

Filling the Hole in Our Hearts

Acts 2:1-21

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day when Scripture teaches us that the Holy Spirit descended upon the church. As we look at many churches today, we might conclude that our churches resemble very little of the early church described at Pentecost. Yet the Holy Spirit is just as relevant to our lives today as it was to first century believers.

British newspaper columnist Bernard Levin wrote an op-ed piece sometime back that is very descriptive of our situation.

“Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet lead lives of quiet . . . desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside of them that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff into it, however many well balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it . . . it aches.”ⁱ

Do you understand what he’s talking about? Do you know or do you have that same ache? If so, I believe that this ache, this hole, is what the Holy Spirit fills in our heart when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Our lesson this morning takes place on Pentecost, fifty days after Christ’s resurrection. Jerusalem was full of visitors who had come to celebrate this sacred festival.

They were all together, more than likely celebrating together, when suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. And they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. And all were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Notice that they were not speaking in unknown tongues, a practice we sometimes think of as being “Pentecostal.” They were speaking in known languages of other nations. The really miraculous thing is they were speaking in languages that the speakers had neither studied nor spoken before.

God had determined that the Holy Spirit would descend on these early Christians on the very day that thousands of Jews from all over the known world were gathered in Jerusalem for this celebration. And the people in the crowd were utterly amazed. They were witnessing a miraculous event. No wonder thousands of them responded to the Gospel message and were baptized.

Pentecost is often known as the birthday of the Church, which is somewhat misleading. It puts the focus on the Church, and takes it away from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the real focal point of the story. And with that said, here is what we need to know about the Holy Spirit present with us today.

It is the Holy Spirit that helps us make sense of our lives and understand God’s purpose for us.

Truth is, life is confusing and doesn’t always make sense. We have good days when we think that everything is going to work out beautifully, and then suddenly, through a phone call or email or in a conversation, our world is turned upside down.

We go to the Bible for guidance and sometimes find nothing that comforts - like it’s still written in Greek. The words are confusing. We have difficulty concentrating. And when we do understand the words, they don’t seem to relate to us.

But we linger with the text, and pray, “Lord, what are you trying to say to me?” and the meaning comes into focus, the words make sense, the way forward becomes crystal clear. It’s like God whispered the meaning into our ear. That is the working of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Tom Long illustrates this aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work when he writes about being a member of a rock-and-roll band in high school, captivated by the music of the blues master Jimmy Reed, a legend in the 50s and 60s.

Playing the harmonica and guitar Reed, a share-cropper’s son, brought the rhythm-and-blues music of the Mississippi Delta to rock-and-roll mainstream. Reed had a significant impact on future stars like Elvis Presley and the Rolling Stones.

But Long relates an interesting story behind Jimmy Reed records. “If [you] listened very carefully [to these records], there could sometimes be heard, ever so faintly in the background, a soft woman’s voice murmuring in advance the next verse of the song.

The story that grew up around this . . . was that Jimmy Reed was so absorbed in the blues beat and the guitar riffs of his music that he simply could not remember the words of his own songs. [Other stories report that what was absorbed by Jimmy Reed was more of another kind of spirit...] Either way, he needed help with the lyrics, and the woman’s voice was his wife, coaching her husband through the recording session by whispering the upcoming stanzas into his ear as he sang.

This, for the Christian, is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is God whispering to us, giving us comfort and encouragement, helping us make sense of our lives. In Romans 8 Paul writes, “The Spirit of God testifies with our spirit that we are children of God . . .”

In other words it is the Holy Spirit that quietly whispers to our heart reminding us who we are. It is the Holy Spirit that interprets Scripture for us and relates it to our daily lives. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us make sense of our lives and understand God’s purpose for us.

Secondly, it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to accomplish what God calls us to do. Jesus had given the disciples a commission (we call it the Great Commission) to go into all the world and “make disciples of all people baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [Christ] had commanded them.”

That’s an impossible task that cannot be accomplished on our own. But Christ made them a promise: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:16-20). This is why they were still in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost awaiting the gift of the Spirit.

In the first chapter of Acts we read that they were instructed to, “...not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Then a few verses later we read, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:5, 8).

It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to accomplish what God calls us to do.

I like the way Corrie ten Boom describes the work of the Holy Spirit: “I have a glove here in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, it can do many things. True, it is not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. We are

gloves. It is the Holy Spirit in us who is the hand, who does the job. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled.”ⁱⁱ

That’s our main task if we want to do something great for God - make room for the hand of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills the hole in our life. It helps us make sense of life and helps us understand God’s purpose for our heart and gives us the power to accomplish what God calls us to do.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit helps us become all that God has created us to be. One of the images used in Scripture to help us understand the work of the Holy Spirit is that of fire. The symbol of fire represents the work of the Spirit refining us and purifying us to become what God intends for us to become.

I do a little work now and again with stained glass. After choosing the pattern, tracing the pattern on to paper, cutting the pattern out, tracing the cut outs on to the glass, cutting the glass and grinding the edges of the glass, it’s time for the copper foil.

Copper foil is thin, 7/32” wide (which is 1/32” wider than the glass is thick) and has an adhesive back to it that, when applied to the glass, sticks to the edge of the glass. That’s important for the next step, which is what everyone sees when a piece is done.

Solder does not stick to glass, only metal, which is why you stick the copper foil on the edge of the glass – to give the solder something to hold on to.

But soldering, which is what everyone sees when a piece is done, is the hardest part of the job and the most tedious. The soldering iron has to be just the right temperature, the speed with which you drag the iron over the copper foil has to be just the right speed, and the solder you extend from the roll has to be long enough to let you get from the starting point to the ending point without having to stop in the middle. Otherwise, you chance not having a nice seam along the edges of two pieces of glass.

But here’s the trick I’ve learned about soldering two pieces of glass together along the copper foil wrapped on the edge of two pieces of glass. I know that the iron is hot, the speed with which I draw my hand is just right, when I can see my reflection in the solder just at that moment when it becomes molten at the tip of the iron, just before it cools again into a solid on the glass.

Which is what God desires for us: to see His reflection in our lives as we’re drawn along the path that He has set for us; as we become who God created us to be.

And when we strayed, he sent His Son to save us from our sin-distorted lives. And then he sent us the gift of the Holy Spirit to work in us, bearing witness with our Spirit, to help us be restored to a right relationship with Him. And when we are, when that work is accomplished, God sees His reflection in our lives.

All of this is what we mean when we say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” It is knowledge and faith that God has filled the hole in our hearts. It is God helping us to make sense of our lives and understand His purpose for us. It is God giving us the power to accomplish what He has called us to do. It is God working in our lives, helping us become who He intended us to be when we were created. It is God, allowing others to see His reflection in our lives.

I pray this day, that you pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit in your life. Amen.

ⁱ *Empowerment: The Competitive Edge in Sport, Business and Life*; by Gene N. Landrum, Brendan Kelly Publishing Inc, Canada; p 9.

ⁱⁱ *Messages of Gods Abundance* by Corrie ten Boom; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 59