

June 4, 2017

Church Planting/Pentecost

Come Holy Spirit

Acts 19:1-7

Opening words: It is hard to believe, but fifty days have passed since Easter. That means today is Pentecost. In the Old Testament, it was also called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:10) or the Feast of the Harvest (Exodus 23:16). Regardless of the name, it was comparable to our Thanksgiving Day, a time to celebrate the harvest. However, in our time, Pentecost is remembered as much more. It is remembered as the day the Holy Spirit was unleashed on the entire body of believers and the church was created. Listen to what I am about to say. The Holy Spirit was not created on Pentecost. He is part of our understanding of God himself. He is even mentioned in the creation story (Genesis 1:26). What makes Pentecost different is the Holy Spirit's availability. Prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was only available to political or religious leaders. Since Pentecost, all the believers have access to the divine helper.

Former President of Asbury Seminary, Maxie Dunnam has spent his life studying the miracles in the Bible. He says the greatest miracle in the Bible is the resurrection of Jesus; it is the heart of our faith. According to Dunnam, the second greatest miracle in the Bible is Pentecost. He says, it is truly miraculous that the Holy Spirit unites so many kinds of people. The traditional scripture reading on Pentecost is Acts 2:1-4. We read it annually. However, our reading for today is Acts 19:1-7. Let me call this message *Come Holy Spirit*. This is sermon number forty-five in my sermon series, *Church Planting*.

Acts 19:1-7 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied.⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

English evangelical Christian author, Os Guinness once said, "*The story of Christian reformation, revival and renaissance underscores that the darkest hour is often just before the dawn, so we should always be people of hope and prayer, not gloom and defeat. God the Holy Spirit can turn the situation around in five minutes.*" I believe that quote is true. If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves today in the nineteenth chapter of Acts. Paul is on his third missionary journey. In this morning's reading, he was in Ephesus. It is the home of

Apollos. You remember him; we were introduced to him last week. He was a Jew who had traveled to Ephesus from Alexandria. He spoke accurately about the Lord but had only received John's baptism. In other words, he had never been filled with the Holy Spirit. His understanding was based on moralism, not grace. He passed that understanding on to his church. Paul recognizes the incompleteness of that congregation and corrects the situation. He lays his hands on them and baptizes them in the name of Jesus. With that simple act, the Holy Spirit came upon them. Just like in the second chapter of Acts, they began to speak in tongues and prophesy (19:6). The final verse tells us, there were twelve men who received the Holy Spirit on that day.

It is a wonderful little story, but what does this story teach us about discipleship? The answer to that question is not pretty. The twelve men in the story are like so many in our time. Their Christianity was incomplete. They never received the Holy Spirit. Could it be our Christianity is incomplete because we have not received the Holy Spirit? Our understanding of God is based on moralism, not grace. I believe, the answer is YES! It explains our present situation.

The mainline Protestant Church is dying at an alarming rate and everyone has been blamed. Our region has been blamed. The population is dropping and we are still trying to maintain the same number of churches. However, we still have a surplus of spiritually confused and lost people. We have a surplus of unchurched people. The neighborhoods have been blamed. The neighborhoods changed and the faces in the neighborhood no longer match the faces in the church. Young parishioners have been blamed. Sunday morning is no longer sacred. It is a time for extra-curricular activities, football, baseball, soccer practice. Faithful long-term parishioners have been blamed. You just aren't welcoming enough and you are against any kind of change. I hate to say it, but even the clergy have been blamed. We just aren't showing enough leadership. No one has been spared, everyone has been blamed. Can I be honest with you? I have grown tired of everyone being blamed. It just isn't constructive.

Do you know why the church is struggling? The primary reason the church is dying in our time is spiritual in nature. We are rotting from the inside out. We are like the twelve men in the story. Our Christianity is incomplete. We haven't experienced the Holy Spirit, so our understanding of God is based on moral behavior, not grace. How many people here today still believe they must earn their salvation? We must experience the Holy Spirit first hand! We have no hope of survival until we experience the Holy Spirit for ourselves. Physical power has to do with what we can do to others. Spiritual power has more to do with what God will do with us. So, this is the question you must answer for yourself today:

Have you experienced the Holy Spirit?

