

The Case of the Missing Person

Message for Sunday, March 1, 2015
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21; Ephesians 5:14-18

Children's Message:

Jesus had told his followers that he would not always be with them. But he made this promise to them:

John 14:16-17, Today's English Version:

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit..."

After Jesus rose from the grave on Easter, he was with his followers for a few more weeks, which was wonderful. But finally the time came for him to return to heaven.

Remember the promise Jesus made to them, that they would receive the Spirit. Jesus called the Spirit "the Helper." The Holy Spirit would live in them and help them.

It would be like your parents leaving you while they're away for a weekend. *Pick up my suitcase to illustrate "going away."* They wouldn't leave you all alone; they'd arrange for a someone to be with you while they're gone until they return.

Well, Jesus will return some time. Until then, we have the Holy Spirit. Let's listen now to the Bible telling about the Holy Spirit coming. This happened on the day they called "Pentecost." That's a Hebrew word; it simply means "fiftieth" — it was a special celebration which came fifty days after the Passover, another special day.

We read about it Acts 2.

Message "The Case of the Missing Person"

1) The Case of the Missing Person

Over the past several decades, churches in Canada have been having a hard time. Thousands of members have left. The same thing has happened in some other countries. In fact, some people have speculated that even God has left!

Private Eye magazine in Great Britain published the following article:

God to leave Church of England

Following the precedent set by leading former Anglicans, God has indicated that he, too, is to leave the Church of England. Friends of God

believe the issue of women priests to have been behind the Almighty's sudden decision to convert to Rome. According to sources close to God, he's been unhappy for some time with the direction the Anglican Church has been taking, and has now finally had enough.

A Church of England spokesman said, "Losing God is a bit of blow, but it's just something we're going to have to live with."

What makes this story so funny is that we recognize there is some truth in it. It tickles where we are tender.

A. W. Tozer, a former Moderator of the Associated Gospel Church, said,

If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.

I entitled this message "The Case of the Missing Person."

Jesus warned about the danger of this happening:

John 15:5, Today's English Version:

"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me."

"You can do nothing without me." A church may be a beehive of activity, doing all kinds of things... but if Jesus is not at the heart of those activities, they amount to nothing. You may be one of the busy bees, doing all kinds of things... but if Jesus is not the focus of your life, it amounts to nothing.

We need Jesus Christ in our lives, in our church. Before Jesus left, he gave a promise that he would come back to us in new way:

John 14:16-18, Today's English Version:

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.

"When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you."

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. There is God the Father, who created everything. There is God

the Son, Jesus, who was both human and divine. There is God the Holy Spirit, who comes to live in us. Some people have taught that the Holy Spirit is merely a spiritual force; but the Bible is clear. The Holy Spirit is a person.

2) Baptized with the Holy Spirit

Jesus made a promise. He kept it. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were “baptized” with the Holy Spirit. Words fail to describe what happened. The best Luke could come up with was:

Acts 2:2-4, Today’s English Version:

Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

The change that happened in the disciples was powerful. Others could sense it. Miracles piled up on one another:

- A few hours earlier, they had huddled behind locked doors, in fear for their lives. Now they spilled out onto the street, proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ. Threats of imprisonment, torture and execution could not keep them quiet.
- On this particular day, they were speaking in tongues; i.e. in foreign languages they had never learned. People from all over the world who were in town for the Jewish festival of Pentecost were amazed to hear these Galilean peasants telling about Jesus in their own languages.
- Three thousand people joined the church that day. A few days later, five thousand more became followers of Jesus Christ. Not even Jesus had had this kind of response during his ministry.

The book in the Bible, “Acts of the Apostles,” which we are reading has sometimes been called “Acts of the Holy Spirit,” since the Holy Spirit clearly was the power behind all that the apostles did. The Holy Spirit is the person we need in our lives and in our church.

Let’s stop and remember who these disciples were. They started out as a bunch of misfits, but they ended up turning the world upside down. They once were petty, competitive and small-minded people. The Gospels record several times they argued about which one of them was the greatest, even the night of the Last Supper,

when Jesus was telling them about sacrifice and suffering.

