

June 9, 2019

2019 Pentecost
Holy Spirit 101
Acts 2:1-4

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. Prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was only available to political or religious leaders. Since Pentecost, all the believers were transformed by the divine helper. This is the Good News for today: The Holy Spirit is alive and well in our world today.

President Emeritus of Asbury Seminary, Maxie Dunnam (born 1934) has spent his life studying the miracles in the Bible. He says the greatest miracle in the Bible is the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning. It is the very heart of our faith. According to Dunnam, the second greatest miracle in the Bible is Pentecost. He says it is truly miraculous that God was able to unite all those different kinds of people. Let me state the obvious. The United Methodist Church needs the Holy Spirit today, because our church is divided. The traditional scripture reading on Pentecost is our scripture reading for today, Acts 2:1-4. Let me call this message, *Holy Spirit 101*.

Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Billy Graham (1918-2018) was an American Baptist evangelist. He once said, "*It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love.*" I like that quote because I liked and respected Billy Graham. If that quote speaks to you, say, "**Amen!**"

The date was May 24, 1738. You may know the story. John Wesley (1703-1791) was born in Epworth, England. His father, Samuel, was an Anglican priest. His mother, Susannah, was a stay-at-home mother, who set the standard high for all parents. She taught John and his siblings how to survive in this world and be prepared for eternity. John Wesley had everything he needed to be successful, but he didn't have a clue. Until he was thirty-five years old, he only knew failure. He failed as a pastor and he failed as a missionary. Tired of defeat, John Wesley went on a great spiritual quest. That quest ended on May 24, 1738 on Aldersgate Street. There is no other way to say it, John Wesley was touched by the Holy Spirit. We call it his sanctification experience. He was

touched by God for a divine purpose. The only thing he ever wrote about that day was a simple phrase in his personal journal, *I felt my heart strangely warmed*. Those words are not impressive, but his life after that experience was. From that point on, he only knew success. He took the whole world on as his parish and changed history. When he died in 1791, he left behind 135,000 followers, plus another 541 itinerant preachers. Today, there are millions of people around the world who claim the title Methodist. If we could resurrect John Wesley, then he would tell you that the Holy Spirit changed everything! If you will admit the Holy Spirit changes everything, say, **"Amen!"** Let me state the obvious.

I was not in the ministry on May 24, 1738. However, I was in the ministry two hundred and fifty years later, on May 24, 1988. I remember that year, because it was the first year I was under a United Methodist appointment. I was serving in the old Morristown Charge in the old St. Clairsville District in the East Ohio Annual Conference, and I was appointed to the congregations in Morristown, Lloydsville and Bannock. As May approached, I was looking forward to the anniversary of the great Aldersgate experience. I was disappointed. Except for a few men riding on horses and dressed like circuit riders, there was no celebration. That year at Annual Conference, I expressed my disappointment to my District Superintendent. He was a spiritually mature man by the name of Abraham Brandyberry. He felt as I did. I asked him why the famous date was overlooked. He simply said, "Russ, there was no celebration, because no one in our time understands Wesley's sanctification, because no one in our time understands the Holy Spirit." There was no debate, because I knew he was right. Many are ignorant of the work and power of the Holy Spirit. Can I ask you a spiritual question?

Do you understand the Holy Spirit? It is a fair question, but it is a hard question to answer. Just think about it for a moment. Our understanding of the Holy Spirit is a little thin. We are much more comfortable with the other members of the trinity. We believe in a triune God: God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God the father is the creator. God created the entire world out of nothing. That is impressive. We seem to have a handle on God the Son. Jesus was the redeemer. Jesus died for the sins of the world. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. The Holy Spirit is different. God the Holy Spirit is much more elusive. It is hard to summarize everything the Holy Spirit does with a few words. So, let me ask you the question again. Do you understand the Holy Spirit?

On this Pentecost Sunday, I want to help you understand the Holy Spirit. Part of my job is to teach you theology. For this reason, don't think of this message as a sermon. Think of this message as an academic lecture. It is not an advanced level course; it is an entry level course. For this reason, I have called this message *Holy Spirit 101*. I have grouped my thoughts about the Holy Spirit around three questions. They are three questions you must be able to answer by the final exam. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

This is question number one: **Who is the Holy Spirit?** The answer is simple. You can answer it with one word: God. The Holy Spirit is God. In order to completely understand that answer, that the Holy Spirit is God, consider this with me. The Holy Spirit was not created or revealed at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has been present in this world from the very beginning. Genesis 1:26 says, *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"* The key word in that verse is the word *us*. The *us* in that verse is the trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is timeless because the Holy Spirit is God.