It is a difficult question. To help you answer that question I am going to ask you two more questions. The way you answer these two questions will be very revealing. Both deal with your priorities. Are you motivated by earthly things, or are you motivated by

God? Be honest with yourself so you can answer the question, *Have you experienced the Holy Spirit?* If you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

One of the greatest preachers of the 20th century was a man by the name of Fred Craddock. On the day he died, I lost one of my heroes. He taught homiletics at the Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. I admired him because he can really tell a story and I like to tell stories. This is the perfect example:

He once told a story about his early days in the ministry. He volunteered to help with his church's Vacation Bible School. In those days, it lasted two weeks and he was assigned to the Middle School class. He was assigned that class because no one wanted to teach it. No one wanted to teach it because there was one horrible boy in that class none of the other teachers could stand. Fred admitted that he would pray that that boy would get sick so he wouldn't come to VBS. However, he came every day, because his mother forced him to come to get some relief. As the second week came to an end, Fred grew tired, especially of that horrible boy. Needing some relief, he gave his class an assignment. They were told to go into the woods behind the church building and come back with something that reminded them of God. Fred prayed a wild animal might get that horrible boy so he wouldn't come back at all. In time, the class returned. All the students had something. A girl brought back a rock because it reminded her of God, a firm foundation. Another girl brought back a flower because it was beautiful like God. A boy brought back a brown leaf because God oversees the seasons. Of course, that horrible boy brought back nothing. He just stood there with his little sister. Fred asked that horrible boy, "why didn't you bring something back that reminded you of God?" The horrible boy responded, "I did, my little sister. I prayed years ago for a baby sister and God heard my prayers. My sister reminds me of God and God's miracles." Fred said he stood there in silence because that horrible little boy was right! It is all about people. In the life of the church the only thing that really matters is people. We all know that. That is what makes the first question so uncomfortable.

Are you more passionate about people or property? The answer should be obvious. However, it is not obvious to everyone. What we say and what we do are often two different things. For example, I have never been in the middle of a large church debate about human need. I have never been part of a big church debate to borrow money to help the forgotten. I am still waiting for the first person to fundraise to fight world hunger or homelessness. However, we are passionate when it comes to our property. We are passionate about a clean kitchen. We are passionate when the sanctuary is too cold. We are passionate when the sound system is too soft. We are passionate when it comes to our programs. How much time and money do we spend on ourselves? How much time and money do we spend comforting the needy in this world? This is question number one, are *you* more passionate about people or property? If you have been touched by the Holy Spirit, then the only thing that really matters is people. Are you more passionate about people or property? If that you think, say, "**Amen!**"

Early this week, I was texting a regular worshipper. They have been coming here for years and I consider them one of us. The problem is, she and her husband have never joined. I was trying to correct that situation. She texted me this question, what do we have to do to join? She meant classes or something. I responded, "Nothing! All you need to know is Jesus and me." How do you feel about that response? Maybe you do feel like we need classes or something? I do not require classes because my goal is not to make good church members or great United Methodists. My goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the mission statement of the United Methodist Church. It really doesn't matter if you know how many annual conferences exist or how long a bishop serves. It really doesn't matter if you know about the history of Western Reserve Church. It only matters that you know Jesus. If you know Jesus then you are part of the invisible church. That leads us to question number two.

Are you more passionate about the invisible or the visible church? In other words, are you more interested in Jesus and his mission, or are you more interested in the survival of the organizational church? You can answer that question with these questions: Do you have an easier time quoting church rules, or Bible verses? Are you more comfortable talking about local church history, or what God has done for you today? Do you have an easier time listing past pastors, or disciples? Are you more upset about about the demise of the mainline Protestant Church, or the loss of a soul? Let me say this clearly. The Holy Spirit only cares about the invisible, or spiritual church. Have you stopped to consider the word Methodist isn't even found in the Bible? This is question number two: Are you more passionate about the invisible or the visible church? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" The mainline Protestant Church will continue to struggle until we all experience the Holy Spirit. We are not saved by the law, we are saved by grace.

One of the great dates in Methodist history is May 24, 1738. For it was on that date that John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, experienced the Holy Spirit first hand. It happened on Aldersgate Street in London. He was transformed from a loser into one of the great figures in church history. When he died in 1791, he had 79,000 followers in England and the United States. His moment lived beyond his life. In 1957, there were 40 million Methodists in the world. It all began in a little chapel on Aldersgate Street.

Dr. Leslie Weatherhead (1893-1976) recognized the significance of that spot and went to visit it. When he arrived, it was dark and damp. He read the simple bronze plaque on the wall. It read: *On this spot on May 24, 1738, John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed.* He read it several times, once out loud. He then retreated to the corner of the chapel and found a pew. In the silence, he thought and prayed about that moment in history. Suddenly, he heard the door open and watched a shadowy character walk in. It was an older gentleman (He was 60!). He walked straight toward the plaque. Thinking he was alone, he too read it out loud: "On this spot on, May 24, 1738, John Wesley's

heart was strangely warmed". Yet, instead of sitting in silence, the older gentleman spoke. He said, "Do it again, Lord. Do it again to me!" I would add, do it again to us!

Os Guinness (b. 1941) once said, *"The story of Christian reformation, revival and renaissance underscores that the darkest hour is often just before the dawn, so we should always be people of hope and prayer, not gloom and defeat. God the Holy Spirit can turn the situation around in five minutes."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**