

The Spirit of Glory

1 Peter 4:7-19

John Breon

Yate's Pool is a great oil field in Texas. It was originally a sheep ranch. The owner, Ira Yates, had traded a grocery store for the ranch. The ranch kept losing money. Yates was in debt, he was struggling through the Depression, he went on welfare, and the bank was foreclosing. Then oil was discovered on Yate's ranch. The first well drilled on his place produced 80,000 barrels a day. A dozen more wells were drilled. After thirty years, the field was still capable of 180,000 barrels a day. Yates owned the oil and mineral rights. He owned it all. He was living on relief when he was rich. He was living like a miser when he was a millionaire. He had many resources, but he didn't know it (Jim Buskirk, *The Holy Spirit in Ministry* tape, 11/8/91).

What about us? Do we know what resources God gives us? Do we realize that in the Holy Spirit we have abundant resources for life, for ministry, for service?

As Peter writes to these suffering, struggling Christians, he says that in your suffering, in your struggle, "you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (v. 14). We could say that *God's glorious Spirit* is on us, empowering us, changing us, giving us gifts so we can do God's will and give glory to God. God's glorious Spirit enables us to glorify God.

Notice how Peter uses the word "glory" in this section:

- in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (11)
- To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever (11)
- you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (13)
- the Spirit of glory (14)
- glorify God that you bear the name Christian (16)

Glory refers to brightness, radiance and splendor. It also speaks of God's reputation or honor. Glory already belongs to God by right. But we glorify God or give God glory by reflecting God's glory back to him. We spread God's reputation and honor God by giving ourselves to him, by trusting him and relying on him to help us live as his people and do his will. In worship we experience God's glory and we glorify God. In daily life we

can glorify God. We experience and show God's glory when we live a life of love.

Peter writes about gifts God gives us. These are spiritual gifts, similar to what Paul writes about in some of his letters. The Holy Spirit gives these gifts to God's people to equip us for life and ministry. Using God's gifts for God's work is one way we glorify God.

All this talk of God's glory and the work of God's Spirit of glory is in the context of suffering. Suffering and glory go together in the Bible and in life. Because we live in a fallen and broken world, we don't experience glory without suffering. But, in Christ, there is no suffering that is not transformed by God's glory and that can't lead us to greater glory.

Let's see how God's glorious Spirit helps us and empowers us in *speaking, serving and suffering*.

Peter encourages each Christian to "use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace." God's grace is expressed in many different ways, through many different gifts. So each of us is gifted to serve. Paul lists numerous examples of these gifts, but Peter just gives a couple of categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts.

First, he says, "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God." All through the New Testament, people who are filled with the Holy Spirit are inspired to speak. Some declare God's praise. Some proclaim the gospel. Some announce God's will. Some speak forth God's word for the church. Some tell events that will happen in the future.

Jesus had warned his disciples that they would be persecuted. They would be hauled before rulers to be witnesses. "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20). The people Peter was writing to may have experienced that.

Peter himself experienced being given words to speak at the right time. Of course, there was the time he failed to be a witness when Jesus was on trial and Peter denied even knowing him. But after the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus forgave and restored Peter. In the early chapters of Acts, we see Peter becoming the spokesman for the disciples. On the first

Christian Pentecost, when about 120 of Jesus' followers were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up in Jerusalem and explained what was happening and declared the good news of what God had done in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:14-41). A little later, after healing a lame man in the name of Jesus, Peter proclaimed Jesus in the temple. When he and John were arrested and brought before the Jewish ruling council, Peter, still filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke boldly to them about Jesus (Acts 3, 4). Again, sometime later, the apostles were arrested and brought before the ruling council. Again, Peter and the others boldly talked about Jesus and stated their commitment to doing God's will (Acts 5:17-32). When a Gentile, a Roman centurion named Cornelius, had a vision and sent for Peter, he went to Cornelius' house and proclaimed the good news to non-Jewish people. The Holy Spirit interrupted Peter's sermon and came upon the people listening to him. This showed that what Jesus did and the power of the Holy Spirit are available to all people (Acts 10). Later, Peter was part of a church council in Jerusalem that made a decision about including non-Jewish followers of Jesus in the church (Acts 15).

Some of us are gifted by God to speak in certain ways as part of the church's ministry. God's glorious Spirit helps all of us to speak God's praise, to bear witness for Jesus, to tell the story. Let's glorify God in our speaking.

Peter goes on and says, "If anyone serves, they should do it with the strength God provides." This could include all the varieties of service that God's people do. One service he mentions a little earlier is hospitality. Traveling evangelists and teachers at that time depended on the hospitality of Christians in various places. Openness to guests, welcoming them and including them is still the church's calling. Serving here probably also includes all the serving gifts that Paul gives examples of like leadership, helping, administration and so forth.

God's people being engaged in compassionate service is essential for a healthy church. A church not involved in serving will maintain a serious illness or it will die. We want to be a lively, healthy, vibrant church. For that to happen we must do more than rehearse what we believe. Our fellowship has to be more than warm feelings we have when we get together. The caring community needs to open up and reach out.

If you recall something of the geography of Israel, you remember that the Jordan River flows into Lake Galilee and then on to the Dead Sea. Galilee is full of fresh water, fish and life. The Dead Sea is really dead—nothing lives in it. The difference is that Lake Galilee has an outlet. The Dead Sea doesn't. It simply takes in water and sediment and minerals. It's so full of those things that nothing can live in it.

An individual Christian or a church that simply takes in and has no outlet of service becomes a "dead sea." Our spirituality stagnates and dies. We want God's blessing and power and life not only to flow into us, but through us. As God uses us in ministry to others, we are more alive.

