

Surrender To The Spirit

Today is Mother's Day and it is fitting that we honor mothers; none of us would be here without our mother. Mothers, at their best, provide the compassionate nurturing that all children need to grow into healthy adulthood. A mother's compassionate nurturing models that aspect of God's love for his creation, just as a father's strong guidance models another aspect of God's love. A mother's nurture has a profound influence in pointing children to the loving arms of their heavenly Father. A mother's nurture can prepare a child to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, who will guide them into all truth.

This day – Pentecost Sunday - we celebrate that special gift of the Father, the Holy Spirit. The Christian celebration of Pentecost began with the earliest Christians, mostly Jewish-Christians, who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Pascha. This is described in Acts 2:1-21. Pascha was a celebration of the wheat harvest in Old Israel and later became associated with the giving of the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai. When those first Christians gathered on that day, the Holy Spirit – which Jesus had promised would come to his disciples - came upon them as a rushing wind. This took place 50 days after Easter, hence the name Pentecost. Immediately after this the Bible tells how Peter, the coward who denied Jesus three times, preached with boldness to the crowds in Jerusalem, and many repented of their sin and were saved.

That first day began a new era. The prophet Joel had predicted it: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29). The confusion of languages that the Tower of Babel represents is overcome by the Holy Spirit who unites people in the language of the Spirit. In the power of the Spirit the gospel can be preached to all nations and peoples.

Acts 2 makes clear: the work of the Spirit transformed a huddled group of timid disciples into a courageous, witnessing church. This was God's work, not their own, and they knew it. Sustained prayer, prayer in which they *surrendered* themselves to God, was key. They took to heart the Lord's words, "My house will be called a house of prayer" (Matthew 21:13).

For many church-goers prayer has become mostly a recitation of non-negotiable demands we place upon God. (And when God doesn't come through on our terms we figure that either God doesn't care or isn't there at all.) In this context we tend to view the Holy Spirit as something to help us with our own agendas: some kind of vague help from God to make us feel better when we didn't get that grade we wanted, or the job we wanted, or the date we wanted, or whatever it is we wanted.

In reality God's action through the Holy Spirit is embedded in prayer itself. The more I study the Bible and pray, the less I think of the Holy Spirit as God's free energizer for my self-help challenges. The Bible tells us that the Spirit is always at work among a *group* of believers, not solely individuals. The Holy Spirit gives energy to believers to fulfill *God's* agenda, not ours or mine. God's Spirit came at Pentecost to give the followers of Christ a needed push into their new mission, to spread the gospel of salvation to all people. It begins

with the Spirit's powerfully and directly to hearts of men and women. One of the first acts of the H.S. in the lives of believers is to reveal their hearts. The Holy Spirit reveals that God loved me not because I was lovable, but because it is His nature to do so. [The result is that the Holy Spirit prompts me to surrender my prejudices and love others the same way. Any number of people will cross my path, your path, whom we cannot respect, yet by the prompting and power of the H.S. we can exhibit love to them as Jesus has exhibited love to you and me. We won't be able love, though, without the Holy Spirit and one another.]

Great spiritual happenings aren't limited to the distant past. A decade ago the Holy Spirit set ablaze thousands in Pensacola, Florida. It began on Father's Day at Brownsville Assembly of God (I guess you'd expect an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at a Pentecostal church). Evangelist Steve Hill, there to preach a revival service, shared about a life-changing experience of literally being overcome by God's presence and overwhelmed by his love several months before at Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in London. When Hill asked how many would like to receive a refreshing of the Holy Spirit, more than 1,000 people responded. As he laid hands on people, the Spirit of God swept over the congregation in an unusually powerful way. The morning service lasted till 4 p.m. It didn't stop, but spread and continued for at least a year, with more than 20,000 people making public commitments to Jesus Christ at the Brownsville Assembly. Punk rockers and lawyers, strippers and bankers, truck drivers and crack addicts have all found new life in Christ at the church. Broken lives have been mended. Revival meetings were held every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evening to accommodate the crowds. Pastor John Kilpatrick says the church had prayed for revival for 2.5 years, but was shocked by the response.

Four years earlier Dr. David Yonggi Cho, pastor of the largest church in the world, located in South Korea, was praying for revival in America. He believes that the Lord led him to point his finger at Pensacola on a map of the United States. "I am going to send revival to the seaside city of Pensacola," Cho sensed the Lord saying, "and it will spread like a fire until all of America has been consumed by it." One group that has been wonderfully blessed is the United Methodists in the Pensacola area, most notably the congregation at the Pine Forest UM Church.

The Rev. Perry Dalton, senior pastor of Pine Forest UM Church, said that because of the revival at Brownsville Assembly, "I have more committed Christians now than I have ever had," he says. "The Brownsville situation really created a holiness in the lives of the people, a real desire for righteousness."

The Gospel tells how the disciples went back to Jerusalem after his ascension, just as Jesus had told them to do. They worshipped in the Temple, retold their stories about Jesus, and broke bread together in his honor. They praised the Father, commemorated the Son, but all without the Spirit in them. Jerusalem didn't notice them; the country didn't notice them. Does Bakersfield notice what we do? Are we living as though before Pentecost?

When the Spirit came upon those disciples they caught fire, they started to preach, to heal, to prophesy, to *change* the world. That is what happened after the Spirit began to change them. Can the Spirit stir us? The church began with those first Christians in an upper room agonizing. I hope our church doesn't end with us in the supper room organizing. The church began in revival; let's not end in mere ritual. The church started virile; let's not end sterile. Charter members of the church were men and women of heat and no degrees; today many

church leaders hold degrees, but have no heat!¹ We need the heat! John Wesley really began to be useful to our Lord after his heart "was strangely warmed." Has your heart and life caught fire with the Holy Spirit?

There is a phrase that the desert fathers used: "Shed your blood and I will give you the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit, is not a teddy bear, but a whirlwind. The whirlwind of God.² Make a sacrifice for the Lord and you will find His power. The Holy Spirit is not a comforting and gentle breeze, but a mighty strength for men and women to do the will of God.

[In 1968, at the Ecumenical Council of Churches Meeting at Uppsala, Metropolitan Ignatios of Latakia spoke these words: Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away, Christ stays in the past, the gospel is a dead letter, the church is simply an organization, authority, a matter of domination, mission, a matter of propaganda, the liturgy, no more than an evocation, Christian living becomes a slave morality.

But in the Holy Spirit: The cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth pangs of the kingdom; the risen Christ is there; the gospel is the power of life; the Church shows forth life of the Trinity; authority is a liberating service; mission is a Pentecost; the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation; human action is deified.]³

There's a broken, hurting, and misguided world all around us. God wants you and me to join him in healing that world, starting in Bakersfield. God wants us to redirect people to him. Where we surrender, the Spirit of God can take our *competing wills* and make them one in His great mission.

It begins with earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit to come in power. It all begins with prayer . . . pray for the Spirit.

¹from Leonard Ravenhill.

²Alan Jones, Dean of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, *The Door*, Nov./Dec. 1995, 8.

³Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *A New Pentecost?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 19-20.