

**When the Helper comes.**

Acts 2:1-11 &amp; John 15:26-16:15

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Today is the day when we draw to a close the first half of the Church Year. If you notice, during the first half of the year the lessons take us through the life of Christ. During the second half of the year they take us through the life of the believer—giving us a sort of overview of what it means to live the Christian life that comes as a result of the Gospel message we heard during the first half.

So today, Whitsunday or Pentecost, we come to the story, as we just heard it read from Acts 2, where the Gospel story itself ends and the story of *our* life in that Gospel begins. We started in Advent with the proclamation that the new life was going to come in the person of the Messiah. At Christmas we heard the message that God had come himself—incarnate as one of us. He lived like us with the one very important exception: where we are sinners, he was not. He fulfilled the Law. During Holy Week we followed him from the Upper Room to the Cross and finally to the Tomb—we followed him as he who knew no sin, became sin for us and bought our redemption. He took God's wrath and punishment for sin in our place. And on Easter we followed his disciples to the tomb and found it empty—empty because God had raised him from the dead. We received the message that we are raised to new life with him. Good stuff! But it didn't end there. A week-and-a-half-ago we followed Jesus and his disciples outside the city and heard those men receive their commission from him: Go out and share the good news. Go out and baptize and make disciples! And then he rose to heaven.

The funny thing through all that is all along Jesus was preaching his message of the kingdom of God—that it wasn't about a place, but about a person and was something that reigns in our hearts as we are joined to that person (to him). And yet at every step the disciples kept stopping to ask him, "Yeah, Jesus, that's great, but when are you going to work your Messiah

stuff, throw off this poor itinerant preacher disguise, kick out the Romans and rebuild the great kingdom that we knew when David and Solomon were kings in Israel?" They didn't get it. Even as he was preparing to ascend to heaven and take his throne, they were asking him when he was going to restore the "Kingdom of Israel."

And so last week we read the story of Jesus' ascension—how he returned to heaven to sit down on his throne and rule his kingdom. The disciples still didn't get it. And yet Jesus had told them before that he couldn't stay—he had to go so that he could send another. We read one of those passages in our Gospel this morning: John 15:26-27:

**But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.**

A few verses later, in Chapter 16, Jesus explains it to them in more detail. He says,

**I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me... I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.**

Jesus has been providing the teaching, he's done the work of redemption, but it's the "Helper," literally in Greek it's the "one who is called alongside" is the one who has to come and put it all into action. Each person of the Trinity has his own part in this whole work of restoration. It was the Father who sent the Son. It was the Son who died and rose again accomplishing the actual work of redemption. And it's then the Spirit who works in the hearts of men to turn them to Christ and to give them understanding. Think about that. Consider the fact that these guys had been following Christ around for three years, not just hearing him preach, but living with him and engaging in personal conversation with him—and yet they still didn't have a clue as to what he was *really* all about. They were still looking for an earthly conquering hero. As much as they didn't want their friend to leave, he needed to so that his Spirit—the Helper as St. John

calls him—could be sent to complete the work. Jesus goes on to say:

**And when [the Helper] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.**

The job of the Holy Spirit is to awaken the deadened hearts of men and women to their need for a Saviour. Again, Jesus has to go so that he can send the Spirit. Without the work of the Spirit those cold and stony hearts will never be turned to Jesus Christ. Without the Spirit they will never be softened. Without the Spirit we'll never have those "hearts of flesh" God told Ezekiel about.

From time to time we need this reminder of what the Spirit's work is. Sometimes we overstep our bounds. Jesus calls *us* to proclaim the message of the Gospel, but it's the *Spirit's* work to convict hearts and to make them understand the message we preach. I talked about this a couple of months ago when we looked at what it means to have a biblical understanding of conversion and evangelism. Our job is to share the message. The Spirit's job is to change hearts. We sow the seed. The Spirit brings the fruit.

But there's more to the Spirit's work than convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgement in the world. Jesus goes on:

**I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. [We've been seeing that all along through the story!] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:4-5, 7-15)**

The ministry of the Spirit is first and foremost to take what Jesus has said and apply it to our hearts as he gives us understanding. This is what the disciples had been missing all along. This is what the world is missing when it hears the Gospel message, but chalks it up as

foolishness. It's the result of our fallen and sinful natures. God created us to understand him, but because we have sinned, our understanding, our reason, our thought processes have all been tainted with sin. Even *with* the Spirit dwelling in us, St. Paul says that even then we still see as through a darkened mirror. *Without* the Spirit we can't see at all. Without the Spirit our hearts are naturally against God. So the most important working of the Spirit is to open our eyes to God's truth. Jesus notes that the Spirit doesn't speak on his own authority, but that the work of the Spirit is to declare—to make understood—to us the message of Jesus Christ.

