

COME, HOLY SPIRIT!

Pentecost

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Acts 1:1-8

INTRODUCTION

Maybe you remember that FedEx commercial that ran a couple of years ago. It was a spoof on the movie *Castaway* in which Tom Hanks played a FedEx worker whose company plane went down, stranding him on a desert island for years. In the commercial, this FedEx employee, looking like a bedraggled Tom Hanks, goes to the door of a home with the package he has carefully saved. He explains to the lady at the door he has survived five years on a deserted island and during that whole time has kept this package safe and unopened so he could deliver it to her. She responds with a simple, "Thank you."

The FedEx worker is curious about what's in this package he's been protecting all these years, so he asks her what's in it. She opens it and pulling out the contents, says, "Oh, nothing really. Just a satellite phone, a global positioning device, a compass, a water purifier, and some seeds."

I've thought of that commercial in connection with this day we celebrate in our church year. On the Day of Pentecost, a package called "the baptism in the Holy Spirit" was delivered to the church. It contains all we need to be dynamic, empowered Christians, doing the works of Jesus. The package broke open that day, and the world has never been the same, saying of these believers, they are "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, KJV). The church was born and the power of Jesus was clearly manifest in those first Christians. However, in our day, for many it remains an unopened package. They fail to make use of the gift Jesus left us with. They have the doctrine and affirm belief in the Holy Spirit. But often, it remains packaged in our churches and lives—there, but not released and let loose in us and in the world. This morning, I want us to open up this package and discover how we too can be just as empowered as the Christians in the Book of Acts. Remember the words with which Peter concludes his Pentecost sermon:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off— for all whom the Lord our God will call."

(Acts 2:38-39)

The gift of the Holy Spirit is for everyone who is a Christian.

CONTINUING THE WORKS OF JESUS

Unfortunately, the Holy Spirit often seems nebulous and not very well-defined in our thinking. We can't see or touch "spirit." But the author of Acts, Luke, helps us here. Both his gospel and Acts are addressed to someone by the name of Theophilus. Listen again to how he begins the book of Acts:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to

teach...

Right away, Luke is letting us know that this is Jesus who is at work in our world now through the apostles and early Christians. The Acts of the Apostles are the acts of Jesus through the Holy Spirit indwelling them. Jesus' life and ministry give us a concrete idea of the nature of the Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus' promise to the disciples the night before he was crucified, as he talked about the Holy Spirit:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

(John 14:12-18)

Jesus gives an incredible promise to us, that we will do even greater things than what He has done during His earthly ministry. How can that be? It is because He's going to send us the Holy Spirit who Jesus says *lives with you and will be in you* (17). These disciples will be changed. The Holy Spirit will no longer just be with them, but in them to empower and work through them the works of Jesus. In this conversation, you can't miss the continuity, the oneness between Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, it is important to remember the Holy Spirit is a person. He is part of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. One God, manifested in three distinct ways, three personalities. How God can be one God and yet three persons is always going to be beyond our comprehension. But then, it shouldn't surprise us if we can't comprehend the God who created all things. Can you understand or even imagine eternity and timelessness? To help a little in understanding the Trinity I sometimes use an analogy with water. You can have ice, water, or steam. It is all water, H₂O. Ice and steam and liquid water all look and function quite differently, yet it is all of the same essence. Each of the three persons of the Trinity is God, but they are God manifested in different ways: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thus, the Holy Spirit has always existed. In Genesis 1:2, after affirming God created the heavens and the earth, it says, *and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters*. Through the Spirit, the work of creation was accomplished. God said, "Let there be light"... and it happened through the Spirit. Here at Pentecost is a new era though. Because of Christ's atonement through His death and resurrection, He can come and live within the hearts of believers in the Holy Spirit, as Jesus has just promised His disciples in John 14.

