

Pentecost Sunday: Three signs of the Spirit's Coming.

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-13

Sermon Text: Acts 2: 2-4

Introduction

How do you know if you are Spirit-filled? What proof do you have that the Spirit of God has made his dwelling place in your heart?

The Spirit is not someone physical, someone you can point at and say, "There he is. Do you see him? That's the Spirit within me!" The Spirit is spirit, not flesh and blood. None of us can see him. None of us can weigh or measure him.

Today's Scripture reading describes the pouring out of the Spirit. It reminds us that nearly 2000 years ago God the Holy Spirit made his temple on earth. But the Spirit is spirit, not flesh and blood. No one back then could see the Spirit either. So how can the book of Acts tell us that the Spirit came down, poured out into the believers? How do we know that the early church was Spirit-filled?

No one can see a spirit. No one can see the Holy Spirit. **But we can know his presence. We can know his presence by signs.** We know about his presence in the early church by wind and fire and speech and we know about his presence today in our lives by wind and fire and speech.

These signs seemed like natural phenomena. After all, what can be more natural than wind and fire and speech? Yet, when they are signs of the presence of the Spirit of Christ, they are supernatural both in origin and character. They are signs from God and of God. The noise was not wind, but sounded like it; the sight was not fire, but resembled it; and the speech was in languages which were ordinary, but in some ways divinely different.

What does this mean? - the crowd that assembled asked the disciples. We already know! It means Christ's Spirit is present in our hearts and lives. It means Christ's Spirit has made his home within the church. It means that believers are the temple, the dwelling place, of God and his Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Wind

The first sign of the Spirit's presence is the wind. Listen to Acts 2:2: *Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.*

What do you think of when you think of the blowing of the wind? Do not think of a soft summer breeze! Think of a powerful wind like the South Easter in Cape Town and the winds of the Cape of Storms (later known as the Cape of Good Hope!) which drives the sea before it. Waves reach up to 30 meters high. Huge breakers sweep up on beaches and the waves become dangerous to fishermen or anyone in a smallish boat! Think of the howling of such powerful wind storms driven by the extreme climate of Antarctica! Roofs are easily plucked off of structures, particularly "informal" ones.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is not like a gentle breeze. It is much more like a blizzard. The Holy Spirit's presence is not meek and mild. His work is powerful, effective, life changing and radical!

In the Old Testament the word translated here as "wind" has special significance. In some places it is translated as "wind," other times as "breath," and still other times as "spirit." Yet, the same Hebrew word is used each and every time.

Lets look at the use of this word in the Creation story. Do you remember what God did?

(Genesis 2:7) *The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

Do you see what happened? The great breath of God, the mighty wind of God, the powerful Spirit of God brought life.

How do you know if you are Spirit-filled? What proof do you have that the Spirit of God has made his dwelling place in your heart? How do we know that the early church was Spirit-filled? **All we need do is look for new**

life - Christ's life - within us. On that first Pentecost about 3,000 new Christians were added to the 120 faithful believers who prayed for 10 days that the Holy Spirit would be poured out onto the church!

Look at your life. Are you still dead in your transgressions and sins or are you alive for God in Jesus Christ through powerful work of the Holy Spirit in you? Those who are a new creation, those who are born-again, have the Breath of God, the Wind of God, the Spirit of God, within them. They serve God valiantly, inspired by the Holy Spirit within them! In the most radical way possible, the powerful Breath of God, the Spirit of Christ, brought life - even life eternal, into their lives!

The Fire

The second sign of the Spirit's presence is the fire. Listen to how it is described in Acts 2:3. *"They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."*

What do you think of when you hear of fire? Do you think of a camp-fire by which you roast marshmallows, warm your feet and sing camp songs? Hopefully you will then also think of the song we love to sing when we go camping - Shine Jesus shine! - which says:

Shine Jesus shine,

Fill this land with the Father's glory;

Blaze Spirit blaze, set our hearts on fire!

