

Sermon Text for May 15, 2016

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Psalm 104:24-35, Romans 8:14-17

“The Spirit of the Lord”

It is another one of those Sundays when we take a break from Genesis because we find ourselves in a time in the life of the church that we have to celebrate something. Pentecost is understood as the birthday of the Christian Church because of what happened at the beginning of this service. The disciples gathered together knowing that Jesus had promised that he would send them the comforter, and they find that they receive the Holy Spirit. We have to put ourselves in the position of the disciples and we have to ask the question, do we have the Spirit of the Lord? They received it and everyone knew it, you could hear it in the wind, you could see it in the flames. But what about us?

Something amazing happens when we receive the Spirit of the Lord. It is mentioned in both of our Scriptures, Psalm 104 speaks of how God imbues his Spirit upon all of creation and it is that which gives us all life. Paul, and I noticed that we are hardly doing anything with Paul these days. I promise you I am not avoiding him. I know some of you are thinking the less we can get of Paul the better. But not to worry, at the end of May we will be starting our 90 Day Challenge part 2 where we will be able to see the majority of Paul’s works, including Romans. We’ll have journals for you next week and hopefully we will also have something online to follow.

But Paul never shies away from speaking about the Spirit of the Lord. This is why this year I chose to go with Paul as opposed to the traditional Pentecost Scripture which we have seen a couple times already together on Pentecost over these past five years. What happens when we receive the Spirit of the Lord? I guess today we move away from what could be considered moralistic theology which is me basically telling you what it takes to be a good Christian, to something a little more esoteric, something that Paul would describe as the meat of the Gospel. We are going to answer the question “What is the Spirit of the Lord” and then we are going to see how important it is to have that Spirit in order to live as Christ would have us live. Let’s read out second Scripture.

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In seminary I'll never forget in one of my classes a student asked one of my professors why it was so difficult for him to explain the Holy Spirit to people. He could talk about God the Father and talk about God the Son, but the Holy Spirit was a bit of a grey area and something that he had a hard time explaining. The teacher looked at him directly and said we can only explain the Holy Spirit in as much as we have experienced the Holy Spirit. The implication was that he had not, what?...experienced the Holy Spirit.

Maybe each of us has an experience that we use to identify what we feel the Spirit is when we try to understand it. Let me give you an experience that I had in a secular setting that most closely defines the understanding we have as Christians as to what the Spirit is. I was a junior in college and spending the semester abroad studying in Rome and for our Spring break I took a train to Portugal go spend a week at my birthplace. When that week was over I got on the train to head back to my studies a little discouraged that this week was over.

I got to my seat which was a compartment of six seats and I was a little late so the other 5 passengers were already sitting down. The train was packed so outside of my seating area people were sitting in the hallways. I had a two day train trip through Portugal, Spain, France, and down to Italy so I did was I usually did when faced with a long trip, I got out my food to eat. I had a roll with cheese and some salami. I tried to offer some to the other people, but we quickly realized after trying 6 languages that we had to settle on English, it was the only language everyone spoke decently enough. There was one guy who was from Sweden who spoke English with a Texas drawl, it was amazing. But each one of them got out their food and we realized that if we put our food and drinks together then each of us could have a veritable feast.

That train compartment was transformed from people dreading a two day trip to a scene of collective sharing and exchanging of food and we told jokes that didn't work in English, and sang songs, the other compartments wanted to know what was going on so on that one train car we had everyone sharing food, drinks, stories and songs, those two days went by too quickly because we had created a fellowship, a community that not a single participant would ever forget. This incredibly feeling of community came about because everyone felt the need to share all things in common.

What does it say in Acts in regards to the early church community and how the Spirit of God moved in its midst? They had all things in common. This sense of community allows the

Holy Spirit to move and operate and to give life to each and single person involved, that in turn creates a new community, one with life, excitement, and spirit. These passages in Psalm 104 and Romans 8 all point to one common meaning and that is that God will re-create his people if we would just allow the Spirit of the Lord to move in our midst.

Let's look at what Paul tells us specifically in regards to the Holy Spirit in vs. 14. It is the Spirit of the Lord which makes us children of God. Keep in mind that we are not making our way through Romans so we don't know what Paul has said earlier in this chapter about the Spirit, but we have to know what he said in order to understand today's Scripture. It is all about the Spirit or the Lord. In verses 10 and 11 we read that the Spirit is life and then again Christ will give you life through his Spirit. What we heard in the Old Testament in Psalm 104 in vs. 30, when you send forth your Spirit they are created, is also true in the New. The word for Spirit, breath, air, wind is pneuma and we hear it mentioned over and over again in Scripture as that which gives life that is blessed and directed and guided by God. So when we ask the question do you have the Spirit we are really asking are you alive? Do you feel alive? That's a serious question for many of us.

If we are children of Christ then we don't have a spirit of slavery, where we are dead, but rather one of life. Let me clarify what the Spirit is by going through Scriptures that mention the Spirit. Then we will see what the Spirit is not as opposed to some common misconceptions that you may have heard. We talked about Genesis beginning with the Spirit of God moving over the unformed face of the earth before creation. God breathes life in to Adam. In Judges every single leader, judge is said to be filled with the Spirit of God. Interestingly on Samson it is said that the Spirit rests mightily upon Samson. Every king in the Old Testament receives the Spirit of God but Saul has this Spirit removed and an evil one takes its place. Job isn't always real happy with God's spirit, but still in Job 33:4 he is still able to say: The Spirit of God has made me, the breath of the Almighty has given me life. The psalms talk about the Spirit over and over again. We hear the psalmist ask God not to take away God's Spirit from us, another psalmist gives up their Spirit. Psalm 104 talks about the presence of the Spirit in all of creation: when you take away their breath, they die, when you send forth your spirit they are created. Isaiah 61 we hear the Spirit of the Lord is upon me and in Joel the Pentecostal Spirit that fills our sons and daughters. Finally in Zechariah we hear that it is not by strength or by power by my Spirit says the Lord. The Old Testament is a consistent witness to the Spirit giving

life and if you did not have God's Spirit you were dead. Remember the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel?

We find the same message in the New Testament. The Spirit in the form of a dove descends on Christ and we hear in Matthew that for us the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. When Jesus dies he gives up his spirit like the psalmist, but John also tells us that God is the Spirit so that Spirit remains and gives life in the resurrection. In Acts the day of Pentecost gives us the birth of a spirit-filled community. I Corinthians describes the Spirit and its life giving gifts. We read about the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians, and finally James tells us that the body without the Spirit is dead.

That is what the Spirit is: it gives life to the community of faith, to the body of Christ. The Spirit is not a litmus test with a list of things that you have to see in order to tell if some has or does not have the spirit. The gift of tongues is a gift that the Spirit gives, but is not given to everyone and is even considered by Paul a lesser gift. The Holy Spirit is not something that we own, but rather is God and controls us. We cannot seek to control it by saying that the Holy Spirit only works in certain ways.

So the question that we started from is what is the Spirit of the Lord and do we have it? We have come to understand that the Spirit really has and owns us, but do we recognize and enjoy the benefits of the Spirit? The presence of the Spirit of God in the church means the presence of life. This church is alive, the Spirit moves through our ministries, through our worship, through our youth programs, through our Sunday School, through our music ministry, through our Bible studies. We just need some of that fire for the young family gathering this afternoon. The Spirit is moving and giving life to us and all those who come into contact with us. Encourage the Spirit to move and work through us so that we are always seeking for new signs and forms of life. When God tells us that we are his children, then we should be asking him, show me how we can be even more alive. Amen.