In the Book of Acts, there is a seamlessness with the work of Jesus. It is now being carried out through believers, with all the power of Jesus' life and ministry through the Holy Spirit whom these Christians now have indwelling them. Peter preaches a sermon on Pentecost with insight, wisdom, and power not his own

and there are 3,000 converts. The crippled beggar is healed “in Jesus’ name in the next chapter. When the religious leaders arrest Peter and John for the healing and their preaching, they boldly preach to the high priest and Sanhedrin. These are the same men who two weeks earlier were hiding in fear from these authorities. Now, Acts 4:14 notes, when the religious leaders ...*saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

Indeed, the works of Jesus are continuing through the Holy Spirit indwelling believers. Within 30 years, the church infiltrated every corner of the Roman Empire. No amount of opposition could stop them. The phrase, “filled with the Spirit,” occurs in almost every chapter in Acts. These early Christians were Spirit-filled making them bold, filled with power and unstoppable.

POWER

“Power” is the big word at Pentecost. This last week, I was reading the recent Seattle Pacific Alumni magazine. It tells the story of Jacob DeShazer, from World War II. Since it is Memorial Day weekend it seems appropriate to share about the transformation of Jacob DeShazer’s hatred into love while he was a P.O.W. It is a remarkable illustration of the power of the Holy Spirit. Jacob was one of the Doolittle Raiders that made a daring bombing run into Japan with sixteen B-25 bombers. He and the other four crew members parachuted into Japanese territory after their plane ran out of fuel. In the midst of this ordeal, Jacob’s mother in Oregon awoke suddenly in the middle of the night feeling compelled to pray for him. They were captured and two crew members were tied to small crosses and executed. The other three were given frequent beatings, starvation rations, and suffered from severe dysentery and delirium— living with the constant fear of execution. The only source of strength Jacob knew was his bitter hatred for the enemy. He nursed that hatred, determined to survive whatever they did to him. He wanted to win.

Jacob had always kept his parent’s Christian faith at a skeptical distance. The brutal treatment at the hands of the Japanese further hardened his heart. But, after two years of captivity, light began to dawn. A fellow prisoner, Bob Meder, reminded him God was in control and the Jesus Christ had died for all of humanity. As he watched Meder die of slow starvation, Jacob pondered what made people hate one another. He knew Christianity claimed Christ could change hate into love and he was gripped with “a strange longing” to read the Bible. Incredibly, when he asked the Japanese for a Bible, they supplied one in English. He devoured the Scriptures, marveling at the love of God, redemption, and the admonitions to forgive and love one’s enemy. When he came to Romans 10:9, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* It was then Jacob DeShazer asked God to take command of his life. At that he says, “My heart was filled with joy. I wouldn’t have traded places with anyone.” That is the power of the Holy Spirit to bring instant change! But that’s only the beginning of this amazing story.

While in prison, God called him to come back to Japan after the war as a missionary. After obtaining a college degree (at S.P.U. of course) he returned to Japan and for the

next six years preached four or five times a day. Thousands of Japanese came to Christ, including two of his former prison guards. The Japanese Naval Air Force commander who led the attack on Pearl Harbor, Mitsuo Fuchida, read a pamphlet with DeShazer's testimony and began reading the Bible. When he got to Jesus' prayer from the cross, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,*" he too committed his life to Christ. The two men became close friends, some-times giving their testimonies together in mass meetings. While DeShazer spent three decades ministering in Japan, Fuchida came to the United States to evangelize— each returning to their former enemies to share the love of Christ!

That is the power of the Holy Spirit in a life. He alone is able to transform us from the inside out. It is not rules and changes imposed on us from the outside. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts and our desires. Good advice without the power to change isn't very good news. God brings the power to change into our lives with the Holy Spirit. Under the power of the Holy Spirit:

- shy people step out and speak with boldness;
- cautious people do amazing exploits for God;
- tightwads become generous givers;
- and people with sour dispositions become sweet and friendly.

WAITING

Notice, the Book of Acts doesn't begin with the Holy Spirit being poured out. It begins with a promise, instructions to be obeyed and waiting. We hate waiting. But God's waiting room is highly creative. Waiting reminds us we are not powerful enough to make things happen. We are not in control. We must wait on the One who is able to do what needs to be done. It is a time to learn relinquishment.

