**Welcome to Forest Hills Church,** I am Cassi Betker, Director of Youth Ministries here. Pastor David and his family are on vacation this week, so you get me today. For those of you who are new, we are a church that Loves God, work at Growing in our Faith and Serve through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. As we light the flame here ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and minds as we proceed in worship. To start off let’s read the memory verse for this week. “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” Psalm 107:1-2 Please stand say so in praise today.

**Scripture reading:** In Acts 1 we read in the letter from Luke that Jesus gave clear instructions to the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:1-5 “Theophilus, the first scroll I wrote concerned everything Jesus did and taught from the beginning, right up to the day when he was taken up into heaven. Before he was taken up, working in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus instructed the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God’s kingdom. While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, “This is what you heard from me: John was baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Slide 1: Explosion

Are you burned out? Do you feel that you have consumed all your resources? Do you feel like your fire is burning low? When a fire is contained to a space it will burn itself out as it runs out of oxygen and fuel. But there is this phenomenon in which a dying fire suddenly explodes when more oxygen is made available. This is called backdraft. Let us take a closer look at ourselves, at our church do we need oxygen, do we need a backdraft.

Slide 2: 20 Churches

I did a bit of research, there are more than 20 churches in the city of Forest Lake, and if you were to consider the whole of Washington County that number increases to more than 200. Not only is there a church on almost every corner, but also on some roads there are four churches sitting right down the street from one. Yeah, that is our street!

The same fact is true in other parts of Minnesota. If you were to drive around the Twin Cities you would pass 3,475 churches and that is just the ones on google. If there is one thing that Minnesota has a lot of, it is churches.

Let’s assume Forest Lake is not unique in this; let’s assume in cities and towns all across America there are a great many churches of all denominations and all styles of worship and all types of architecture. The question I want to raise with you today is, how can we have so many churches, and so much sin and suffering at the same time? How can we have so many hurting, so many unchurched, so many unbelievers, so many people needing to hear the gospel? You would think that with 200 churches throughout the county the conditions in Washington County might be a lot better than they are, but that does not seem to be the case.

The Bible calls for the church to be the city that sits on a hill whose light cannot be hidden. The church is the salt in the earth that brings seasoning and preservation to the whole community. The church is the wellspring of hope and help and healing in a sinful world, but that does not always seem to be the case.

On the surface of things, it would seem that we have enough churches and enough Christians to get the job done. There are only 1 police precinct in the entire city of Forest Lake, but there are over 20 churches. There are only 3 social humanitarian clubs in this city, but there are over 20 churches. If you were to add up all of the members who attend all of the churches in Forest Lake it would seem that we have more than enough people to get our message out, and make our presence felt and transform this entire city. We have enough! But despite having over 30 thousand people attending churches in Washington county, our influence is limited, our effect on civic life seems minimal and our ability to help the hurting is negligible.

It seems to me the **church needs some power.** We do not need new music or new pews or new instruments nearly as much as we need new power. We do not need new buildings as much as we need some spiritual life in the buildings we already have. We have praise bands and preachers, but on their own they have no power beyond the walls where they operate. We have teams, committees, and activities, but we struggle to alter the circumstances in the lives of people who are sitting just outside the doors of our churches. What difference does it make that we have over 20 churches in Forest Lake if the church community as a whole is lacking power?

Slide 3: Jerusalem city on a hill

This is not the first time that the church needed power to transform the city in which it lived. The same thing was true in the city of Jerusalem. As we heard in the passage earlier Jesus gave his disciples instructions to wait for the Holy Spirit. Let’s continue in Acts 2 now we've been going through Acts 2 for a while so let me summarize. Jesus had finished his earthly ministry and had ascended back into heaven. The whole world was waiting to hear the Gospel message that Jesus had come to deliver, but not a sound could be heard. The disciples who had been called and trained by Jesus to carry his message to the ends of the earth were all locked up inside an upper room. They were hiding from the very people they were supposed to be challenging with the message. They were whispering to each other behind locked doors rather than shouting to Jerusalem about the message of salvation.

Right outside their doors were the blind, the crippled and the sick. Jesus had touched such people and restored health to them, but these men could do no such thing because they had no power. Right outside their door were people who were going through the motions of religion; saying prayers that held no meaning to them and sacrificing animals, which didn’t seem to affect their daily lives. But these men and women could not offer the world anything better because they had no power.

