

The Holy Spirit Uplifting Us

Acts 2:1-21

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost is the seventh Sunday after Easter and takes place 50 days after Passover. “Pentecost” means fifty. Today is also the Sunday that our church has designated for the uplifting of children in our church. How shall we uplift our children? I would like to share the story of Pentecost and the biblical message, and then uplift our children and all of us by sharing the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today’s biblical story in Acts 2 is told as a genuine miracle story. It is a definite and extraordinary act of God. Jesus our Lord instructed his disciples about the day of Pentecost. “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised,” Jesus had said. All the believers were gathered together in one place on Pentecost to witness what was to come.

Suddenly, there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where the disciples were sitting. This was probably not like the tornado we had last week. Sun called me from the YMCA where she heard a tornado warning siren. She had been directed inside for shelter in a hallway. She asked me if I was OK. I told her, “I’m fine since I’m in my Father’s house!”

The atmosphere of the striking and violent wind of Pentecost was not fearful like a tornado, but it was an astonishing and extraordinary phenomenon. They saw what looked like tongues of fire spreading out, and each person there was touched by a tongue. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

Have you been at the JFK International Airport in New York? It is quite interesting when you see and hear all the foreigners there at the International Airport. It is just like a market place where all kinds of races and nationalities gather from everywhere. When you hear the travelers speak their own languages at the airport, you can begin to wonder if you are truly in New York or a whole other place in a foreign country. New York is a well-known place in the world in which many foreigners converge from all around the world. Many languages are spoken there. The phenomenon of Pentecost was similar to this setting of speaking foreign languages among the people, except that this came about suddenly by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not something in our control, but something we can only receive.

There were Jews living in Jerusalem, religious men who had come from every country in the world. When they heard this noise, a large crowd gathered. They were all excited, because each one of them heard the believers talking in their own languages. In amazement and wonder they exclaimed, “These men who are talking like this – they are all Galileans! How is it, then, that all of us hear them speaking in our own native language?”

There were other kinds of people there who were outsiders from the believers. These outsiders made fun of the believers, saying, “These men are drunk!” Then, Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles, and in a loud voice began to speak to the crowd: “Fellow Jews, and all of you who live in Jerusalem, listen to me and let me tell you what this means. These men are not drunk, as you suppose; it is only nine o’clock in the morning.” It was too early for anyone to be drunk. The Jewish custom was not to eat until after this hour, which was the time of morning prayers. Wine was drunk by the Jews with flesh only, and, following the custom in Exodus 16:8, they ate bread in the morning and flesh in the evening, and so took no wine until late in the day.

There are three kinds of people among those who profess themselves as Christian in understanding of the Holy Spirit. First, there are people, like the eleven disciples and close followers of Jesus, who experience the Holy Spirit. Second, there are spectators who watch the event of the Holy Spirit and are amazed by the miracles. Lastly, there are people who are outsiders from the believers and make fun of the believers, saying, “These men are drunk!”

Pentecost is known as the birthday of the church. On Pentecost, the eleven disciples and other believers gathered and experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If you have never experienced speaking in tongues, don’t feel left out from the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This phenomenon of speaking in tongues was a preliminary stage of the event of the Holy Spirit. There are many gifts of the Holy Spirit that uplifts our life. I would like to share these gifts of the Holy Spirit that Peter spoke about.

My son-in-law, Mark, is six feet four inches tall. Last year my daughter, Alice, sent me some pictures of her family and said, “We went to an apple farm with Benjamin and enjoyed our visit.” Imagine a six feet four inch tall man put his two-year-old son on his shoulder. At that height, on his dad’s shoulder, Benjamin could reach any apple and pick them with his hands. Benjamin enjoyed picking apples!

A distinguished professor taught at the University of Chicago. Quite often, his preschool granddaughter would come to visit him at his office. She loved to reach up and hold his hand and walk around the campus with her grandfather. One day, the man was carrying his granddaughter around on his shoulders. They met a friend who had seen the little girl just the week before. The friend looked up at the little girl riding on her grandfather’s shoulders and, with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes, said to her, “My goodness! Look at you! Look how much you’ve grown since I saw you last week!”

The little girl replied, “Not all of this is me.” Of course, what she meant was, “I’m not really this tall. I’m not really this big. I’m riding on somebody else’s shoulders.” I like that story because that sentiment so powerfully represents how I feel every single day.

