

THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH (A Meditation for Pentecost Sunday)

Acts 2: 1-12 & 1Cor. 12: 3-13

Luke informs us:

When the day of Pentecost had come they were together in one place. Suddenly, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. What appears to be flames rested among them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages as the spirit gave them the ability.

Note that every one of them became filled with the spirit, which of course indicates the presence of God within them and their surroundings. In other words, the presence of God became so evident that everyone present not only saw but they also experienced it first hand.

I would like you to notice also that these believers came together with great expectations. Jesus on the verge of his departure from his earthly realm made them a solemn promise. **I will ask the father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. On that day, you will know that I am in my father and you in me and I in you.** This phenomenon then, was the fulfillment of that solemn promise. This promise was also made known to John the Baptist as he preached to the people, **I baptize you with water,** he said, **but one comes after me who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** (Luke 3:16) The flames seen by the believers in the upper room indicated that God was present among them and that that presence brought them light, power, truth and hope.

I would like you to visualize exactly what was taking place among the believers in the room that day. These people were having a real Holy Ghost experience. They were on fire for God. The spirit was moving among them. In the gathered community there is no room for chaos or divisive behaviour, because the spirit of God is neither divisive, disruptive, nor contentious. If then, there is divisiveness or contentions in the church, let us root it out and if the devil stands in the way, let us drive him out. Paul reminds us in Romans 14: 17, **for, the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by the believers.**

In teaching sometimes, it is amazing what one will do to demonstrate a point. A certain pastor decided to dramatize the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to his congregation, so he arranged with the janitor to release a pigeon from the gallery at the point in the sermon when he said that the Holy Spirit descended like a dove. The sermon proceeded very well, but at the point when he said the magic words, no bird appeared. He repeated the line several times but nothing happened. Then the janitor called down in a loud voice, **pastor, the cat done eat that spirit bird. Do you want me to throw down the cat?** Surely you do not believe that the cat ate the Holy Spirit. But there are cats around that certainly will devour you and the church if you let them. How about the cats

of, materialism, cynicism, secularism and doubt? A number of people have said to me, **I'm not interested in the church.** May be these people have a valid reason to be cynical or skeptical about the church in its present form. People want to belong to a church that is alive; a church that is moving; a church that has experienced and is experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit (Amen). A church that is alive with the presence and power of God is certainly a growing, loving, life-changing, caring, life-transforming and spirit-filled congregation.

Secondly: People want to belong to a witnessing church. **Now there were swelling in Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from every nation under the heaven. And at this sound, the multitude came together, and they were bewildered because each one heard them speaking in his own language.** Onlookers were astonished. In fact they even accused the believers of being drunk. So it took dear old Peter to clear the air. Peter explained that God had given those unlearned believers the ability to speak foreign languages so that everyone could hear the good news in his or her native tongue. I tell you, God certainly moves in mysterious ways. I have taken French courses including intensive French immersion and I can barely “parle”. Yet everyone present at Pentecost understood in their own language what was taking place. Isn't that fantastic? Whenever something exciting happens in your life you want to tell someone about it. You want to share your joy and your excitement. But don't be like the man who was having their first baby went and announced to his friend, **my wife had her baby last night. Guess what?** His friend asked, **a boy? No,** replied the man. **Guess again. Is it a girl?** Excitedly the man asked, **how did you know? Who told you?** Did not Jesus commission us to go into the world and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit? Those first Christians took witnessing seriously and because they were filled with the spirit many were added to the church. Our prayer today should be to ask God to help us to be a witnessing church.

The third thing I want to leave with you today is that we should be a church where fellowship is experienced. In verse 1 of the passage from Acts we read they were all together in one place. The believers had all things in common and with glad and generous hearts they praised God and had favour with all the people. In other words, they were a community who loved and cared about one another and to whom fellowship was very important.

Of course it was not a perfect church. The people had imperfections and weaknesses as we have imperfections and weaknesses. They had problems with dissents and disagreements as we have dissents and disagreements. Like us, they had those who did not want to give the financial support that was expected of them and even lied about it, for example, Anannias and his wife Sapphira; and you know how they came to their end. Their consciences killed them instantly. The believers probably did not always agree with their leaders, but the one characteristic they never, ever lost, was that they stayed together through thick and thin because the Holy Spirit was alive and well in their midst.

Eugene Smith in his book, **Mandate For Mission** described a church for which fellowship and friendship were of uttermost importance. Smith said that the treasurer of the church was arrested, indicted, tried and convicted of embezzlement for which he spent several years in prison. Throughout all his years in prison the congregation prayed for him, visited him and corresponded with him regularly and faithfully. Upon his release a delegation from the church met him at the prison gates, escorted him to the church,

where the congregation as a family welcomed him home with a fellowship meal and a party. For the first time in his life this man experienced and understood the real meaning of love and forgiveness. He discovered for the first time that the real church is not a sanctuary for those without sin but a haven and a hospital for the forgiven and redeemed sinners as well. Is your church like that? Is your church a spirit-filled church? Is your church on fire for God? Think about it and if you find it lacking then I challenge you to do something about it.

Amen