Maybe you are sitting here today wondering if your life is useless, meaningless, like you can’t do anything. You feel like you can barely make a change in your own life let alone be used to change the world. Well, I have news for you, you are just like those disciples before Pentecost. On the Day of Pentecost, something happened that touched and transformed the men and women in that room and they in turn stepped outside of the doors and touched and transformed the rest of the world. They received the Holy Spirit. The Bible says the room was filled with a sound like the roaring of a mighty wind. What appeared to be tongues of flame rested upon the head of every person in that room. Each one of them was filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in different tongues.

As they spoke, those people began moving out into the city and a mysterious thing happened; people from various nations throughout the Mediterranean world understood what those people were saying in their own native language. The Gospel was being preached. By the end of the day 3,000 new converts had been added to the church. Those who heard the message that day took it with them back to their homes all over the world. God makes His power available to you to change the world.

All of this happened, because those who had no influence and no power on one day had suddenly been filled with the Holy Spirit. Now they could preach with power. Now they could pray with power. Now they could sing and witness with power, because on Pentecost they had been filled with the Holy Ghost. Talk about a backdraft, because of an influx of wind the people exploded into the streets. I am inviting every one of us to pray to God that something similar happens to us. I am praying that God gives us the power of Pentecost. I am praying that God gives our music, and our prayers, and our preaching and our worship the power of Pentecost. I am praying that God wake us up and bring us alive so that our 200 churches will have the power that is needed to share the gospel all across this county.

Those men and women were so excited about their faith that some of the people in the city said, “These men must be filled with wine.” It looked as if they must have been drunk. Peter responded to that church by saying, “These men are not drunk; it is just the ninth hour of the day, and it is much too early to be drunk.” They have simply been filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to receive the spirit of God that can set a fire inside of our souls that set us ablaze for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Slide 4: Pray, Walk and Talk in boldness

I want to have happen to me what obviously happened to Peter. The last time the public had heard anything from Peter prior to Pentecost, he was telling people on three separate occasions that he did not know Jesus. However, once the power of the Holy Spirit came upon Peter, he was walking boldly throughout Jerusalem telling anyone who would stop and listen, that Jesus Christ was Lord. I want that boldness, and I hope that you want it as well. I hope that all of us want to have the power and the boldness and the desire to share our faith and live openly for God.

There is despair and anger all around us. Right outside these doors. But Church, you, and I, we have the answer for them. You cannot share the Gospel without talking about Eternal Hope and Joy that no one else offers. But like the disciples before Pentecost no one understands us if we are not first praying for the Holy Spirit. It is through His power that we are heard, and the Gospel is received.

I want our church to grow like the church grew on the Day of Pentecost. Not for numbers sake or attendance awards but for the growth of the kingdom. At the end of that day, 3000 souls were added to the church, and more souls were added every day. The need for salvation is no less urgent, but the response the world gives to our preaching and our evangelistic efforts is far different than it was on the Day of Pentecost.

We tend to be asleep in the spirit most of the time. Let’s take a moment and think about our personal faith walk. Let’s ask ourselves, do I lack energy in worship? Do I struggle to attend grow groups or community events? If you answered yes to any of these, it's ok! One of the reasons it may be hard is because you are trying to do it solo. Maybe you've used up all your internal resources, you are on the edge of burnout. You want to re-engage but don’t know how. Know this first, You can’t do it on your own. You need some power! We all need the Holy Spirit to help us grow in our faith.

Understand that the power of Pentecost is not the exclusive property of those Christians in Peter’s time. The power of the Holy Spirit is available to all believers. We need the spirit not so we can speak in other tongues or other languages. We need the Holy Spirit so we can preach and witness with power and win new souls to Christ through our energy and excitement.

Slide:Acts 2:42

So how do we get there? Through obedience, and prayer we access the power of the Lord, but also, we activate His power through Bible Study. Acts 2:42a - They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. The believers would meet together and one of the things they would do is study the Apostles teachings. You know what we call the Apostles teaching today? The New Testament. These first century Christians were in Bible study together. If we are going to have God’s power manifest in our lives, we need to be studying God’s word together with some other believers. And not just other believers, ideally it should be some other believers from your church. Not that others can’t participate, but when we are joined in community together, we grow in our bonds together as we study God’s word together and we become more effective together and the Spirit’s power to affect change through us is increased. It is through Bible studies with others that we get challenged in our own thinking. Each one of us has biases. I am certain some of those biases are not based on the word of God. When we study with others, we get challenged in areas of thinking that we may hold and are forced to dig deeper into the word. That is a good thing. The things we believe had better be true to God’s word or we need to change our thinking. When we study alone however, we often will skate over areas of difficulty because of our biases. Not that we always will, but we have a better chance of being challenged and sharpened by others than when studying just by ourselves. As Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” We need to sharpen each other by being in Bible study together.

