

Acts 2:1-21 “Spirit Filled”

May 15, 2016 – Confirmation Sunday

Maybe this has happened to you ... you have vague memories of a Bible verse or story that you want to re-read or share with someone, but you can't find it. You could do a Bible word search, but that doesn't always work. The next time try this ... do a Google search.

Jesus told the story of a man possessed by a demon who had successfully gotten rid of it somehow and the demon wandered the earth looking for a new home. When he didn't find one, he went back to check out his old address. He discovered that no one else had moved in yet, so he went and found a bunch of his demon friends. They all moved back in and the poor man's condition at the end was worse that it was at the beginning. I knew most of the story but I didn't know where it was from, so I asked Mr. Google. “demon cast out comes back with friends” and I found it ... it's in Matthew 12:43-45

“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

Here's the thing ... many people try to clean up their life, get their house in order and generally be successful, without God. If I suffer with anxiety or depression, if I am beset with worry and the cares of this life, how can I learn to cope? Someone asked me that question this week. My answer went something like this ... unless you are in outer space, an empty glass isn't really empty. It's full of air. There's no way to get the air out unless you pour in something else that can push the air out of the way. If I want to worry less and trust more, the Bible gives us the answer. James writes, “Perfect love casts out fear.” Our Christmas hymn says, “O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray; cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.”

On this day of Pentecost we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit who came to fill us. He comes to plant faith, to sanctify us, to cleanse us from sin, to take hold of our unclean spirits and fill us with new life. A question for our confirmands ... What has changed for you on this Pentecost day?

Do you feel any different ... do you feel more holy?

Do you look any different ... do you look less sinful?

Some things have changed. You clean up pretty well -spiffy clothes, combed hair. You do look different. You feel more grown up but the coming of the Holy Spirit didn't happen to you today. It happened a long time ago. We will get to that.

What do we know about that first Pentecost? We know that the disciples were changed that day. The Holy Spirit was poured out on them. Tongues of fire appeared on their heads. They spoke in other languages for all to hear. They received power, as Jesus had promised them. From now on they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. It was revealed to them that salvation had come, not just for the chosen people of God, but to the nations far off. But God hadn't changed. It was always His plan and intent that the Saviour would die for the sins of the world. Look at God's promise to Abraham. Through your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Look at Solomon's prayer when the first temple was built and dedicated. He prayed that this awesome temple would be a place for the nations to come and receive blessing from the true God.

God's plan to rescue humanity from sin and death was not just for some, it was for all. Why else would the disciples have been gifted with so many different languages? God hadn't changed. Did the disciples change that day? Up until now, Jesus had been directing them where to go, who to talk to, what say, what to do. That would change. Now the Holy Spirit would direct them. Up to now Jesus had been teaching them. That would change

too. Now the Holy Spirit would teach them. He would guide them into all truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” Now the Holy Spirit would bear witness to the grace of God in Christ and to the truth of the Gospel. Up to now they had been susceptible to their worries and fears. Up to now they had suffered under sins of pride and selfishness. Up to now they had had difficulty enduring their weaknesses and the storms of life. When the Holy Spirit came to fill them, their sinful natures weren’t gone, but the Holy Spirit did give them important gifts. He gave the disciples power, and direction, and understanding. He equipped them to be witnesses of the Gospel of forgiveness, just as Jesus had promised.

So, is that what’s going to happen to you today? If you got your hopes up, I’m sorry to burst your bubble. There’s a reason why the gift of the Holy Spirit isn’t happening to you today. It happened to you many years ago. You were blessed by the Holy Spirit when you were baptized. That’s when the Holy Spirit was poured out on you. It’s not as if you didn’t have the Holy Spirit yesterday, and today you do. And it’s not as if God didn’t give you the whole load at your baptism, that somehow He was holding out on you until now, until you could prove you were worthy to receive Him. You got the whole load back then.

I have other news for you. Two years of confirmation class didn’t make you worthy either. Jesus had the twelve disciples for three years, and at the end, when He gathered them on the mountain of ascension, they still didn’t understand the basic truths about the kingdom of God. “Are you going to restore the Kingdom of Israel now?” They still didn’t get it. They still weren’t worthy. They were still a rag tag band of sinners. But I have good news for you. The Holy Spirit used them to turn the world upside-down. You don’t get the Holy Spirit because you earned it. You get the Holy Spirit because you need it and because God is gracious and because He wants you and me to continue to turn the world upside-down.

