta or Glasgow—cuz I've seen people a couple hours into drinking at 9am—if they're coming back from holiday they may not have even quit yet from the night before
- But there was no airport in Jerusalem at the time, so Peter's words make sense
- Now let's look at what Peter says next—he quotes the prophet Joel to explain what is happening—THIS is what God spoke of through Joel when he said
- 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. . .Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'
- I skipped over the smoke and blood and mist stuff
- But take a look there—I will pour out my Spirit upon ALL FLESH, Then EVERYONE who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
- **Of course, Joel means ALL FLESH except—you know, those people—who do those things, or talk like that, or dress that way, or think that way, or look like that, or love like that, who live over there—those people who aren't really people—you know the ones**
- **NO. There is one qualifier here—are they made of flesh? Then them—they're the ones God declares that He will pour out his Spirit upon—white flesh, black flesh, brown flesh, young flesh, old flesh, male flesh, female flesh, rich flesh, poor flesh and all the flesh in between**

- **EVERYONE. EVERYONE** who does what? Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord—you gotta ask for it-- Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
- You'll remember from our Meet the Gospels series that this is Luke's theme of universal salvation to all the world, that runs through Luke and Acts, salvation beginning in Jerusalem and extending to the Gentiles and to **ALL THE WORLD**
- Now, as you head Pastor Tasha read for us, Peter delivers a tremendous speech to his audience--and we COULD talk about this powerful discourse—a sermon, really, about how Peter speaks to these devout Jews from all over the world—how he refers to Joel and David, and what these folks have seen with their own eyes to confirm to them that Jesus is THE MESSIAH, whom they with the assistance of the Roman empire crucified, but who also could not be contained by death and so God raised him up—but we're not going to look at that today
- What we are going to look at this morning is the way that Peter, who we hear from for the first time in the book of Acts here in these verses, the way he has changed from the way he has been represented by Luke in his gospel—which remember, is part one, of Luke/Acts—and that change is a testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit upon Peter's PEG—his personality, his experience, and his gifts—and the transformation that Luke tells us about is dramatic
- You know a lot of folks will tell you in one way or another that “people don't change” –they may say “a leopard can't change its spots” or “once a cheater always a cheater” or once a SOMETHING, always a SOMETHING
- That's common sense, and it's tempting to say, “yeah that's true,” but it's not what the New Testament teaches

- The gospel of Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit can change anyone and everyone, and that no one anywhere is ever beyond the grace of God, and as Peter reminds us through the prophet Joel, God says I will pour out my Spirit on ALL FLESH, and all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved—the Holy Spirit can and does change lives powerfully, dramatically, and miraculously—the Book of Acts is all about the Spirit’s powerful, dramatic, miraculous works, and Peter is the first example that Luke gives us of the power of the Spirit to transform lives—and Peter is an example of the the way that God uses our unique **personalities**, our **experiences**, and our **gifts**—God takes the way we act and the way we communicate, the way we are, and the things we have done, the things we can do--and makes it all new—but that’s not all—the Holy Spirit gives each of us unique and individualized gifts that enable us to serve others and to follow the path that God has called us to
- I want to give you three examples of the way that Peter is changed by his encounter with and the infilling of the Holy Spirit this morning—and for your convenience—they all happen to begin with the letter A.
- So let’s begin: First of all, The Holy Spirit changes Peter’s:
 - Attitude—
 - This Peter that we see who stands and raises his voice and preaches this powerful sermon in response to those who mockingly accuse the apostles of hitting the sauce early in the morning is a different Peter from the one we see in Luke’s gospel—part one of Luke/Acts
 - Specifically I want us to look at The first time and the last time we see Peter in Luke’s gospel,

- The first time we meet Peter, in Luke 5, Jesus tells Peter and his fellow fishermen how to haul in a huge catch, and Simon Peter does as Jesus says, and sure enough, they catch so much that their boats begin to sink
- And we read in verse 8
- ⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"
- Then Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, **left everything** and followed him.
- Now—Notice the way that Peter's words reflect his attitude toward himself—I am a sinful man—I'm not worthy to be near you—get away from me—BUT JESUS' answer betrays his PRIMARY motivation—FEAR—he is afraid—of who Jesus is, what Jesus can do, what Jesus means to his life—what do I do now that I have seen this?
- Jesus tells him DO NOT BE AFRAID—and he listens and LEAVES EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW JESUS
- Next I want us to look at an event involving Peter toward the end of Luke's gospel, but first we should mention that just a few Chapters on, Peter knows and acknowledges Jesus as Messiah
- In Luke Luke 9:18ff we read,
- ¹⁸Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"
- ¹⁹They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."
- ²⁰"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
- Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