The deity of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen in scripture. If you do not believe me, then look at the life of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was a big part of Jesus's life. The Holy Spirit was in Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit was present when Jesus was conceived. The Holy Spirit was present when Jesus was born. The Holy Spirit was present when Jesus was baptized. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. You can't tell me the Holy Spirit didn't play a vital part in Jesus's earthly ministry. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit became available to everyone.

The same great characteristics of God the father can be applied to God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the mind of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of adoption, of truth, of liberty; the Spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, of godliness, of the fear of God. This only begins to show how unlimited He is. Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God! If you believe the Holy Spirit is God, say, **"Amen!"** Answer the question, "Who is the Holy Spirit?" The Holy Spirit is God!

This is question number two: **What does the Holy Spirit do?** You can answer that question with one word: change. The Holy Spirit brings godly change. It is as true today as it was on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit historically has made order out of disorder, clarity out of confusion. How many examples do you need?

Just look at the disciples. Prior to Pentecost, the twelve didn't have a clue. I do not know how that was possible. They followed Jesus around for three years, but they didn't have a clue. They were present for every miracle. They were there for every parable. They heard about the Kingdom of God from the Master himself. Peter, Andrew, James and John were even on the mountaintop when Moses and Elijah appeared, the great law giver and the greatest of the prophets. They heard their endorsement of Jesus, but they didn't have a clue. Then, the Holy Spirit came into their lives and everything changed. The pre-Pentecost Peter who denied Christ three times was touched by the Holy Spirit and preached to the crowd. According to the text, 3,000 were saved that day. It wasn't just Peter. The same thing is true of all the disciples. Each was changed or transformed by the Holy Spirit and went on to do great things for God. The disciples would tell you, the Holy Spirit changed everything! Historically, the

Holy Spirit has made order out of disorder and clarity out of confusion. For this reason, the United Methodist Church needs a good dose of the Holy Spirit. What does the Holy Spirit do? It changes everything. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Answer the question, "What does the Holy Spirit do?" This is the answer: The Holy Spirit brings godly change.

This is question number three: **Why is the Holy Spirit important to us?** You can answer that question with one word: revival. Sometime back, the Associated Press carried this dispatch: "Glasgow, Ky.-- Leslie Puckett, after struggling to start his car, lifted the hood and discovered that someone had stolen the motor." That is the story of so many churches today! They own everything needed to be a church, but they lack one thing, the Holy Spirit. In other words, they don't have a motor.

This is an incredible time to be in the ministry. I can honestly say it is not the same old thing. My job has changed completely in the last thirty-five years. Things are not getting easier. They are getting harder. The world has changed. We live in a post-Christian world. The church is no longer respected by society. How many local congregations are near the end? Every church seems to be looking for a quick fix, but there are no quick fixes. It isn't just true of local congregations. It is true of entire denominations. It is certainly true in the United Methodist Church.

This is the first Pentecost since the special General Conference. You know the topic, sexuality. It is a debate with no winners. Some want the denomination to change their long-standing tradition of not officiating at gay weddings or ordaining openly gay individuals. After spending millions of dollars, nothing changed. In the months to follow, our denomination is struggling. It would be struggling if the vote had gone the other way. The unity of our denomination is in question. There are no simple answers to this problem. A special committee appointed by the Council of Bishops will not solve it. A slick advertising campaign will not solve it. A powerful sermon on love will not solve it. The only thing that will solve our disunity is a good dose of the Holy Spirit. If you believe the United Methodist Church needs the Holy Spirit, say, "**Amen!**" Answer the question, "Why is the Holy Spirit important to us?" This is the answer: The Holy Spirit brings revival.

I want to end this message this morning not with a story, poem or quote. I end this message this morning with a challenge. I challenge you to go home and pray about the Holy Spirit. Pray that you not just understand the Holy Spirit with your mind, but that you experience the Holy Spirit with your heart. For once you do, everything will change. Never forget it, the Holy Spirit brings godly change. Do you remember the Billy Graham quote? The great evangelist once said, "*It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love.*"