

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

Acts 2:1-13

Dr. J. Howard Olds

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In the spring of 1998 Sandy and I bought our first home. After years of parsonage living, it was an absolute delight to have our own place, though the bank still owned the most of it. The Director of Christian Education asked if we would host a little Sunday School party on Pentecost Sunday. We immediately agreed to do so, even though the house was far from ready for “company.” We thought about twenty people would come. Fifty showed up at our door. We prayed that the weather would be good and the sun would be shining so we could have them outside. Instead, we had the worst thunderstorm of the Spring. We had them crowded together in one room when suddenly the skylights started leaking, not leaking—pouring water. I began to distribute buckets and pans and said, “This is the first team-building activity of the new Sunday School class. I want you to experience it together.”

Meanwhile, Sandy put pizzas in the oven and not remembering that there is a difference between gas ovens and electric ovens managed to catch them all on fire. As smoke filled the house, we jerked blazing pizzas from the oven, hosing them down in the sink. I made the mistake of saying to her, “You mean you put boxes of pizzas in the oven?” She started speaking in tongues that I hoped was unknown to our guests. When it was all over I said to those gathered, “This may be the closest thing to a Pentecostal experience you will ever behold at a Methodist gathering.”

Of course, it is not the special effects of wind, fire, and smoke that make Pentecost a Christian holiday. It is the Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. Believe it or not, one year later, a young adult at that party wrote me a letter describing the spiritual transformation that started in his life on that embarrassing night.

God moves in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.

When God moved across the waters of Creation, bringing light out of darkness, order out of chaos, and human beings out of the dust of the earth, we discovered God is for us.

When God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose again, that we may have life everlasting, we discovered God is with us.

When that same God sweeps over our spirits filling us with love and binding us together as one, God is in us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

On this Pentecost Sunday, let us be filled with the Holy Spirit. What difference

would that make for you? Let me suggest some things.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AFFIRMS US

Paul says in Romans 8: *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God.* Sometimes we forget who we are.

One of my dear friends was the late Dr. Orson Smith. Dr. Smith loved to tell the story about his father, O.P. Smith, who was a Methodist preacher up in Eastern Kentucky. Brother Smith loved to go deer hunting. One day, after he made hospital calls, he slipped out into the woods, changed his preaching clothes for his hunting clothes, and proceeded to deer hunt for the rest of the day. When darkness came, Brother Smith couldn't find his car. Not wanting to spend the night in the woods in Eastern Kentucky, he took his shotgun and fired two or three shots hoping someone would hear. Someone did hear. The game warden came up in just a little bit of time and with a big flashlight. Then, looking Brother Smith over said to him, "Sir, you're under arrest for hunting after dark. It's against the law in this county." Brother Smith said, "You can't do that. I'm a Methodist preacher." The game warden said, "You sure don't look like one." Brother Smith said, "But I am one." The warden said, "Can you prove it?" He said, "No, I don't have any credentials. All of my stuff is in the car and I can't find my car." Finally the game warden said, "I'll tell you what. If you'll fall to your knees and pray the Lord's Prayer I'll believe that you're a preacher and let you go." Brother Smith immediately fell to his knees and began to pray with great earnestness, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters.*" The Game Warden replied, "My Lord, you are a Methodist preacher."

Sometimes it is hard to remember who you are. The stress of the day, the pressure of the moment, the sin of the hour, the tides of time, can cause us to forget who we are. Paul says the Spirit helps us. When we do not know how we ought to pray because we cannot find the right words to say and we forget the words we think we know, the Holy Spirit connects with our spirit to remind us that we are the children of God. The Holy Spirit affirms us.

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES US

Oh, I know what you and I say. We say, "Let your conscience be your guide." That is good if your conscience has the right content. The problem is many consciences do not have the right content.

Undeveloped consciences of our day see nothing wrong with evil because they have never been taught the difference between right and wrong.

All of us are tempted to rationalize the conscience. The main character in War and Peace says, "Yes, Lord, I have sinned but I have several excellent excuses."

A consequence conscience says, "I'm wrong if I get caught, but if I don't get caught, I'm not wrong at all."

There is the elastic conscience that shifts with the situation, whatever it might be.

Some of you came to church today with an over-sensitive conscience and you just feel guilty about everything. A conscience is not a good guide if it doesn't have the right content.

But Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes to you, he will guide you into all truth." The word Jesus used for this advocate is *paraclete*. It is a word that means "called along side another." It comes from the military world. As surely as there is a soldier on the front line who is supported by his fellow soldiers at all times, so it is that this paraclete of God comes into our presence to be with us, to guide us, to direct us, to lead us in all truth. Sometimes we translate the word paraclete as *comforter*. The Comforter has come.

David Seamonds tells the story about having open heart surgery. *Just before surgery, the nurse enters, takes my hand and says to me, "Will you squeeze it?" In the next few hours we are going to stop your heart and repair it. After surgery you're going to be immobile for about six hours and you won't be able to move, to speak or open your eyes even though you'll be able to hear what is going on. During that time I want you to know I'm going to be right by your side. I will hold your hand exactly as I am doing now. When you feel my hand, know that I will not leave you. If you need anything, just squeeze my hand. I'm going to be holding it.*" David said, "She did and it was tremendous comfort to me." The Holy Spirit is that kind of comforter. The Holy Spirit of God is present with us to comfort us in our time of need.

Sometimes we translate the word paraclete as counselor. The wise Counselor is with us. We need someone who will allow us to talk until we know what we are trying to say. We need somebody to probe to the core of our memories and help us find the way. We need somebody who will accept us as we are and empower us to become what we were created to be.

I will be forever indebted to pastoral counselors, spiritual directors, and psychotherapists who have helped me find my way through the wilderness of my own woundedness into the sunlight of God's grace and peace. Most of all, I am grateful today for the wise counsel of God through the person of the Holy Spirit who comes to show me the way. The Holy Spirit guides us.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US COMMUNICATE

Internationally and interpersonally, communication is the number one problem of humankind. At every level of life we confront communication problems. When Pepsi Cola took their slogan, "Come alive, you are in the Pepsi generation" to China and translated it, it became, "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead." Hardly the message they wanted to communicate.

For years, I have classes in pre-marital work with couples. I ask them to fill out inventories about the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship. Almost without exception, the majority of our time is spent on communication and conflict resolution. One wife said to her husband, "You say you understand what you think I'm saying, but what you think you are hearing is not what I am saying." As a society we are drowning in information but we are starving for communication.

Are there spiritual answers to our communication problems? *Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When the rushing winds and the flaming tongues of the Holy Spirit descended on the gathering, filling each one with his love, they were amazed and bewildered because each one heard them declaring the wonders of God in their own tongue.*

The real gift of the Holy Spirit is not speaking some unknown language, but speaking with such clarity and compassion that all who are present can understand. The Holy Spirit helps us communicate.

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US

During the Great Depression a man by the name of Yates owned a sheep ranch in West Texas. Day by day he grazed his sheep and wondered how he was going to pay his bills. It was in the middle of the Depression and even government subsidies would not give him enough income to break even. Then one day an oil company came to town. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well on Mr. Yates' land. At 1,115 feet they struck oil to the tune of 80,000 barrels a day. All Mr. Yates needed was suddenly provided.

When I read that old story, one that Bill Bright tells, I wondered if it is a parable of our spiritual life. *All I have needed God's hands have provided,* says the hymn. The power we need to become what God intended us to be is already in our souls.

The church and our faith should never say **you ought** without immediately being able to say, **you can**. I want to say to you today **you can**, not by your own strength and your own power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Whatever it is that God is calling you to do and be in your life, **you can**. You ought to be a better person. I have come to tell you today that by the power of the Holy Spirit **you can** be a better person. You ought to break bad habits. I have come to say to you today that by the power of the Holy Spirit **you can** break your addiction. You ought to forgive. I have come to say to you today that by the power of the Holy Spirit **you can** forgive. You ought to love your enemies, said Jesus. I have come to say to you today that by the power of the Holy Spirit **you can** love your enemies. You ought to be faithful. I have come to say to you today that by the power of the Holy Spirit **you can** be faithful to the finish.

When the day of Pentecost came, Peter was crippled with foot and mouth disease, bruised by too much bragging, impotent from too many denials. Instead of

wallowing in his own failure, he waited with other believers until the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them. They formed a new religion that day, a religion that is grounded in grace. What God did for Peter He wants to do for you. We will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us.

Nathaniel Hawthorne once said, *Happiness is a lot like a butterfly. Pursue it and it will always be just beyond your grasp. Sit down quietly and wait for it and it's likely to land right on your shoulder.*

It is a lot like that with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the living God is not something we see, but someone we receive. If we wait and pray, there will come a day when the Holy Spirit himself will come to us. Oh, may it happen to somebody who is here today. Amen.