Last year on Grandparents’ Sunday I shared a song, “You Raise Me Up” recorded by Josh Groban. Through that song we can imagine God, who raises us up. Groban sang, “You raise me up, so I can stand on the mountains. You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas. I am strong, when I am on your shoulders. You raise me up; to more than I can be.”

This song reminds me of the picture of today's scripture reading, Acts 2:1-4. It was the work of God. We were merely the instrument of God's Holy Spirit. I was riding on the shoulders of God's Holy Spirit!

More importantly, Peter preaches to us his message, quoting the prophet Joel, saying that the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon you, and then you will receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit to communicate with his people. God wants to communicate with the people of God. In doing so, God uses three media. Look at verse 17.

First, God uses our mind, as a medium of delivering God's will. "Your sons and daughters will prophesy."

Most people think that prophesy is the ability to tell the things that will be happen in the near future, like a prediction. The revelations of God have been revealed and completed in His Son Jesus our Lord. To deliver God's message to the people, a person's intuition is needed. However, to interpret God's word is the gift of prophesy. Paul advocates the gift of prophesy. To interpret God's word is not according to the knowledge of this world, but depends on one's faith. Paul said, "Do not think of yourselves more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and each one of you, judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you."

To preach God's word is the work of the Holy Spirit. God uses a person's spiritual intuition this way. What Paul exhorts in Thessalonians 5:19-20 is spiritual intuition. Paul exhorts, "Do not restrain the Holy Spirit; do not despise inspired messages." In Roman 12:2, he also emphasizes how to use intuition: "Do not conform outwardly to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good, and is pleasing to him, and is perfect."

To prophesy is totally the work of Spirit and faith. "If our gift is to speak God's message, we must do it according to the faith that we have." (Roman 12; 6) "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Second, God uses young people's imagination as a medium of delivering God's message. "Your young men will see visions."

A long time ago, I had an opportunity to travel to Disney World in Florida with my family. It was a tremendous amusement park there. I remember an impressive tour in Disney World, but I don't quite remember where it was. It was a place where they were showcasing the science of energy. A guide guided us through a panoramic scene which introduced us to the beginning of energy, from solar energy, to atomic energy, and so forth. After the show, the guide asked us, "What do you think is the 21st century's most powerful energy?" Nobody quite answered. Then the guide said, "It is imagination!"

Advances in technology today have made it possible to create almost anything humans can imagine, it seems. We need more imagination that will power this world.

Vision is imagination. God would like to give us His imagination through the Holy Spirit. May the young men and women in this church receive the imagination by the power of the Holy Spirit. God uses young people's imaginations as a medium of delivering God's message. The scripture says, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint." (Proverbs 29:18) Revelation means vision, in other words. Paul's vision on the road to Damascus and his vision of a man in Macedonia both initiated crucial events in the missionary activity of the church.

Thirdly, God uses old people's souls as a medium of delivering God's will. "Your old men will dream dreams."

Everybody dreams dream, but most dreams are scattered before their meaning is discovered. Handbooks on dream symbolism were popular and part of the almost universally accepted belief that all dreams were significant in some way. In a secular way, there are many theories of dreams. Sigmund Freud was a famous psychiatrist. He interpreted human's dreams as a subconscious expression. He saw in the human subconscious, the id, instinctive impulse. Carl Jung, another famous psychiatrist, had a different interpretation of dreams, as he searched for meaning in personal life. But we believe that there are dreams that God uses, which need interpretation through the Holy Spirit.

In biblical times, dreams were understood as one of the communication links between God and human beings. This belief in the revelatory significance of dreams and visions is also found in the Old Testament. But, the emphasis in the Old Testament is always on the revealed word of God, not the mode of that revelation. For this reason, God also gives the interpretation of dreams an importance as crucial as the dream itself. The Old Testament is also concerned with distinguishing true dreams and visions, which are genuine revelation of God, from those which are false.

God uses our soul, even if we were in a state of comma. A human soul is different from our mind or imagination. God uses the human soul in the state of sleep, totally out of mind and consciousness. God called Jacob in a dream and gave him the message that God will keep His promise to him. May God's continuing message be revealed unto you, our old men and women who have had many experiences of God. This is the way of uplifting you by the Holy Spirit.

May you receive God's dream and these dreams come true!