Jesus said to the twelve ... you will receive power ... you will be my witnesses. He says to us ... you have received power ... I want you to be my witnesses too. One of the class assignments today was to prove that the resurrection of Jesus was not a hoax, not a mistake, not a plot cooked up by the disciples that the only way to explain the empty tomb on Easter morning is the resurrection. The reason behind that question is clear. It is central to our Christian faith.

How much did you know on the day when you were confirmed? How much do you understand today? Everything you needed was there on the first day of confirmation class. Question #1 ... what is the main focus/topic/truth of all of Scripture? The main focus of the Bible is the life and salvation we have from God in Christ. Peter got it. He understood it. Think about the simplicity of his Pentecost sermon. It’s like this ... judgment day is coming. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Here’s the bad news ... here’s the good news. It’s like this ... the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Here’s the law ... here’s the Gospel. It’s like this ... he is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world.

Okay, now you’ve lost me. Propitiation, what’s that? Now I know where “what does this mean?” came from! Follow me here. If the wages of sin is death, and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, then what’s left? Simple ... we all die unless there is a propitiation. Unless there is a substitute sacrifice, we are all lost. The good news is that there is a substitute sacrifice. “He and Me” Isaiah knew it, “**He** was wounded for **our** transgressions, **He** was bruised for **our** iniquities ... by **His** wounds **we** are healed” “All **We** like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on **Him** the iniquity of us all.”

Abraham and Isaac knew it. We’ve got the wood and the fire and the knife but where’s the sacrifice? God will provide it. Moses knew it. So did John the Baptist ... “there’s the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Even Adam and Eve knew it. One day a substitute sacrifice will come. One day the seed of the woman will crush the serpent. The message has always been the same. So what’s changed? Now it’s time for the

disciples to take that message out to the ends of the earth. Judgement day is coming. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The wages of sin is death ... the gift of God is eternal life. To do that, the disciples were going to need help, a lot of help. So God poured out His Spirit on them. You will receive power. You will be my witnesses. The Spirit will lead you into all truth. He will take what is mine and give it to you. You will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father.

Who was there in Jerusalem that day? It was Pentecost, which was already an Old Testament holiday. Fifty days from Passover a week of weeks ... $7 \times 7 = 49$ days ... plus one! It was even called the Festival of Weeks, because it's a week of weeks. What's it for? It was called the feast of harvest and the feast of firstfruits, but what did it celebrate? God's people were to bring an offering to the Lord from the first of the crops they had sown in the fields, the first thing from the garden. Oh, good, God can have all the asparagus!

When do you bring a thank-offering to the Lord, do you bring it when the harvest starts, or when the harvest is over? Which would be more thankful? Which would be more an act of faith? I got a million bushels of wheat this year ... I'm going to give some to God, or here's the first bushel of this year's wheat ... I'm going to give it to God Or if you are growing tomatoes in your garden this summer, would you wait to give some to the Lord in September when you've eaten your fill and can't bear to look at another tomato or would you give Him the first one of early summer? You see, it takes real faith to bring an offering to the Lord before the barns are full because you don't know how full they are going to be when October gets here.

Here's the point ... every thank-offering we bring serves to remind us that we can never out-give God. We are only giving back to Him from the incredible bounty He has poured out on us. So, what took place that Pentecost day 2000 years ago? God in His incredible and immeasurable grace poured out His Holy Spirit on His church in such measure that those who saw it could hardly believe it. God poured out power. He poured out wisdom and understanding. He poured out faith and forgiveness and eternal life, and 3,000 were added to the church that day. The firstfruits, the very first day of harvest was unbelievable. What Jesus had promised had now come true. He said to His disciples, "You will do even greater things because I am going to the Father." He had said to them, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will bear much fruit." And there it was ... Pentecost ... the day of the first of the harvest, and three thousand souls were harvested for the Lord. On that Pentecost day the message went out once more. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. And God blessed the message with His life-changing power.

Since this is confirmation day, we should ask, "What are we confirming today?" We are confirming that the Word of the Gospel has the power to change hearts and lives. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. We are confirming the truth of Scripture, that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Yes, He was really dead and yes, the soldiers guarded the right tomb. And no, nobody stole the body. When you eliminate the impossible, whatever is left, however implausible must be the truth. Jesus has risen from the dead! That was and is the foundation for the hope we preach and believe. If the tomb isn't empty nothing else matters. We are lost. We are still in our sins. We are most to be pitied. If the tomb isn't empty, there ain't no propitiation. But, if the tomb is empty then really and truly nothing else matters. Death's power has been defeated. Satan's arrows broken lie. All fear is gone ... "Because he lives."

Today we rejoice because the Holy Spirit has come and He brought gifts!