Forget about a soft glowing candle or romantic camp fire! Instead, go to Iscor. Stand before any of the huge furnaces. The fire burns at more than 1000 degrees Celsius. Rock full of iron turns into a hot, boiling, gushing liquid. Pure iron runs through a spout as smoothly as water, because of the fire by which it is purified! The presence of the Holy Spirit is not a soft, glowing candle. It is bright, blistering, purifying flame.

Remember Isaiah. In a vision Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, flying back and forth, and calling to one another:

(Isaiah 6:3) *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory ...*

Remember Isaiah's response to this awesome scene!

(Isaiah 6:5) *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

Then one of the seraphs flew to Isaiah **with a live coal in his hand**, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched Isaiah's lips and burned away all of his lip's impurities.

The brightly burning fire of God, the consuming fire of God, the blaze of the Spirit of God purified Isaiah. In the same way the cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit purges our lips, our hearts and our motives and turn us into fiery, passionate witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Remember what happened to the disciples at Pentecost. The same fire that purified Isaiah falls on ordinary people and they are not consumed, but they are purified by that sanctifying flame.

This purifying flame of the Spirit makes an observable, evident difference in the lives of God's children. Without this flame we pursue the acts of our sinful nature: sexual immorality, impurity, and immorality; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like (Gal 5:19-21). With this flame blazing in our hearts we pursue the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). With this flame, in other words we become more and more Christ-like every day!

We all either face the flames of the Spirit or the eternal flames of damnation. We either submit to the purifying flames of the Spirit or the punishing flames of hell. It is the one or the other.

How do you know if you are Spirit-filled? What proof do you have that the Spirit of God has made his dwelling place in your heart? Look for a life that is in the process of being purified, changing people according to the image of Christ. This is the difference the purifying, blazing Spirit makes in the lives of God's children: we run from sin rather than after sin, though too often we don't run hard enough and it does catch up with us.

John Wesley said: "Give me only a hundred men who fear nothing, but sin, and desire nothing, but God, and you will see the Kingdom of heaven coming on earth!!" This is the passion that the blazing Spirit gives - a passion that fears nothing but sin and a passion that desires nothing, but God!

The Speech

The third sign of the Spirit's presence is one of speech. Listen to Acts 2:4: "*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*"

What were they talking about? Peter's sermon later on in this chapter shows us clearly that they were talking about Jesus - crucified, resurrected and glorified. They were talking about Christ to everyone in their own language.

How do you know if you are Spirit-filled? What proof do you have that the Holy Spirit lives in your heart? How do we know that the early church was Spirit-filled?

Whenever someone cannot stop talking about Jesus, whenever someone stands before God and his people and before the whole world and proclaims that Jesus is his/her Saviour from sin and the Lord of his/her life, we see the presence of the Spirit. Whenever the church speaks faithfully of Christ, whenever God's people cannot keep quiet about the wonderful works of God in Christ Jesus, whenever and wherever a thousand tongues sing God's praises in Christ, we see the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Anyone who is filled with the Spirit cannot stop talking about Jesus.

Anyone who is filled with the Spirit is also walking the talk!

Conclusion:

No one can see a spirit. No one can see the Holy Spirit.

But we know his presence. We know his presence by signs. We know about his presence in the early church by signs as of wind and fire and of what the disciples said and how powerfully they said it.

We know the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives by wind and fire and speech. We know his breath by the presence of the powerful life of our resurrected, ascended Christ in our lives. We know the presence of the blazing Holy Spirit by his purifying, sanctifying work, reforming us and the church according to the will and example of Christ!

We hear a sound like a violent wind when 10,000 times 10, 000 believers, with all of creation, and all the host of heaven, kneel before the Lamb to worship him and to boldly proclaim: Worthy is the Lamb! and passionately say: Jesus, we love you!

This is the Word of God.

Amen.