- Why does Luke single Peter out here, I think he's intentionally letting us know, look, Peter **knows** exactly who Jesus is (even if he doesn't quite understand all that that entails) and acknowledges it to Jesus' face—but later, in Chapter 22, when the crucifixion is taking place, denies him anyway,
- not because he is unsure, not because he is undecided or uncertain that Jesus is Messiah—he knows, and yet in Chapter 22 of Luke's gospel we read
- ⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.
- Let me stress this—Here we see the depth of Peter's denial-- he denies that he was WITH JESUS, the person, then he denies he is ONE OF HIS FOLLOWERS, the group, then he even denies that he's from Galilee, the PLACE associated with Jesus and his followers)
- Why? Well, the simplest answer is To save his own skin-- because he is fearful of his accusers—Now catch this--he couldn't even stand up to a servant girl in the Gospel of Luke
- But here in Acts, after Pentecost, when he is filled with the Spirit-- now to those who accuse and mock— he stands up and raises his voice and says LISTEN UP, you need to hear this! And he proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah and tells the good news of the Gospel even in the face of those who mock and accuse—
- What might this say to us today?

- Are we today afraid of those who might mock us? Those who would accuse us of acting improperly? Of being associated with the followers of Jesus?
- The Holy Spirit is fully able to change an attitude of fear into an attitude of boldness, to transform those who would cower and hide into those stand up and raise their voices, who proclaim with prophetic zeal the good news of the gospel to a lost and a broken world—and that same Spirit that changes Peter’s attitude can change ours—that same Spirit can fill the Church in a post-Christian age with that same power that changed the pre-Christian world—but only if we let it, only if we are open to it, only if we say “Here I am, Lord, change my attitude”
- But the Holy Spirit doesn’t just change Peter’s attitude--the way Peter feels, the way he sees himself and others, doesn’t just change his perspective
- The Holy Spirit changes Peter’s
- Aptitude—
- Now let’s recall what’s going on here—Peter’s speech is in response to those who are mocking and accusing the Apostles of being drunk—why, because they are telling of God’s deeds of power to these Jews from all over the world, and they’re speaking the native languages of the hearers—how are they doing this?
- We find the answer in Acts 2: verse 4
- All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, **as the Spirit gave them ability.**
- As the Spirit GAVE THEM ABILITY---NOT as the Spirit USED their talents, not as the Spirit ENHANCED their capabilities, not as the Spirit COOPERATED with their skills and talents, NO—**as the SPIRIT GAVE THEM ABILITY.**
- And so we see Peter, standing up, raising his voice—he delivers this stirring sermon to devout Jews from all over the world—proclaiming the place of Jesus in

the history of the Hebrew people—in the line of David, foretold by Joel's prophecy—specifically to those who are mocking and disbelieving---Israelite to Israelites, but not cowering and denying now—

- Peter is not trained in the Law like Paul (who we will meet later on in Acts)—he is an unknown fisherman with no theological training and yet he is able to deliver this convincing and convicting sermon to devout Jews from all over the world—the kinds of Jews who would have been able and willing to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem
- And so we find that Peter, a poor unknown fisherman becomes the leader of the Early church, the one whose sermons serve as the source for the gospel of Mark, the original gospel—Peter should not have the ability, the APTITUDE, to fill that role, but he does
- And How often do we lament, I am not able to—if only I had the ability to—to teach, to preach, to encourage, to give, to build up, to feed, to heal, to visit, to protest unrighteousness, to work against injustice, to work for justice, to house the homeless, to rescue the perishing—but do you know the only ability you need to have is availability? You don't have to be ABLE—you just have to be available—the Holy Spirit can give you the ability to do anything God calls you to do—and if God calls you to it, the Holy Spirit will equip you for it
- The Holy Spirit changes our APTITUDE
- And finally, the Holy Spirit changes Peter's
- Altitude
- Now you might think that what I'm going to say is that the Holy Spirit lifts Peter, and anyone else, from their lowly station and elevates them to a higher place
- And yes, I do want to suggest that

