

Holy Spirit, Dwell With Me
Acts 2:38-39
June 4, 2017

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Today is Pentecost; the day the Church has set aside to remember and celebrate the Holy Spirit coming down on Christ’s disciples. Marvelous things happened on that day. Today’s epistle lesson records the result of the sermon Peter delivered on that first Pentecost. And the result was nothing short of a miracle.

The Bible tells us that about 3,000 people were brought into the church that day. So, it would be proper to say there were about 3,000 miracles that day. When anyone comes to faith it’s a miracle because only the Holy Spirit can bring faith to an unbelieving heart.

Does that sound important? It is important. It’s the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin and then brings us to faith. It’s the Holy Spirit who keeps us in the faith, who sustains and renews our faith. It’s the Holy Spirit who gives us the assurance of salvation and seals us to our salvation. It’s the Holy Spirit who gives gifts to the people of God’s Church so they might be equipped to carry out God’s mission of reaching out to the lost. And it’s the same Holy Spirit, who filled the first disciples, that fills you and me today. That is, he fills you and me if we allow him to do his work in and through us.

What we want to look at today is how the Holy Spirit can work in and through us. We need to look at how the Holy Spirit can be a blessing to us and then be a blessing through us. We know what great things the Holy Spirit did in the lives of those first disciples. And we know how the Spirit worked through them in such a way that their lives had a world-changing effect. Today we will see how the things the Holy Spirit did through those disciples he can and will do through us – if we let him.

To accomplish this, I want to share with you an old hymn written by Thomas T. Lynch. The four verses of this hymn constitute a prayer. A prayer to the Holy Spirit. This prayer asks the Spirit to come and dwell in us – to be a blessing to us so we might be a blessing to others. The first verse goes like this:

Gracious Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would gracious be;
And with words that help and heal
Would Thy life in mine reveal;
And with actions bold and meek
Would for Christ my Savior speak.

In this verse, the prayer is that the Holy Spirit would give us a measure of God’s grace. With this gift from the Spirit, we can be examples of God’s love in action. God’s people

are to be gracious not crass or rude. We are to treat other people with a measure of love and kindness the world does not possess.

It's easy for us to fall into the world's pattern of "it's all about me", "I'm looking out for number one", or "you can go first, right after me." That's what the world teaches. That's the rationale of the sinful human heart. But that's not what God wants for his people and from his people.

With the Holy Spirit present in us, just like he was present in the disciples on the first Pentecost, we can, as the songwriter hints at, look at other people through the loving eyes of Christ. We can be ready and willing to help and heal. Help when help is needed; not with thoughts of repayment, but because we work to love others as Jesus first loved us.

And we can also heal. We can work to heal the sorrow, the pain, and the guilt of another person's soul. How can we do that? The last line of the verse tells us – would for Christ, my Savior, speak. We can address the problems of another person's soul by telling them the good news that Christ died for their sins. By telling them that forgiveness is a gift from God which comes with the gift of faith which the Holy Spirit brings.

The second verse asks for the Holy Spirit's help in another area of the Christian life:

Truthful Spirit, dwell with me;
I myself would truthful be;
And with wisdom kind and clear
Let Thy life in mine appear;
And with actions brotherly
Speak my Lord's sincerity.

The Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as the Spirit of Truth. Of course, the truth the Spirit brings is the truth of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. In this verse we ask the Spirit of God to bring his truthfulness to us and make it a part of our lives. We should work to be as lovingly truthful with others as God is lovingly truthful with us.

Truth has become a rare gem in today's world. In some places, the truth is even illegal. In our society of relativism, truth has become whatever the individual wants it to be. Your truth and my truth may not be the same and that's okay because each of our truths is a private thing. Does that make your head hurt? Today, black and white truth has been replaced with shades of gray of personal opinion and personal preference.

A society without the guidance of the absolute truth of God is like a ship without a rudder. That society will drift aimlessly, first in one direction and then another, driven by this popular opinion and then that popular opinion. That society will bob around without direction until it crashes on the solid rock of the truth of God.

