

COMING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-8; 12-21

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Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 2013

Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles in the Upper Room, wasn't an isolated one-time event. Supernatural signs and wonders didn't only happen in "Bible Times," so we should never think what happened back then can't happen right now. But being the children of the Enlightenment and having been weaned on the scientific method we tend to think the Bible should be taken metaphorically before we can take it seriously. Ironically, unless we take these signs and wonders seriously, how can God take us seriously as potential laborers in his field?

In 1849 three prospectors in northern California discovered gold and they each vowed to keep it a secret. When they headed back to town to stake their claim and buy tools and supplies they said nothing to nobody but when they were about to return to their mine they were followed by a long line of townspeople carrying their own tools and supplies.

What happened? How did their secret get out? Simple, their faces were flushed with excitement and anticipation. The townspeople suspected they found something special and nobody wanted to be left out.

That's how God wants us to be, flushed with excitement and anticipation. Why? We've been given a secret meant to be told, in both powerful words and deeds. I'm not necessarily talking about us performing bona fide miracles, though that could happen. What I am talking about is being so on fire for Jesus, your neighbors won't want to be left out.

We say Pentecost is about the Holy Spirit coming to us, but I think that's only half right. Being everywhere at the same time the Spirit doesn't need to come to us because he's already with us. Perhaps the better way to put it would be Pentecost is really about us coming to the Holy Spirit by making ourselves available to be drawn into an intimate bond with the Spirit the same way we're drawn into an intimate bond with Jesus. As I always say, Christianity is basically all about being in right relationships with God and each other. Through these relationships we're empowered to work together to reconcile the creation and everyone in it back home to God.

Last Sunday's sermon spoke about the disciples gathered in the Upper Room constantly praying together as they waited for the Spirit. By doing this they show us the way to the Spirit. Keep in mind, the Spirit was coming whether they prayed or not. Their prayers were actually for their own sakes so they'd be ready to get on board. Think of it this way, they didn't want to miss the bus. Ideally a bus comes on schedule, but it's

our job to be at the right bus stop at the right time. Similarly we need to be in the right frame of body, mind and spirit in order to catch the Spirit.

A rather serious man vowed never to attend the one church in town because he found it cold and quite frankly, dead. Lots of social activities, but nothing worth his time. Then one night the church caught fire. Everybody in town ran to help out, including the man who never showed up. Seeing him, the pastor smugly said, "This is the first time I ever saw you running to church!" The man shot back, "This is the first time I ever saw your church catch fire!"

I'm not suggesting in the least the fire in our church is out. We have exciting stories to tell about how the Spirit is moving and making good things happen. But I am suggesting our fire has yet to be stoked to its fullest potential. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not assigning blame. Many of you take your responsibilities to be Christ-like seriously by giving much of your time and energy to this church and other good works beyond this place. Even so, there's something still missing here. Like the apostles in the Upper Room just prior to Pentecost, shouldn't we be specifically praying to prepare ourselves for when the Spirit rushes over us in this room so together we can love and serve our neighbors like the Apostles did at Pentecost? No wonder, when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and then Peter preached the Gospel, "on that day three thousand people were baptized and they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers." (Act s 2:41-41)

Mind you, it wasn't Peter's eloquence or personality that moved the people to repent and believe. It was the Holy Spirit who set Peter on fire because Peter was prayerfully prepared for that moment.

Never underestimate the power of having a heartfelt conversation with God about yourself, your family and friends, even out of control situations, all coming together under God's will.

Part of being under God's will means going beyond being aware of God to becoming intimately in sync with God. What's the first petition of the Lord's Prayer? "Thy Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What did Jesus pray in Gethsemane? "...never the less, not my will but thine be done." Again, God invites us to pray so Christ's Gospel will take root in you and then you'll be moved to share it with your neighbors so they can be loved into God's Kingdom.

The great 19th century preacher, Dwight L. Moody, was invited to lead all the Sunday morning and evening worship services at a prominent church. By noontime Sunday he was drained and depressed. The worship service was so carefully choreographed it was lifeless and the people in the pews were so unresponsive he felt lifeless. He dreaded the seven o'clock evening service, but he had to go through with it.

Unbeknownst to Moody an elderly woman went home to her bedridden sister and told her Moody would be preaching that night. She sat up in her bed with her eyes filled

with tears of joy and said for some time she was praying God would send Moody to their church to liven things up. “Forget about lunch,” she said, “we have to spend the afternoon in prayer.” “What shall we pray for?” the other sister asked. “Pray for our church and that God’s will be done.”

At 7 o’clock Moody stood in the pulpit. He later said, “...I could tell something was wonderfully different. I could sense the power of God permeating the sanctuary. I preached as never before to the same people who were in the congregation that morning, but now they seemed alive and on fire and for weeks afterward I received cards and letters reporting the great transformation that was taking place in people’s lives.

That church experienced Pentecost because two old ladies were inspired to spend the afternoon praying and fasting for the Spirit of God to descend on their church. Question: do any of you ever pray for me, the members of the Praise Team (or choir) and your friends in the pews on Saturday night or Sunday morning on your way to church? Would it make any difference?

As I said earlier, Pentecost happens anywhere at any time, but especially when God’s people have prepared themselves so when the Spirit empowers them, they’ll be ready to go out to bring health to the sick, raise the dead, touch the untouchables and kick out demons.

Pentecost is all about reawakening the faithful to reach out to the lost and make Church matter again. Pentecost happens to people who want it to happen, devote themselves to prayer, having heartfelt conversations with God, praying for family and friends, as well as strangers in need, will be filled with power through the Holy Spirit so together we can do our part to change the world one life at a time.

Will you pray with me?

Holy Spirit, draw us close to you.

Encourage us to talk with you, help us fall in love with you, as we love the Father and the Son.

Fill us with your truth so we may share in your joy and be on fire for Christ and his Kingdom.

Amen.