Is it any wonder that Jesus told them to wait before doing anything?

Acts 1:4-5, Today’s English Version:

And when they came together, he gave them this order: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift I told you about, the gift my Father promised. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

I paraphrase that: “Don’t you *dare* try to start a church or do anything at all until you have received the Holy Spirit.”

3) Be filled with the Holy Spirit

Friends, the Holy Spirit is not an nice option in the Christian faith. The Holy Spirit is at the heart and the core of being a Christian.

You see, living the Christian life isn’t difficult. It’s impossible! Try doing the things which Jesus teaches — pray for those who persecute you; love your enemies; love God with all your heart, and so on — impossible! You can’t live the Christian life apart from the help of the Holy Spirit. If the disciples dared not move until they had been assured of his presence and power, how foolish we are to leave the house every morning without giving the Holy Spirit a thought! It’s why we experience so much defeat in our lives. We can’t live the Christian life in our own strength.

You may be thinking, “This sounds good! How can I have this, too?”

There is a lot of controversy and confusion over this. Some Christians and some churches say that everyone who is a Christian — that is, everyone who has committed his or her life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour — has the Holy Spirit. Some Christians and some churches say that there is a second step you must take after becoming a Christian, a step they call “being baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Both sides can point to Bible passages that support their conclusions — that’s what makes it so confusing.

I have my own opinion on this. But, as I’ve said before many times, my opinion isn’t worth two cents. So listen to what I’m going to say in the next few sentences... then forget it. You have to come to your own conclusion on this.

I have just one request: let this debate not become a source of division in the church. It's quite alright to have different ideas in the church, as long as our we keep our focus on Jesus Christ.

For myself, I believe that all Christians receive the Holy Spirit at the moment they become Christians. Some people have been Christians from the time they were very young; there never was a conversion experience. I would assume God gave them the Holy Spirit when it was the right time.

The main Scripture verse on which I base that conclusion is in Peter's sermon on that day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:38-39, Today's English Version:

Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit. For God's promise was made to you and your children, and to all who are far away—all whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

But there's more to it than that.

Paul writes to the people in the church in Ephesus that it's possible to be a Christian, yet not really enjoy the fullness of the Christian life. This passage starts by quoting what appears to be a saying at that time.

Ephesians 5:14-17, Today's English Version:

"Wake up, sleeper, and rise from death, and Christ will shine on you."

So be careful how you live. Don't live like ignorant people, but like wise people. Make good use of every opportunity you have, because these are evil days. Don't be fools, then, but try to find out what the Lord wants you to do.

Paul says it's possible to be a Christian, and yet be asleep; to be a Christian, and yet be unwise; to be a Christian, and yet waste your time; to be a Christian, and not know what God's will is. In other words, it's possible to just get by as a Christian; to say, "That's good enough."

Paul gives a remedy to this sort of living. It is a command which is the key to this passage. In fact, it is one of the keys to living as a Christian:

Ephesians 5:18, Today's English Version:

Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Every Christian has received the Holy Spirit. But not every Christian is *filled* with the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean, to be "filled" with the Spirit? Well, what does it mean to be filled with hate? It means that hatred influences you, directs you, dominates your thinking, your emotions, your behaviour. Being filled with the Spirit is similar. It means that you ask the Holy Spirit to lead and direct you, instead of money or pride or any other god we may worship.

You can start every day by praying like this:

God, I love you and I want my life to show that. Help me today to do the right things. Help me to love others. Help me to obey your commands. I'm asking for your help because I need your help. If I could do this on my own, I wouldn't need you. I pray that you will fill me with your Holy Spirit. I open myself right now to receive your fullness in my life. Amen.

When we're defeated in the Christian life, it isn't because we have too little of the Holy Spirit; it's because the Holy Spirit has too little of us.

We have a choice. We can get by with "good enough." Or we can have the wonderful, Spirit-filled life. Which one are you going to choose?

I invite you to pray that prayer with me...