Peter reminds everyone to use our gifts to serve others. The gifts are expressions of God's grace. God supplies strength for service. And God is glorified in our serving.

Our call to service and ministry is at the intersection of God's grace and the needs of the people around us. Here is a definition of Christian service: God's resources touching and meeting human needs through God's people, the Body of Christ, the Church, us.

Jessica Seay is the pastor at First UMC in Ardmore. She tells about her family's involvement in community ministry. Jessica's mother, Ruby Farish, came home one day to find her husband, a surgeon, in tears. When she asked him what was wrong, he told her about a child who had been abused and had died on the operating table that day. Ruby asked where the mother was. Dr. Farish said that the mother had been arrested. Ruby went to the jail and asked to visit this young woman. She told her she was from a local church and that she just wanted to talk with her and pray with her.

As Ruby left the jail she wondered what she could do about situations like this. She checked around Tulsa and found that there were no real child-abuse services. She started calling some 800 numbers and finally came across Parents Anonymous. She got an information packet from them and called together twenty-two of her friends. Several of them decided to help and they formed the Tulsa chapter of Parents Anonymous.

The Farish's home phone was the child abuse hotline in Tulsa for several years. Jessica used to go with her mom to baby-sit when her mom went on call and worked with parents.

In the decades since then, thousands of families have been helped. Parents have found ways to deal with their anger other than taking it out on their children in abuse. That Parents Anonymous group is now the Parent/Child Center of Tulsa. It has 71 employees and is federally funded. They focus on building strong families to prevent child abuse and neglect.

I first heard this story in 1991. I called Jessica once to make sure I remembered it right and she told me how the story had gone on. Her mother, Mrs. Farish, was at that time a police chaplain. She went to families to notify them of the deaths of family members.

What kind of impact did Ruby's community service have on her family? Her two daughters are now ordained ministers, one in North Carolina and one in Oklahoma. Her son is a medical missionary who spends time each year in Russia.

How far does this influence reach—the influence of this one UM lay-woman with a heart for God and solid biblical teaching from her church? It reaches to Ruby Farish's children, grandchildren and someday her great-grandchildren, and many others who hear this story and see her model of service. Ruby Farish died this March at the age of eighty-seven. Articles about her in the *Tulsa World* showed how great her influence is (http://m.tulsaworld.com/obituaries/localobituaries/former-police-chaplain-ruby-farish-dies-at/article_856cd0dd-fdc9-5245-a45d-bd2320ec9940.html?mode=jqm#.UyMPLJChC0s.facebook).

What kind of impact can we have? Where is God calling us to serve? What needs do you see in this community that you wish someone was doing something about? Maybe your thoughts in response to that question are part of God's call to you.

The glorious Spirit of God gives us words to speak, gives us strength to serve and gives meaning to our suffering. We've seen several times in this letter that Peter was writing to Christians who were being excluded, oppressed and persecuted in various ways. He tells them here that they shouldn't suffer for being murderers or thieves or criminals or meddlers. But if they suffer for being Christians, they shouldn't be ashamed but should glorify God that they bear Christ's name. In that time and place, "Christian" could have been another legal charge like thief or criminal. Peter

encourages these people by talking about suffering according to God's will. That doesn't mean God causes the suffering, but that the suffering comes because we are doing God's will in a world that resists God's will. When we go through suffering we need to entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator. God who is the source of creation can handle our troubles. We show our trust in God by continuing to do good, even when it hurts.

Trevor Hudson is a South African Methodist pastor. One of his books is titled *Holy Spirit Here and Now*. One chapter title is "The Gift God Gives Engages us with Suffering." He calls attention to the suffering and overwhelming need in our world. That makes following Jesus today challenging. But he points out that the book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit worked through the early Christ-followers' speaking and doing.

When they proclaimed God's good-news story, the Holy Spirit brought many into God's family. When they shared their material possessions, the Holy Spirit blessed people in need. When they ministered to the sick and lame, the Holy Spirit gave remarkable gifts of healing. When they reached out to people from different cultural backgrounds, the Holy Spirit created a new kind of community that had not been seen before in the first-century world. When they opposed unjust practices, the Holy Spirit set people free. When you step into the fifth book of the New Testament, you see how the Spirit transformed these early Christians' human abilities and transcended their human inabilities as they engaged their suffering world.

Then he gives some examples of how the Holy Spirit continues to do this today. I'll share just one of them. He tells about a friend of his who serves as the human resources director in a medium-sized company that employs about six hundred. He knows most of the employees by name. He visits their homes when tragedy strikes and advocates on behalf of the workers for a more equitable sharing of profits. He creates jobs wherever he can. He has set up training programs to empower and equip people who were previously disadvantaged. Recently he facilitated a wage agreement for the next three years, which was agreed upon by the workers involved.

It's amazing how the Holy Spirit has transformed this man's natural abilities for the sake of the common good. He says that the outcomes of his efforts have far exceeded what he could have done in his own strength and wisdom (139, 149-50).

The Holy Spirit is at work leading us to engage and make a difference for suffering people in the church, in our neighborhoods, at school, at work—wherever we meet people who are hurting. And, God's working through us to bless others can help us in our suffering as well.

The Spirit of glory and of God is with us, upon us, in us to make us the people of God, to fill us with holy love, to equip and empower us to glorify God in our speaking, our serving and even our suffering.

I like this prayer: "An Invitation to the Holy Spirit":

O God, the Holy Spirit, come to us, and among us; come as the wind, and cleanse us; come as the fire, and burn; come as the dew, and refresh; convict, convert, and consecrate many hearts and lives to our great good and to your greater glory; and this we ask for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #335)