Our danger is to rebel at the waiting and busy our lives with doing things to fill-in for what is needed. Instead of seeking God, prayerfully waiting for His answer we run out and do the best we can with what we've got. It seems easier than waiting around, and it puts us in some control of things. Waiting seems like such a *waste*. So we end up with programs and plans generated by human initiative with no divine power in them.

It is in the waiting God wants to do some of His most profound work in our lives. We find our motives sifted, our desires refined, until the essence of what we really need is discovered and desired. Perhaps we start out seeking miraculous deliverance from our trouble. In our frustration and seeking, we begin discerning the whine in our voices, the self-pity, the "why me?" attitude. As we let all that go in surrender, we find the powerful peace and presence of the Holy Spirit moving into that empty place. Having His presence is so much more wonderful than anything else, whether the trouble ends or the healing comes becomes secondary. Knowing His love and feeling the inner strength He's providing is totally sufficient.

Among the 120 gathered in the upper room, waiting those ten days until Pentecost, it is evident God did some important work in getting them ready for the Holy Spirit. *They all joined together constantly in prayer* (1:14), the Scripture says. Of course, they didn't

know it was going to be ten days— we only know that in hindsight. It was open-ended from their perspective. Think a moment about what God is doing in this waiting time. Even among the twelve, there had never been unity. Throughout the time with Jesus, there were rivalries, bickering over position and who was greater. Don't you think there had to be some forgiving going on in that room? Some of the results of the waiting together and praying together I think are best captured by the KJV in its rather literal translation: *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.* (Acts 2:1)

“One accord” expresses a unity that had developed during the waiting. Individual agendas had been pushed aside, hearts emptied of pride and judgement toward one another. The helplessness of waiting can put us on common ground. What they waited for, no one could make happen. All they had was a promise and a shared commitment to Jesus as Lord. Before the power of the Spirit can be fully unleashed, unity was needed in the gathered Body of Christ.

Ruth Seabury, a missionary to India, reports a conversation she had with one of the great Hindu social workers. He asked her, “Do you think most Christians know what they've got?” Perplexed, she asked what he meant. He said,

“Every religion has a god. Every religion has an altar. Every religion has worshipers. Every religion believes in sacrifice. But only Christians have a Savior and only Christians have a congregation.”

Of course the Savior part doesn't surprise us, but how about “only Christians have a congrega-tion.” Do you realize that a congregation is a unique gift of the Holy Spirit? A congregation is not an audience of people sitting in pews listening, and worshiping. It is a group made one in the Spirit in whom the power of God resides in order to minister to one another in healing, blessing, liberating, transforming and encouraging. As Paul reminds us in Romans 12:5, “*so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*” Every single member in a congregation is meant to be a part of the ministry. Each one has gifts that can bless and meet the needs of others.

CONCLUSION

This morning, we've only taken a little peek into this package called “the baptism with the Holy Spirit” delivered to the church on Pentecost. There is much, much more than I can cover in one sermon. It has everything we need to not just survive, but to thrive in this world. It includes all the power we need to witness and do the works of Jesus. The package also provides us with the inner heart transformation we need to reproduce the character of Jesus in our living.

While the Holy Spirit enters our lives when we are born again, there is more. We need other infillings, empowerings, and releasings of the Spirit. If you feel rather empty, rather stale spiritually, it is part of a thirst for more. And in those places of our lives where we feel inadequate, they are opportunities to seek His strength. Where things are out of our control, let go and let Him be in control.

I believe it is in this waiting, seeking place of the upper room— that place we so want to

avoid— we will often find the key ingredients to a fresh in-filling with the Holy Spirit. Remember, the Spirit comes as a gift. Ask. Seek. In the waiting, avoid filling the emptiness with the busyness and stuff of this world's plans and programs. Keep seeking for the One who will fill our hearts to overflowing— the Holy Spirit. You will find Him in His time.

I am always glad to be a guide for you on that journey. I love explaining more about the Holy Spirit to hungry people and praying with them for a fresh immersion, a baptism in the Holy Spirit.