Notice also Jesus says that the function of the Spirit is to give him glory. Even though there is equality within the Holy Trinity, there is still a hierarchy within the relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Jesus is subordinate to the Father, just as any son is subordinate to his earthly father. Notice that throughout Jesus' ministry he tells us that his purpose is to glorify the Father—never once does he bring glory on himself. In fact, that was what Satan tempted him with in the wilderness. And so with the Holy Spirit, except that the Spirit's ministry is to glorify Christ. The Spirit never glorifies himself. Notice that the Spirit never attracts attention to himself. His mission is to point us to Christ and Christ's mission then is to point us to and reconcile us with the Father.

All this is exactly what happened at Pentecost. When Jesus ascended he commissioned his disciples, telling them that they were to go out to all the world to be his witnesses, first to Jerusalem and to Judea, but then to Samaria and eventually to the whole world. *But*, he said, you need to go to Jerusalem and wait. I need to return to my Father, but when I get there, I will send the Helper—my Spirit—who will indwell you and enable you to do all these things I've commissioned you to do.

And that's what they did. They went back to Jerusalem. St. Luke tells us that for the next week-and-a-half, they didn't just sit on their hands waiting for the promised power to come, but spent their time in the temple praising and blessing God.

And then Luke tells us that when the day of Pentecost had come—the second of the Jewish harvest festivals when the city of

packed with Jews from all over the world—the disciples were all gathered in one place. Presumably when he says “all,” he's talking about the whole 120 of them. Tradition says they were gathered in the same “upper room” where Jesus had instituted his Supper. He says in Acts 2:

**And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.** (Acts 2:2-4)

This was what they had been waiting for. It's appropriate that the Spirit came as it did. Jesus had described the working of the Spirit as gentle breeze—and that's very true—but here on the day when the Spirit was given to the Church—on the very birthday of the Church—he came with the sound not of a little rustling breeze, but with the sound of a storm. And it's interesting that St. Luke is specific. It's not that the Spirit came as a wind, but specifically that he came with the sound of a mighty wind, which tells us something about the way he works.

And as something that looked like tongues of fire rested on their heads, that sound of the mighty wind broke into the sound of those 120 disciples suddenly speaking in other languages as the Spirit directed them. What happened? Luke doesn't give full details. All he says is that they started speaking in other languages. The Greek word used refers specifically to known languages. It was a reversal of what had happened at Babel, when God had confused and scattered the human race by confusing their languages. Now at Pentecost he brings them back together—not by their own doing, but by the power of his Spirit and through unity in Jesus Christ. For that reason it seems unlikely that they were all shouting at once. This wasn't a chaotic scene. Luke says that they spoke in these languages as the Spirit gave them utterance—as the Spirit directed.

Now remember that for the festival there were Jews in the city from all over the world. If the disciples were in the Upper Room, they weren't very far from the Temple. The men outside heard the

sound—presumably the sound that was like a mighty wind—and went to investigate, and when they got there, all these foreigners heard the gathered disciples speaking their own languages. Jews from Rome heard men speaking in Latin and Jews from Greece heard men speaking in Greek, and they said, “What's up with this? These guys are all locals from Galilee—they're yokels! I mean, maybe we could expect them to speak Greek and some of them a little Latin, but they're speaking in all sorts of languages! Our languages!”

Some of those who heard were convinced that those speaking in these other languages were drunk, but the speaking caught the attention of lots of them who listened and heard the disciples telling them of God's mighty works. As the crowd gathered the little group of 120 attracted thousands. We don't know how many thousands, just that the end result of what the Spirit did on that day was that three thousand came to faith in Christ.

The only place in Jerusalem big enough to handle that kind of crowd was the temple environs. St. Luke doesn't say how they got there from the Upper Room, which was nearby, but one tradition describes the crowd growing as foreigners were attracted, hearing their own languages spoken, and that groups started forming outside the house, men from each province gathering around the disciples speaking their language, listening to them talk about God's mighty works as they all made their way up to the temple. However it happened, the temple has to be where they ended up.

And when they got there St. Peter spoke up and began preaching to them. And this to me is the most remarkable thing that happened on Pentecost—the thing that shows more than anything else that the Spirit was at work and that shows us what the primary ministry of the Spirit is. Peter suddenly understood!

Remember how all along Jesus preached about the kingdom of God, and all that time the disciples kept *not* getting it. Even on the Mount of Olives, just before he ascended, the disciples were asking him, “Okay, Jesus, all this stuff you've done is really cool—especially the whole rising from the dead thing—but when are you going to do what you came here to do?”

