The Holy Spirit’s Full-Filling

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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Acts 2:32-39

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This is the 7\textsuperscript{th} Sunday, or the 50\textsuperscript{th} day after the glorious celebration of Easter. This is “Holy Spirit” Sunday. It’s Pentecost Sunday – “pente” meaning 5, as in the 50\textsuperscript{th} day since the very first sightings of the Risen Savior. After that first Easter, Jesus continues to appear to hundreds and hundreds of His followers and specifically to His disciples. Even before His death, especially in John’s Gospel, we hear Jesus promising His disciples that He will never leave them alone on their own. Jesus says to them, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Encourager to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth….You know the Holy Spirit, because He abides with you, and He will be with you” (John 14:16-17).

The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is the “paraclete.” Jesus gives His Spirit to us, to literally “come alongside” us. Jesus calls Him our “Encourager” and “Advocate.” The Holy Spirit is our “Comforter” and “True Friend.” (Dale Bruner)

This morning, we come to what some have called Luke’s “second gospel,” the Acts of the Apostles. It is 40 days after Easter and Jesus again promises His disciples the imminent gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus then leaves them and ascends to heaven. And, then, the disciples wait and wait, for ten more days. It is worth the wait. Luke tells us that all the disciples are gathered together in one place. Suddenly, there is a sound like the rush of gale force winds and then (not stopping there) tongues of fire (like a wildfire) descending upon them! It’s an indescribable, overwhelming event! The “violent wind” is compared to a “heavy tropical storm.” We’re not talking here about a drizzle; we’re not talking about a little shower; we’re talking about a deluging outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all who were present. They—hearts, bodies, minds— are completely overcome by the Holy Spirit!

Our Three-in-One God has always existed in all fullness since even before the beginning of time and creation. Three distinct persons in One – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When God created the very first human being, God took dust from the ground and then breathed into Adam’s nostrils the “breath of life,” the Ruach, God’s very Spirit (Genesis 2:7). The “Spirit of God” came upon the unassuming, even cowardly Gideon,
and he became one of only a few truly remarkable Judges of the Old Testament. God’s “Spirit” enabled the prophet Isaiah “to preach the good news to the poor…to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives…and to comfort all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:1-2). The Holy Spirit was, is, and has always been filling, breathing, moving!

But in the Old Testament, until the full revelation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out only in particular ways upon specific people of God. It was as if the manifestations, the activity of the Holy Spirit was more limited. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was kind of like cell phone coverage in the 80s and 90s. Getting a recognizable call from the Holy Spirit was infrequent. Only a select powerful few had that real bandwidth to hear God, from God! Depending on the roaming capabilities, a call from God might have been here or there, hit or miss.

But now you and I can pick up a call from anywhere (and right here). At Pentecost, EVERYONE was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. No one was skipped over. The fire and smoke of the Spirit was everywhere. Just as Jesus promised, the Spirit empowered all – 3,000 to be exact, 3,000 souls from every tongue, race, nation under heaven! Three thousand new believers filled with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, today’s Pentecost Sunday Scripture. The man of the hour is Peter, who is preaching about the real man of the hour, of all time, Jesus Christ. Peter preaching? Can you imagine? We all remember Peter’s three repeated failures of turning his back on Jesus before His Crucifixion. So where does Peter, after such failures, find the power to declare his complete devotion to Jesus? Scholar-pastor William Willimon writes that the “Holy Spirit breathed life into this once impulsive, cowardly disciple and created a new man who has the gift of bold speech.” No matter where we have failed in following Christ by our actions and words, no matter how we have denied ever knowing Jesus, His Spirit can breathe new life and power into each one of us. Take heart that, like Peter, even in our failing we can speak out and live persuasively for Jesus of Nazareth. God is a God of second chances, fresh starts.
We pick up Peter’s preaching at the crescendo, Acts 2:32 - 36: 
“God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this.”
Real-live witnesses! Luke is writing only 30 years after Jesus’ Resurrection appearances! Now He is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. And the Father, as He had promised, gave Jesus the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. “So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!”

Peter proclaims the Resurrection as the ultimate proof that this Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the long-anticipated Lord and Messiah. Without the Resurrection there is no Pentecost, there are no 3,000 Spirit-gushing new believers. Without the Resurrection there is no 1st century Church. Acts 2:37 - 39: Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter urged them, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away — all who have been called by the Lord our God.”

The Holy Spirit and His power are available to everyone – for you, for your children, and for all who are far away. At our finger tips, within our very souls, like oxygen, we have absolute access to Christ’s Spirit – our Encourager, Comforter, True Friend.

So, two applications for today. The power of the Holy Spirit equipped the disciples in two ways. First, the Holy Spirit enabled them to boldly say and do new things as never before. Second, the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to create a new kind of community.

First, witnessing and healing and serving boldly. The same disciples, who only weeks before were denying and doubting and running away in fear are now boldly declaring Jesus as the Crucified and Risen Messiah. The same disciples are now boldly healing “in the name of Jesus” (3:6). These same disciples are now boldly extending mercy to the most neglected, the widows and orphans in and around Jerusalem (6:1). This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples. As a result, hearts are renewed; bodies are repaired; lives are changed.
This has got to be our story, too! Professing Jesus as Lord and Messiah, you and I have been filled with the Holy Spirit. Praise God, thank God! So what does this filling look like? The Holy Spirit equips us to **SHOW UP** and to “be there” to care for someone who is hurting or hungry. The Holy Spirit equips us to **SPEAK UP** for the lost or lonely who need to hear about Jesus’ saving, healing love. The Holy Spirit equips us to **STAND UP** against the powers of darkness in a world of violence, abuse, and disease, in the power and name of the One True Light, Who has overcome the darkness. Where is the Holy Spirit calling YOU? To boldly show up, to speak up, to stand up?

Second, filled with the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus created a new way to live together, to be in community together. Look at the remarkable evidence of the Spirit’s power in the 1st century church. They were devoted to one another; they had hearts of love for each other; they were inspired to sacrifice for the greater good. All the while they prayed and worshipped and broke bread together, and no one had any need! Jesus’ kingdom on earth. Wow!

This power to transform is still at work today among us. You and I have full access to the Holy Spirit. But often you and I are not as FULL-UP in the Spirit as we can be. We don’t have as much of the Spirit because often we don’t invite or ask or desire more of the Spirit to be ALIVE in us. Like those 1st century Christians, let’s pray and ask and allow Jesus’ Spirit to fully-fill us. Let’s pray that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus would become more and more the sole content of all that we are, say, and do.

One day in class, in front of his seminary students, James Emery White took two glasses and two packets of Alka-Seltzer tablets. He took one of the glasses and dropped an unopened packet of Alka Seltzer – wrapper still on – into the water. He took the other glass, opened an Alka-Seltzer packet, and dropped the tablet straight into the water. All the students watched as the water started bubbling and fizzing.

“All Christians have the Holy Spirit in them,” White told his students, “but see how you can have the Holy Spirit in you, but not the Spirit’s filling?” When we believe, we all have the Holy Spirit living inside us. The goal
for us is to ask God to help us unwrap the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us. The goal is to ask God to unleash the Spirit within us, so that He may fizzle and bubble more completely and thoroughly in our lives! Come Holy Spirit, come! Will you invite, ask, allow the Spirit to witness, to heal, to serve boldly through YOU, together in community, in the name of the Risen Jesus of Nazareth?