

Modern Day Pentecost?

Message for Sunday, June 9, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Children's Message: from Acts 1:3-8

Tell the children we are going on a journey. We will need to take all the necessary supplies with us for this journey. Ask them what we will need. Some possible ideas: food, clothes, money, tent, Bible, family/friends, Jesus/God, etc.

We will also need a map. The map tells us what direction to go. Pull out a sheet of paper, which is our map. On it is a single large arrow, pointing ahead. Jesus calls us to go on the journey with him. He doesn't say what will happen to us, whether it will be easy or hard. But he does say that he will be with us, and he will never leave us to be by ourselves.

Message "Modern Day Pentecost?"

1) Modern day signs and wonders

A woman had a blockage of the arteries supplying blood to the heart. She urgently needed an operation to bypass those arteries, and was scheduled for surgery in two days. Her minister went to see her in hospital. While there, he prayed that God would heal her, and then anointed her with oil on the forehead.

The next day, during one last test in preparation for the operation. her doctor discovered that there was nothing wrong with her heart. She was perfectly healthy.

The minister in this case was a friend of mine, a United Church minister. He told me other stories of people being healed miraculously, casting out evil spirits, people being reconciled, and a general renewal in the church he was serving. He said it wasn't him doing this; it was the work of the Holy Spirit, God's presence in one's life.

When I'm on vacation or study leave, I like to visit other churches, not just United Churches. I like to learn from how others do things, and enjoy a different style of worship.

I have been in some churches which emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit. In some of them it's common for people to be speaking in tongues—uttering sounds which are said to be another

language. In some of them people are "slain in the Spirit"—they become unconscious and lie on the floor for a few minutes until they come out of it. In all of them, the normal practice is for people to come forward at the close of the worship to be anointed with oil and prayed for, for whatever concerns or problems they may be facing. These churches are meeting a need, and they are growing.

Who or what is behind this? How do I react? How do you react when you hear of something like this? Skeptical? Open-minded? Ridiculous nonsense?

Some of you may know that my background is in science. Before deciding to become a minister, I was preparing to be a doctor. I was majoring in chemistry. Scientists are taught to never accept something just because someone says so. Test it. Find out for yourself.

So when I began to hear stories of these modern-day miracles, I was on my guard: "They didn't do things like that in the church in Moose Jaw where I grew up." But then my scientific training reminded me: "You don't know it all, Bruce. Just because you've never witnessed something, doesn't mean it's impossible. Look into this more closely. Find out for yourself."

My reasoning was this:

- If it something good, something from God, then I should be part of it.
- If it something bad, a counterfeit for the real God, then I should be aware of that, too.

I would like to tell you this morning what I have found.

2) Background details

First, some definitions.

Pentecost: means "50th day" (similar to "pentagon," which means "five sides"). Pentecost is a traditional Jewish feast coming fifty days after Passover. This was the occasion when Jesus' disciples received the Holy Spirit, as described in Acts 2.

Pentecostal: A denomination in the Christian Church which emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. We have a Pentecostal church here in Stirling.

charismatic: Similar to Pentecostal, but within other denominations (e.g. charismatic Anglicans or Catholics). In Picton, the Baptist Church is more charismatic than many Pentecostal churches.

3) What does the Bible say?

Our best guide in life is the Bible. So let us turn there for help. In chapter 16 of John's gospel, Jesus promises the disciples that he will send the Holy Spirit to them.

John 16:7–13, New International Version:

⁷ "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

Verse 7: "It is for your good that I am going away."

Jesus was with the disciples for three years, as their beloved teacher. Every day they were learning and growing. Now it appears he will abandon them. Not at all! In fact, Jesus says they will be even better off living with the Holy Spirit, than they were with him.

Verse 8: "When [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement."

The Holy Spirit will point out the errors in your life. There's an old saying which demonstrates this ever so clearly:

The sin which is the most difficult to repent of is the one which I am about to commit.

Of course, nobody likes the type of person who always criticizes, always points out mistakes, who loves to show people how dumb they are. And if the only work of the Holy Spirit was to convict people

of sin, they wouldn't be much interested. But Jesus goes on.

Verse 13: "[The Holy Spirit] will guide you into all truth."

As well as alerting us to danger, the Spirit will also reveal to us God's truth. Perhaps the greatest example we have of this are the Scriptures themselves: written by human hands, coloured with the distinctive personalities of their authors, yet at the same time guided by the Holy Spirit to reveal to us God's truths.

All this (plus several other passages in gospels) is the promise which Jesus made. The promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The story of that incredible day we read about, in Acts 2. From there the story continues. The rest of the book of Acts is full of stories of people being healed, prison doors being opened—but most of all, people's lives being changed by an encounter with a real, live Jesus Christ, who dwells within them by this Holy Spirit.

4) Testing for truth

The same thing continues to happen today, say many people in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Is it for real? Or is it just—as some skeptics say—a combination of sensationalism and emotion? How do we tell whether something is really coming from God, or from somewhere else?

Here's where my science background comes in. Suppose you suspected someone was trying to poison your food with arsenic. I could take your plate of food and run a few tests on it. As a result of those tests, I could tell you whether you should be concerned.

In a similar sense, we have tests to determine whether or not something is truly from God.

1 Corinthians 12:3, New International Version:

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible talks about many ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives, but this is the first and foremost: to deepen and confirm our relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

If something else takes over that number one spot that belongs to Jesus, then clearly it is not the work of the Spirit. For example: if your love and loyalty

for your particular denomination or your pet doctrine is most important, then the Holy Spirit is not behind it.

5) The Fruit of the Spirit

This is another way to test whether something is genuinely of God.

Matthew 7:16-17, New International Version:
[Jesus said,] "By their fruit you will recognize them. ... Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."

Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version:
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Again, by this test, most of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement pass. There are some exceptions, of course, just as there are some unhealthy things in every denomination.

6) Test Results

I have never had the experience of speaking in tongues, of seeing someone healed supernaturally, or of any of the other special experiences these churches talk about. But that doesn't mean they're false. Maybe there is something more, something I'm missing. If so, I'm open to whatever God may want to give me. But at the same time, I'm not making that the focus of my life.

Where does this leave us? Well, what if we apply those tests to ourselves?

a) Is Jesus Lord in your life?

Is there anything or anyone else to which you are more devoted? If it came down to choosing between them, which would win?

Example: Loyalty to your church is considered a virtue. But some say they would rather die than change churches. But if Jesus is Lord in those other churches, then it really means you are worshipping the building or the denomination!

b) What fruit are you producing?

Does your life display love, joy, peace...? Are you like that consistently, or only when someone is watching?

I've already told you my answer to this inquiry. What's most important now is, what is your response? Are you open to all that God has for you?

Or are you like a moth? Moths can never make up their minds. They are irresistibly drawn towards a flame; yet at the same time they fear the heat so they pull away. Are you like that with God? You hunger for more meaning in your life, you want to really know God as an intimate part of your life, you want to grow spiritually. Yet you're also afraid of giving yourself completely over to God.

All I can say is this: you'll never know until you give God a chance. Why not just simply be open to all that God may have for you?

Are you open to God at all? Have you even made the first step of committing yourself to Jesus as Saviour and Lord? If not, then why not today?

Next Steps:

- Pray: Confess if you have put other things ahead of God, such as the church, the building, money, family, etc.
- Give God the number one place in your life.
- Surrender your life to God. Be open to whatever God may have for you.