When are you going to defeat the Romans? When are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel? When are you going to make the Jews great again?” Even at the very end, the disciples didn’t get it. And now suddenly, Peter stands up before the crowd—and *he gets it*. And he starts preaching to them the Good News—and the coolest part is that where before he was looking back at all those Old Testament prophecies that the Jews thought were about the restoration of an earthly kingdom, now suddenly he understands them. He starts preaching Christ and the kingdom of God from those same passages he’d never understood before.

At the same time the Spirit was at work in the people listening. St. Luke says they were “cut to the heart.” They ask Peter what they should do, and Peter said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Luke says that three thousand did just that and as the weeks and months went by more and more did the same—and they did so *as the Spirit did what he was sent to do*: to turn our hearts toward Christ and to open eyes and ears to the truth of the Gospel.

Of course, we can’t forget that the work of the Spirit goes beyond Pentecost. The purpose of the Spirit is to unite us to Christ. He’s the one who grafts us into Christ, the vine, so that we can have new life. And of course St. Paul reminds us of the results of that change. In Galatians he lists the works of the flesh: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like those. Those are the behaviours that describe our life before Christ, but as the Spirit indwells us our lives are changed, we receive life from Christ the vine and the Spirit causes us to bear his fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Those are the evidences of the indwelling Spirit. Doing amazing things and working miracles, casting out demons and prophesying, speaking in tongues or healing, are often signs the Spirit works to validate the message, but even Jesus warns us that those things can be counterfeited and often will be. We have

all sorts of guys on TV that are poster children for this—guys who claim to be faith healers, working miracles, and yet their personal lives are dominated by greed, and dishonesty, and lust and adultery. The real evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit is a *changed life*—a life that bears the fruit of the Spirit and as I talked about last Sunday: that is every growing in holiness—and that’s the greatest miracle of all! If the Spirit chooses to work miracles sometimes to add extra weight to the Gospel message, that’s great, but the consistent message throughout Scripture, and especially the New Testament is that we are called to witness the Gospel by *living* it, by bearing the *fruit* of the Spirit in our lives. Where there is love and joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control you know you’re dealing with a person full of the Spirit and because of that a person who is grafted into Jesus Christ. That’s what the world needs to see in us.

I want to close with an example from the Old Testament. Samson was a man who had been gifted by the Spirit. In his case it was supernatural strength. The Spirit doesn’t give us gifts today for no reason and he didn’t then—in fact, when he did in those days it had to be for some *really* important purpose. Samson was truly gifted in regard to his strength. He was also called to exhibit godliness as one of God’s elect, but even more so because of his Nazirite vow. He was to be especially dedicated to God and to his kingdom. And yet throughout his life, despite his calling to holiness, he consistently lived in an unholy and ungodly way. He lived in direct disobedience of not only his vows, but of the Law. Samson took the gift of strength that God had given him to use for his kingdom and instead used it to take advantage of people and to basically be an all around jerk. Had Samson followed God closely it boggles the mind to think what he could have done to witness the glory of God, but instead he abused God’s gift. In the end God used him for two things: first, to bring the house down with his strength and kill a whole bunch of Philistines, and second, to be a lesson to us: don’t be like Samson. Don’t squander and abuse the gifts God gives. I often wonder if some of the Philistines might somehow have had their eyes opened to God had Samson exhibited what the New Testament calls the fruit of the Spirit.

Each of us is gifted by the Spirit. Some of us having amazing gifts like Samson did and some of us have more mundane gifts, but the Spirit gives them to each of us for the purpose of building his kingdom and building up his body—no gift is more important than another. But those gifts are only used appropriately as we live in the Spirit and bear Christ-like fruit. The Corinthians were being kind of like Samson. Some of them had been given amazing gifts by the Spirit, but instead of using them to build up the Body, they were using them to build up themselves, to show others their supposed superiority, and in many ways just being jerks. And Paul wrote to them, showing them how they were abusing those gifts. One person’s gift doesn’t make them any more special than someone else. Just because your gift is a “wow” gift, doesn’t make it better than someone else’s gift that isn’t a “wow” gift. Far more important than the gifts is the fruit. And that’s where Paul goes on to talk about the supremacy of love—the foremost of the Spirit’s fruit. The fruit, not these other gifts, is the most conclusive manifesting of the indwelling Spirit. That fruit—that life lived with the indwelling Spirit—needs to be our primary focus because it’s only in combination with living that Spirit-filled life that our *other* gifts will build the kingdom of God and bless the Body.

Please pray with me: Heavenly Father, you not only sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to purchase our redemption from sin and death, but you sent your Spirit to turn our stony hearts into hearts of flesh, that we might understand and receive your Gospel. Today Father we ask again for your Spirit to do his work, that we might not merely believe your Gospel, but that we might also receive your power to live it, that we might bear the fruit of the Spirit and be living witnesses of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.