- Peter, who considers himself a lowly sinner at the beginning of Luke's gospel, is elevated to disciple, who recognizes Jesus as Messiah,
- And Peter, who finds himself at his lowest point when he denies the Lord 3 times, is empowered by the Spirit who descends to where Peter is and enables him to rise—to stand up here at Pentecost, RAISING his voice
- But the Holy Spirit doesn't just change Peter's elevation by lifting him higher, it also calls him to descend, to enter into the depths
- It is the Holy Spirit that empowers Peter to rise to be recognized as the leader of the Christian Church—some call him the first Pope—but also drives him to be arrested and imprisoned
- It is the Holy Spirit that enables Peter to become the great preacher whose narratives about Jesus become the original gospel, the gospel of Mark, but it is also the Holy Spirit that leads Peter to martyrdom, as he is crucified upside-down by the Romans
- And if popular culture is to be believed it is St Peter who now stands at the Pearly Gates of Heaven
- The Holy Spirit changes Peter's altitude
- This is the recurring theme that we see in the gospels and the lives of the Apostles—the idea that one is lifted up to be poured out---this is what happens to Jesus—who being God, descends into humanity, is lifted up on the cross, descending into death, lifted up in the resurrection, lifted up into heaven, who then pours his spirit out, raining down upon the disciples, to Peter, who is raised up and pours out the gospel here to the crowd in Jerusalem, who is elevated to the position of head of the church, and crucified upside-down, to rise in glory

- And today, too, the church and the people who make it are lifted up to be poured out
- If you are in the pit, the Holy Spirit will lift you out of the miry clay and put your feet on the rock (as Psalm 40 declares)—but if you are on the mountaintop, if you are blessed with an abundance of resources, or even if you're blessed with very few resources, the Holy Spirit calls you to go to the broken, to the one in the pit, and to pull them out—you are blessed to be a blessing, not to store up your treasures on earth
- You see, the Holy Spirit comforts the afflicted, but also afflicts the comfortable, challenging them to move out of their comfort zones, to pour out their blessings upon others, upon the last, the least and the lost, sure in the knowledge that God provides abundantly and unceasingly all that we need, even more than we could ask or imagine—we are raised up to be poured out **unceasingly**
- The Holy Spirit will never drive us to say “I got mine—I got my salvation and my blessings-- and the rest of the world can go to hell as far as I'm concerned”—No, we are not called to stay on the mountaintop--no we are called to descend upon the very gates of Hell itself, to set the captive free—as Jesus said to Peter, upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it—and what do gates do? They keep people in or out, and if the gates of Hell will not prevail against the church that tells us we're to be tearing those gates down, flinging them open, emptying Hell and populating the Kingdom of God
- The Holy Spirit changes our Altitude
- Now you may be thinking this morning. . .
- I could use a change in my attitude, I am much too controlled by fear or anxiety or worry or guilt or uncertainty or despair—

- maybe you'd like to be assured that you have the aptitude, the ability, to do what God is calling you to do, whatever that may be—maybe you don't know what that is yet, maybe you're searching for the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- maybe you're feeling the Spirit is prompting a change in your altitude, maybe you need to be lifted up out of the miry clay—or maybe the Spirit is calling you out of your comfort zone, maybe you feel a leading to take up your cross and pour out blessings on others, to meet the broken and the lost where they are—
- I want to remind you this morning that if you call on the name of the Lord—if you just ask—if you make yourself available—your personality, your experience, and your gifts--your PEG-- will be empowered by the Holy Spirit----and yours is a PEG like no other—there is a calling on your life that is on no one else's—your personality, your experience, your gifts make you uniquely suited to do what the Spirit will guide you to do—no one else will be in the places, among the people that you are—and no one else has your personality—your ability to communicate, to sympathise, to connect with—no one else has your experiences—good and bad—no one else has your story, no one else can do the things you can do—and no one else has the gifts you have been given, gifts that when combined with your personality and experience and the power of the Holy Spirit, can, and this is no exaggeration—change the world. This is the power of the Holy Spirit and you are called to receive it—and not only to receive it, but to use it. That's the power of the PEG.
- In a few moments we're going to receive the Lord's Supper together—take this time to gather the elements and then Pastor Tasha will lead us.