Slide: Acts 42b-47

How do we grow in our excitement for our church? Let us continue reading in Acts 2:42b-47.

42 The believers devoted themselves... to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. 43 A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. 44 All the believers were united and shared everything. 45 They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. 46 Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. 47 They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

These first century Christians not only devoted themselves to Bible Study, but they devoted themselves to fellowship. They hung out together. They met together. They ate together. And they enjoyed the favor of all the people. The world around them was being changed. Fellowship is very important if we are going to be a people and a church that has the power to change the world. Being connected with other Christians in the body is vital to our growth and effectiveness to experience the power of God to change the world.

Slide : Sao Paulo World Cup

I was in Sao Paulo Brazil one of the years they won the World Cup in Soccer. You could feel the excitement building all throughout the game. When that last goal was made, and the win was announced the city erupted. You could physically feel the backdraft, the intake of breath and then exploding shouts, people, and banners. People were streaming out their doors and gathering in the streets. Band set up and people cheered and danced. The energy in one place brought life to the whole city.

If we had that same sense of excitement inside the church, we too could have a spill-over effect into the areas outside our doors. If we increase the energy in this church, I believe we can bring life to this whole community. I tell you we need some power. Imagine if you will that we were so excited about Mission Wednesdays that you couldn’t help but ask your neighbor who was hurt on the job this year, if they need work done around their yard. What if we were so excited about Kids Bash that you offered to drive the neighborhood kids there each day. What if you were so energized by the topics in grow group that you invited the neighbor to come with you! What do you think would happen? I think we have some new people at our events! Because I know when my neighbor comes over all excited about a sale at Target and asks me to go with, I say yes, because excitement is contagious! You add excitement and the power of the Holy Spirit behind you now grow groups are starting to sound as exciting as a sale Target is to my neighbor.

Let me be clear today: I do not want anybody to get excited about God just for the sake of making noise. Like I was all those years ago in Brazil, I did not follow the game, I was just swept up in the excitement. It had no lasting effect on me, I still do not like soccer. I want you to think about what God has done in your life, and if it looks as if God has been good then I invite you to respond to that goodness. If God has blessed you, let the world know it by saying, “Praise the Lord.” If God has made a way out of a bad situation in your life, then let the world know it by saying “Thank you, Jesus.” If you were sick, but the Lord has healed you; if you were down but the Lord has restored your joy; if you were frightened and afraid but the Lord has remained right by your side, then let the world know what God has done in your life. Psalms 107 says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” Today we need to ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit so we can have the power that is needed to impact our world.

Slide: Turn this City Upside down

Imagine more than 200 churches filled with the power of Pentecost; let’s pray for that to happen. Imagine more than 200 churches determined to reach this county for Jesus Christ; let’s pray for that to happen. Imagine 200 churches with so much energy and excitement going on inside that it spills out into the communities around them; let’s pray for that to happen, as well. Imagine 200 churches with pulpits blazing with truth. The same 200 churches that seem so powerless today can turn this city upside down if we just receive the power God first poured out on the church on the day of Pentecost. Let’s pray:

Father God, we ask that the Holy Spirit empowers us to be blazing with truth and light into our community. Fill us with energy and excitement for the good works you are doing here at Forest Hills. Open the hearts of our neighbors as we share with them the good news.

Amen

**Benediction:**

As the Holy Spirit moves in you, our response becomes to give of our time, talents and resources. Part of those resources are our monies , that we use here at Forest Hills to provide those ministries to our congregation and community. You can give online, through the code on your bulletin or drop it off in the box in back. We are special offering for Ruby’s pantry, please use the special Love offering envelopes in your pews for that or mark it on the memo line when doing an online giving.

This week we have our mission day and Community Care this Friday starting at 2pm and Saturday starting at 6am. Next week Rev. Peter Law will be here giving the message and we will have the baptism of Annika Hansen. Come back next week to celebrate with them.

Let us leave with this blessing: I pray the Holy Spirit gives you a backdraft, an influx of wind that you go forth and explode out our doors in excitement for what the Lord has done in your life. Go and share the good news. Amen.