I have, of course, just described the popular society of present day America. This is our society. And the only salvation for our society is for the truth of God to be brought to it, the truth the Holy Spirit brings. And how is that going to happen? We Christians are God's chosen vehicles to bring the truth and good news of our God to the world. With the truth of the Spirit in us and flowing through us, we are given the wisdom and the boldness to stand and speak the real truth, just as Peter did on the first Pentecost.

The third verse asks the Holy Spirit to bolster our human weakness with his mighty strength:

Mighty Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would mighty be;
Mighty so as to prevail
Where unaided man must fail:
Ever by a mighty hope
Pressing on and bearing up.

The natural, sinful condition of man makes him the weakest, most vulnerable creature on earth. Left to their own devices people are helpless to withstand temptation or bear up under suffering and trials. They are completely without hope. Basically, without the uplifting Spirit of God, people are helpless and hopeless.

However, that's not the way things have to be. In this verse, the songwriter rightfully states that with the Holy Spirit living in us we possess a strength greater than anything the world can give. The indwelling Spirit gives us the power to withstand temptations that unbelievers cave in to. The strength, which the Spirit gives, isn't physical strength it's strength of character.

A Christian drawing his strength of character from the Holy Spirit can turn his back on temptations of lust, greed, power, and self-centeredness. This Christian, supported by the Spirit, actually sees temptations, trials, and sufferings as a thing of joy because he knows that God not only allows such things to strengthen him but that God also, through the Spirit, gives him the strength to triumph over them. The apostle Paul writes: *We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope* (Rom 5:3-4).

It's the confident hope, which the Spirit builds in us, that makes us a shining beacon in a world of chaos. When things are headed south in a handbasket, the Christian can stand tall and secure because he or she knows that their hope isn't tied to the things of this world. The story of two painters trying to depict perfect peace makes my point.

Two artists set out to make a picture representing perfect peace. The first painted a scene depicting a carefree lad sitting in a boat on a little placid lake without a ripple to disturb the surface. The other painted a raging waterfall with winds whipping the spray about. On a limb, overhanging the swirling water, a bird had built its nest, and sat peacefully brooding her eggs. Here she was safe from her predatory enemies, shielded

and protected by the roaring falls. Real peace is the ability to remain calm in the midst of trial.

This is the peace which results from the hope which the Holy Spirit brings to the heart of the believer. This is the peace and hope which, sooner or later, the unbeliever will ask about. And when that happens, we have the opportunity to present someone with the reason for the hope we possess. We can tell the good news of our Savior.

The last thing the songwriter asks of the Holy Spirit is the power to lead a life which is pleasing to God. The word phrase for this is a sanctified life. The indwelling Spirit gives us the ability to live every day in the example of our Lord.

Holy Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would holy be;
Separate from sin, I would
Choose and cherish all things good,
And whatever I can be,
Give to Him who gave me Thee!

Paul writes about Christians being living sacrifices to God. That involves living our lives in compliance with God's will – loving God with all that we are, loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, avoiding sin, sharing the Gospel. This is no easy assignment. In fact, without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we have no hope of even beginning to live a God-pleasing life.

We need to pray daily for the Spirit to give us the ability to turn from sin and toward the things of God. We need to constantly rely on the Spirit to help us see clearly the traps and snares that Satan, the world, and our own flesh put in our way. And we do this in order to offer back to God the best that we have; not to win special favor with God but as a thank-offering for him making us his own.

Now, if you don't remember anything else I've said today, listen carefully and please remember this. We sometimes look at the accounts of the first disciples and we marvel at the great things they accomplished. And, while it's good to have role models to look up to, there is something we must never forget. Those great deeds were not done by them but through them. The things the apostles did were, in truth, the works of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of God working through them, the apostles would have been just twelve ordinary men that history would have soon forgotten.

And what's that have to do with you and me? The same Holy Spirit of God that worked in and through those first disciples works in and through us. That is, if we let him. We can block the operation of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is important that we consciously remain open to the operation of God, through his Spirit, in our lives.

My friends, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that we might have eternal life. The Father gives us his Son to save our lives. The Son gives us the

Holy Spirit to support our lives. Without the Spirit in us we are less than what God wants us to be. It is my prayer that every day your prayer will be, "Holy Spirit, dwell with me."