

31st May 2020

The Promised Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-13 (Read)

Pentecost is the festival when Christians worldwide celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is celebrated on the Sunday 50 days after Easter, and 10 days after Ascension Day. In fact, Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian church. Because it's the start of the mission of the church in the world. It's the moment that God became present with his Holy Spirit in the world.

Pentecost originated as a Jewish harvest festival called 'Shavuot'. It's the festival where the first harvest is offered to God, and where also big celebrations happened. The apostles were celebrating this festival when the Holy Spirit descended on them. And when that happened, people heard the sound of a very strong wind. And people saw on or above the head of the disciples something that looked like tongues of fire.

The apostles then found themselves speaking in foreign languages, inspired by the Holy Spirit. People who observed everything happening thought that they must be drunk, but the apostle Peter told the crowd that the apostles were full of the Holy Spirit.

Focusing on festivals in our preaching is some of the most important, and yet the most dangerous preaching we do.

Important because festivals mark the major turning points in the Christian story. They orient us toward what is central, even crucial, about the Christian faith.

But also dangerous, because the nearly irresistible temptation when preaching a festival is to commemorate it. Festivals beckon us to remember God's faithful action in the past. Which is a good thing...so long as it prompts us to seek God's action among us in the present and prepare for God's action through us in the future.

All too often, when we look back to commemorate God's action in the past our attention lingers there, and we grow nostalgic for days gone by and compare unfavourably those we currently live in. And here's where the danger lies, as there is nothing more resistant to purposeful, hopeful action in the present than nostalgia, the sentimental longing for a bygone era.

Few festivals present themselves as ripe for nostalgia as Pentecost. After all, weren't these the glory days of the church -- spirit-filled preaching; attentive listening; three thousand converted in a single day? Exactly. And what have most of us seen or done since that could possibly compare? Preaching Pentecost primarily as a remembrance of the past -- think big cake and candles to celebrate the church's birthday -- unintentionally numbs us to God's ongoing work to love, bless and redeem this world right now, right here, through us.

So, I'm going to try and avoid presenting Pentecost as just a commemoration of a wonderful day in the church's past, and focus on Pentecost as a promise of God's ongoing activity and as a clue to discerning how God is using us just as surely as God used Peter

John 14:15-31 (Read)

Four roles of the Holy Spirit

As a person, we all have roles we fulfill when we are in relationship with other people. To my parents I was a son. With Nola, I am a husband, to our two girls, I am a father. With some people, I am a friend, a colleague, a neighbour, to those who read this message I have the privilege of being your pastor. You and I have roles we play depending upon the relationships we have.

For the Believer, the Holy Spirit also has roles He plays. I want to share with you four roles which the Holy Spirit plays in our lives. The central command that Jesus gives is to love Jesus by obeying His commands. Jesus is about to leave His disciples and so He shares a special relationship that He will give to every follower.

The purpose of the relationship of the Holy Spirit is to love Jesus and obey Him.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commands.” v15,
What are the commands? Love God and love one another.

In Matthew 22:37-40 *Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

It is the sum total of the Old Testament. Jesus said that the sum total of the New Testament is to love Jesus. Because if a Christian loves Jesus, loving God and others will follow.

But Jesus knows that Christians cannot love well by ourselves. We need someone to help us. This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit has been sent in our lives to help us love Jesus and love others by obeying Jesus.

How do we as Christians accomplish that?

After Jesus returned to heaven to the Father's right side, He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us and live in us to empower, transform, guide, and comfort us.

Over the last six weeks we have shared the stories of six Old Testament characters, ordinary people who God enabled to do extraordinary things. Today we will explore the promise and provision of God for us, so that as ordinary people we too can-do extraordinary things through a Helper who empowers us.

As Christians we believe that there is one God in three persons– the Father Almighty, Jesus Christ, His only Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, our Saviour, Lord, and High Priest, is at the right hand of God in heaven and lives to intercede for us – which is so helpful and is such a blessing. But in addition to our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Brother, we have an earthly helper, the Holy Spirit, who lives right inside of us.

The Holy Spirit is spoken of often in the New Testament, and this third member of the Godhead plays a very important role in our lives.

The apostle John devoted a significant amount of space in his Gospel to the teachings Jesus gave His disciples on the night before His crucifixion in chapters 14-16. A lot of Jesus' teachings that night focused on the Holy Spirit and His role going forward.

1. Counsellor/Advocate v16-17

In v16-17 *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn't see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you.”*

Here Jesus identifies the Holy Spirit as the Counsellor who would be with the followers of Jesus forever. Jesus identifies Him as the Spirit of truth, and declares that He will be not only with us, but in us. A few verses later, Jesus added, v25 *“I have spoken these things to you while I remain with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.”*

2. Caregiver v18

“I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.” Jesus promised that He would care for me as a Christian. But how was Jesus going to help me and care for me if we was not going to be around? Jesus gives a hint here. The Holy Spirit would not be just my counsellor, he would take care of me. Here, we see that the Holy Spirit will not leave me. Jesus compares the eternity connection with God through the Holy Spirit to a foster parent. The Holy Spirit does not own me. Jesus owns me. Yet, Jesus has transferred guardianship or custody of me to the Holy Spirit.

3. Conviction John 16:7-8

The Spirit is to testify about Jesus. In John 16, Jesus added this information about the Holy Spirit: v7-8 *“Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counsellor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you. v8 When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment...”*.

