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The National Presbyterian Church

“God Within Us: Newly Related”

Romans 8:11-17; Corinthians 12:7, 27-13:3; Galatians 5:22-26

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Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost had come, Jesus' followers were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came *a sound like the rush of a violent wind*, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided *tongues, as of fire, appeared them*, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

In sermons through May and June We're looking at the remarkable letter of the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome – and we're focusing on the 8th chapter, a chapter that speaks about the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of God, or of Christ, of Jesus or Holy Ghost – all the same).

So last week – which happened to be Pentecost, the day we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the 1st Christians 2000 years ago we thought together about the amazing truth that God doesn't just want to forgive us, or take us to heaven when we die. But God wants us to *live within us* – *live inside us*

And to do so by his Spirit, the ongoing presence of Jesus living within us, empowering us by his ongoing resurrection life

Just as:

- sap flows within a tree and creates growth and fruit
- as water flows within a turbine and creates electricity
- and just as electricity flows within a wire and gives power to a light
- and just as blood flows within our bodies and brings life and nourishment to every square inch of our being.

So God wants his presence and power – His Spirit to enter and live within *us*!! *As a gift. A gift* God gives to every single person who turns to His Son, Jesus Christ, in humility and faith.

And this should amaze us, take us aback that God should want to come and live --not only *with* us, but *in us*.

- We may never be rich, *but God wants to come and live in us!*
- We may never be famous, *but God wants to come and live in us!*
- We may never be beautiful or handsome, *but God wants to come and live in us!*
- We may never be perfect in fact far from it:
 - All of us have done what we ought not to have done
 - And left undone the things we ought to have done*but God still wants to come and live in us!*

The God who made the universe is passionate, not just about living on the outside of our lives (in the universe in general) but on the inside -- in your life and mine.

Which, of course, begs the question that I'd like us to think about today: "How do we know if God is here? At work within? What's the evidence? God around us and within us?"

And this is a question that is especially pressing. Because the story of the first Pentecost (shared in Acts 2), seems to indicate that when the Spirit is present *the signs are going to be wild and unmistakable.* So on the first Pentecost:

- was Rush of a mighty wind
- were Tongues of fire dancing around
- were Other languages being spoken, never learned

And you might well say *I've never had that happen to me, [and I'm not sure I want to!!]*

And if you were to say that to me I'd say – "No need for fear or panic!"

That while I have no doubt whatsoever -- that some people have indeed had all those experiences (and perhaps some here). The fact is, that within the Scriptures we're given *not just* one set of criteria as evidence of the Spirit's presence *but* a number of criteria most of which are fairly ordinary and that you *might have missed or never thought of* as being signs of God's Presence or signs of God's Spirit

- I. **So, for example,** When Jesus speaks of the Spirit in John 16:8 he says this: that *When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.*

The Holy Spirit is going to make us feel guilty! Which really doesn't seem to be very nice and certainly doesn't seem to be very spiritual:

- A feeling of Guilt! And Accountability! Judgment!
- A strong conviction that we're not the people we're supposed to be!

In fact it sounds miserable!

But, says Jesus, this is often how the Spirit works. Breaking our Pride and bringing us to our knees in prayer:

- *So that we beg God to help us and forgive us*
- and change us, and guide us,
- and provide us w/ wisdom and power
- to grow and leave our sins behind

And when we pray this kind of prayer that comes from a deep conviction and humility stirred up by the Holy Spirit Jesus assures us that God hears!! *Not the prayer of the self-righteous, but of the broken-hearted.* Want God to hear your prayers? Then pray for the Holy Spirit to bring you to your knees!

Not very exciting of course. And certainly not an end in itself to bring us to our knees. But certainly a prelude to what God really wants to do for us which is to change us and to give to us the character of his Son -- the character of Christ

- II. **And when Paul writes to the Christian in Galatia** -- in what is now Turkey -- **he speaks of this "character changing work" of the Spirit** in terms of fruit that can grow in our lives because God's life/power is on the inside of our lives: *The fruit of the Spirit* (he says in Galatians 5), The visible evidence of the Spirit is not tongues of fire or the sound of a great

storm, but – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Some of you *may have read the book or seen the movie by Laura Hillenbrand called Unbroken about the late Olympic athlete, Louis ('Louie') Zamperini*

In WWII in the Pacific Louie survived 47 days *on a raft at sea* after his B-24 plane crashed, and then, after that, he survived over 2 years as a POW: constantly being tormented and abused by his guards, and especially by one guard, whom he nicknamed, the Bird.

