

Batman can _____! Spider-man can _____. Wonder-woman can _____. Captain Marvel _____. What special gift, what special power do you want God to give you?

Moses raised his staff over the Red Sea and the water split; he raised his staff again and the water came back together. He struck a rock and water gushed out. David dropped the giant Goliath. Elishah healed the leper, raised the dead. Daniel faced the lions; he read the writing on the wall. What special gift, what special power do you want God to give you?

The disciples cast out demons. Peter and Paul worked miracles, healed the sick, even raised the dead. What special gift, what special power do you want God to give you?

You check the news. You hear your family news. What special gift, what special power do you want God to give you?

I'm no *Wizard of Oz* fan (maybe it's the flying monkeys; I don't know). But I sure could use the *Wizard of Oz* gift pack - a heart, a brain, some courage. And to go with that - to know when someone is lying me. To know what to say. To take hurt away. To be able to snap a finger and make things right. Wouldn't that be great? What special gift, what special power do you want God to give you?

Today is a special power, a special gift day. We hear the disciples speaking in tongues; we see little flames of fire on their heads. We hear the scared stand up and speak up strong. We hear the guilty cut to the heart, and instead of fighting back, they repent! They believe! They call on the name of the Lord they had killed. They're baptized, washed, forgiven, and saved! Yes, today is a special power, a special gift day.

But I've never been able to strike a rock and have water gush out. I've never been able to heal the sick or raise the dead. Some mornings Lisa asks what happened on top of my head, but it's never been a Pentecost flame.

Some days strange things come out of my mouth, but it's never been speaking in tongues. I imagine the same is true for you. So what are we celebrating today - "look what they could do?"

No, today we celebrate a gift, a power, that God is giving you. We could talk about the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control - I see the Spirit bearing fruit in so many of you. We could talk about the gifts of the Spirit - the gifts to know and understand the Word of God, the gifts to lead and serve, the gifts to encourage and show mercy. The Holy Spirit is looking to work his gifts in each of you, and I see him working his gifts in so many of you.

Today we won't go there. Instead we'll talk about a power more life-changing than speaking in tongues or working a miracle, a power that could be more life-changing than raising the dead. What special gift, what special power has God given you?

We go back 50 days before Pentecost, Easter evening. The disciples, afraid, have locked themselves in. Jesus comes and stands right there with them. "**Peace.**" He shows them his hands and side so they can really know it's really him. He says it again. "**Peace.**" And then he says: "**As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**" And with that he breathed on them and said: "**Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**" What is the gift, the power that God is giving us? A gift, a power, more life-changing than speaking in tongues or working a miracle or even raising the dead. Here, Jesus gives you - remember, Peter calls you God's royal priesthood to declare his praises. Here Jesus gives you the power and authority to say: "You are forgiven. Your sins, your guilt are forgiven. Not just here with me, but before God, you are forgiven in heaven above!"

We might think: "What's so special about that? I know people who need healing. People with hurts and heartaches and troubles that need taken away. People with wrongs that need to be made right. A world that needs to be fixed. With all that's wrong in our world, what's so special about forgiveness?!" Don't sell forgiveness short. After breaking the power of

death, Jesus could have breathed on his disciples and said: "Receive the life-giving Spirit of God; go, heal the world, cure the sick, put an end to death." But really, how long do you want to live in this world? After facing the worst of this world with its cruelty and hate, Jesus could have breathed on his disciples and said: "Go, make the world a better place." Lisa and I just spent a couple days in Springfield. Lincoln tried to make this world a better place, but walk around his old stomping grounds and what do you see - blight. After facing the injustice of this world, Jesus could have breathed on his disciples and said: "Go, make life fair and just and right." Oh, it's good to try, but don't think that's the best we can do. Jesus has something bigger and better for us to work at. So Jesus said: **"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."**

There's a part of me that's disappointed. That part of me wants the world healed now, trouble gone now, this world fixed now. Why? That part of me is so short-sighted, so stuck on this life in this world, that it thinks this life is the only life that matters. That part of me is so stuck on this life that it has little time or thought for God. But God didn't create us for what this life and this world have become. God didn't send Jesus to save us for this life and this world. God created us and he sent Jesus to save us for life with him - a life free from sickness and death, a life free from poverty and injustice, a life free from the polluting of our bodies and the polluting of our minds, a life free from danger and evil, free from hurt and heartache - a life where we get to live and show off the greatness and grace of our God.

And what gets in the way of that life? What gets in the way isn't something that can be fixed by super-hero powers. What gets in the way isn't something that can be fixed with a miracle or all the good in the world. What gets in the way isn't sickness or poverty or injustice. What gets in the way is something far more deadly - guilt. The guilt of my wrong can't be made right by me doing good. Guilt for the hurt we cause can't be undone by being nice. Our guilt before God is something we could never undo, no matter how much good we do. The sickness and trouble we want to be free of ... the sickness and trouble we wish others were free of ... that sickness and trouble is just a taste of God's judgment on guilt - my guilt, your guilt, the

guilt of the world out there. But with his Spirit, Jesus has given you power and authority to do something about that guilt. You get to share what God has done with that guilt - he put it on Jesus. You get to share what Jesus has done about that guilt - he paid for it on the cross - it is finished. With the power and authority of the Holy Spirit you get to share what God promises in Jesus: "You are not guilty, forgiven, right for life with God!"

With those words, you aren't just saying something nice. You are working a power greater than any super-hero power. You are working the power of God. You are opening the way to life with God. And that is the best gift, the best power that God gives any of us. Amen.