It is hard to imagine that we are better off without Jesus being here with us in this world, and yet Jesus explains that He has to go so the Spirit can come – that would be beneficial.

4. Coach John 16:13-14

Look at one last thing from John’s Gospel, Jesus said: 16:13-14 *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you”*.

The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth, and He will declare what is to come. Notice again that the Spirit doesn’t draw attention to Himself, but seeks to focus attention on Jesus and to glorify Jesus. So, from these few verses, we begin to get a picture of how important is the role of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus died on the cross and arose from the grave, He met on several occasions with His disciples before ascending to the right hand of God. In Acts 1, during one of those post-resurrection appearances, He gave them these instructions and this promise: While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promise. “Which,” he said, *“you have heard me speak about; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days.”* So, when they had come together, they asked him, *“Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”* He said to them, *“It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:4-8)

In v8 we find our promise for today: you have a helper, the Holy Spirit, who empowers you! *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Imagine all of the promises Jesus could have made to the disciples at that time, but He didn’t.

- a. Jesus didn’t promise them immediate success.
- b. Jesus didn’t promise them the absence of persecution or struggle.
- c. Jesus didn’t promise them good health and great wealth.

What Jesus did promise was the perpetual, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Everything that happens from Acts 2 through Revelation 22 is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came alongside the disciples and came inside the disciples and gave the early church the push they needed to face the challenges ahead and to accomplish God’s mission. Do you and I need the spiritual push and power of the Holy Spirit today? Absolutely! Undeniably!

In Max Lucado’s book. “Unshakeable Hope” in a chapter on this promise, he shares a helpful personal illustration:

Max says, *“Several years ago when my legs were stronger, my belly was flatter, and my ego was bigger, I let my friend Pat convince me to enter a bike race.”* The race included a one and one half mile climb up a steep hill with a gradient of 12 %. The hill is called “Killer Diller” and it lived up to the hype. Max signed up for the race because his friend Pat told him he could make it, even through the Killer Diller climb. That was easy for Pat to say because Pat was 15 years younger than Max and had competed in bike racing since his youth – Pat was riding pelotons before the rest of us knew what they were. When Max balked at the idea of completing the race, Pat assured him, *“Believe me, Max, you will make it, I promise.”* But Max almost didn’t make it. When the race began, the bikers who belonged in the race left those who didn’t far behind. Max and his fellow stragglers were joking with each other about the race and the upcoming climb, but they didn’t joke for long. It takes breath to talk

and soon they needed every breath just to keep peddling. By the time he was halfway up the steep incline his thighs were on fire, and he was having less-than-pleasant thoughts about his friend Pat who had gotten him in this situation. That's when Max felt the "push" – it was a hand pressing against the small of his back. Max turned and looked – it was Pat. Pat had already finished the race and anticipating Max's exhaustion, had hurried back up the hill to give Max a hand. Pat said: "I told you that you would make it and I came to make sure you did!"

It is the Holy Spirit who promises to do the same for you and for me. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit became the primary agent of the Godhead on earth.

The Holy Spirit is here on earth and lives in us to complete what was begun by the Father and Son. Although all three persons of the Godhead are active, the Spirit is taking the lead in this final age.

Max Lucado uses the acronym "P.U.S.H." to describe the way the Holy Spirit helps us. The Spirit promises to give us Power, Unity, Supervision, and Holiness.

The Holy Spirit enters the believer upon their confession of faith and immersion into Christ (Eph. 1:13, Acts 2:38). From that moment forward, the Christian has access to the very power and personality of God. As the Spirit is allowed to have His way in us, we are transformed into the likeness of God. We begin to think the way God thinks, love the way God loves, and impact others the way God impacts others.

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to minister in power, to pray in power, and walk in power.

This power includes the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). These attributes appear in the life of a disciple in the same way an apple appears on the branch of a tree. Fruit happens as result of relationship – if you sever the branch from the tree, then you can forget the fruit.

But if the branch continues to be connected to the trunk, nutrients flow and fruit results.

The same is true of the fruit of the Spirit – as our relationship with God is secured and unhindered by rebellion or sin, then we can expect a harvest of good fruit.

We can also expect the Spirit to provide the power and gifts for ministry that Paul laid out in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and concluding that *"One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills"* (vs. 11). And so, we see it is the Holy Spirit who gives us power to change and live and serve.

Even though the Ephesians had received the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), Paul had to urge them to be "filled with the Spirit" (To keep on being filled with Spirit) Eph. 5:18.

If we want to be filled with the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit, we need to regularly examine ourselves to see if we are persisting in disobedience, or harbouring hatred or unforgiveness, or continuing in immoral attitudes or activities, or feeding our flesh rather than our faith.

If we want the Holy Spirit's power and direction, then we must keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). "Keep in step" means "to walk in an orderly way." The word was often used of those who were marching. The Holy Spirit is like the drum major and we are the marching band. The Holy Spirit is like the drill sergeant and we are the platoon. "Left, left, left, right, left, right."

I hope and pray that the good works and fruit of the Spirit displayed in my life and yours are far greater than anything that you or I could do in our own strength. I hope it will be obvious to everyone that you and I have a helper who is empowering us!

Let's give praise and thanks to God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Since the Holy Spirit is the helper who empowers us, let's allow the Spirit to do His work in us, and through us!

Prayer: *"Spirit of God, please make this day a re-birth-day for Your people. Make us passionate in our faith, strong in our commitment, courageous beyond our imagining, and willing to love, and keep on loving, without reservation, we pray, in Jesus name. Amen"*