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Pentecost and the Power to Change

*It is not for you to know times or seasons
which the Father has put in His own
authority.*

*But you shall receive **power** when the Holy
Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be
witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Ju-
dea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
(Acts 1:7, 8)*

Change. Our world is full of it. Some of it is imposed, such as the historic education policies of the Canadian government for indigenous peoples. Some change is voluntary. Diets, New Year's resolutions, self-improvement courses, and fulfilling commitments made during our corporate or individual worship times are just a few examples. And we are bombarded with invitations to change. Whether it is a new product, a new lifestyle, a new perspective, investment or giving opportunity, etc., we are invited to be part of change.

Change is a common theme and is impacting the church. Changes are numerous and some commentators, like Phyllis Tickle suggest that we are in the midst of a huge transformation in the way Christianity is understood. Central to her thesis is the idea that large changes (or reformations) involve shifts in how we understand and perceive authority. Indeed, all the changes we experience are based in some authority or power, be that persuasive, political, personal or theological.

As followers of Christ we need to be comfortable with power language. The very notion of prayer, our use of titles (e.g. Lord, Creator, etc.), our practice of *worship*,

our need to be trained ("transformed by the renewing of our minds,") and our shared call to repentance, faithfulness and obedient servanthood, all point to our deference and submission to God's authority. This summer at the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Vancouver (July 12-15), we will again work together at sharing an understanding of authority that informs and transforms our lives.

As I reflect on the Pentecost experience recorded in Acts 2, I see a time of reformation, of profound change, and of new power and authority. Pentecost was traditionally the celebration of the giving of the Law (10 Commandments): a new authority for the life of God's people. And now, mere weeks after the resurrected Jesus appeared, God's Spirit comes enabling the apostles to communicate in unexpected and powerful ways. It is difficult for me at this distance to know the right "mix" of Spirit and Word authority, just as it is difficult to know how much of this change was brought by the will of the apostles, and how much was the change effected by God's transforming Spirit.

The easier observation in Acts 2 is to see the changes that emerged: people from diverse contexts and languages understanding God's wondrous acts (v. 11); repentance and baptism (v. 38, 41); shared teaching, fellowship and communion (v. 42); transforming experiences (v. 43); unity (v. 44); generosity and mutual aid (v. 45); gladness and sincerity (v. 46); growth and positive engagement in the community (v. 47). *May our prayer be to experience the power and submit to the authority that will lead each of our congregations to this level of transformation.*



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