Following the war like many who had been through the fire Louie found it hard to not to forget the hell he'd experienced, he couldn't escape filling up with anger at his treatment – especially by the Bird. And he couldn't escape the nightmares about Bird, that came pretty much every night and, more than that, he couldn't escape the addictive power of alcohol to dull the pain that was taking over his life.

But 4 years after the war, in 1949, Billy Graham came to Los Angeles where Louie lived, and his wife, Cynthia, dragged him, against his will, to the meetings where finally after a couple of evenings of resenting-even-being-there! as Billy Graham spoke, Louie finally remembered a promise he'd made on the raft in the Pacific That if he survived, then he'd serve God the rest of his life. And with that memory, and promise the lights went on!! A deep sense of conviction and need came and Louie gave his life back to God.

And then something even more remarkable happened. The HELL that had controlled his life began to lose its grip. The nightmares stopped. The need for alcohol began to disappear. And within a year, especially after he returned to visit Japan, his anger was replaced with a sense of love and forgiveness for his abusers many of whom he met face-to-face on the trip.

A New Character! New fruit:

- *love, joy, and peace,*
- *patience, kindness, and goodness,*
- *faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*

And it never left him evidence of the Spirit

Who brings to us not only a (1) a Growing Change of Character – *sometimes fast, sometimes slow* (2) and a Deep Conviction BUT *in the third place*, says Paul brings to us/reveals to us

III. Gifts and Talents to use in God's service and especially to build up the church

A number of passages speak about these gifts/talents of the Spirit given to us by God but perhaps the most famous is in Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians 12

⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Some of these gifts seem supernatural/miraculous and some ‘down to earth’/ordinary. BUT all of them involve a sense of giftedness and usefulness in God’s service.

Sometimes the gift or talent is brand new. We never knew we had it. It comes out of the blue. BUT sometimes the most powerful experience of God’s gift-giving Spirit comes with a gift or talent that we *already have* but up until a certain moment, we’d never used it fully/or thought to use it FOR GOD. And it can be *the prodding of God -- to use it for God* that can be powerful evidence of the Spirit at work.

One of the most stunning times I’ve seen this happen was when a church member, who was an engineer and a major contractor in the city, offered his services to represent the church during construction of a new fellowship hall to be added to a building on the National Historic Register

The initial bids were far too high for the congregation to afford. But what my friend did was to work with the architect to modify the plans. And when we sent out the new plans, and rebid the project – something stunning happened. *With no loss in functionality or key components at all* those simple changes in design brought the new bids down by about *a million dollars, 25%*, which made the project feasible and successful!

And then it happened again – during construction his gifts at work for God: My friend walked onto the site one morning and noticed something that hardly anyone would have noticed: in fact nobody else did! That the metal studs delivered to build the frame were the wrong thickness – too thin – an error, a change in thickness, that would have led to structural damage/buckling within a few years .

Years of training and experience brought into God’s service. The very gift needed at the perfect time. Even though the gift itself had been there for years and was in some sense ordinary but now used for God. Can be used in the church. Can be used in the secular World. But now quite different: used FOR GOD!

And this is an experience of the Spirit that God wants us to have.

1. The Spirit Gives us **Gifts** and challenges us to use them for God
Do you know this?
2. The Spirit Convicts our **Consciences** until we seek God’s help
Do you know this?
3. The Spirit changes our **Character** and makes us Fruitful for God
Do you know this?

These are all signs of God’s Spirit and then finally today – one more experience or sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence and work.

IV. **A strong assurance** about our **New Relationship with God**

A relationship in which Jesus is clearly the Boss -- not only our Savior, *but our Lord*. But a relationship in which there is no shadow of a doubt that we belong to God’s family – so that we KNOW that God is our true Father!! And Jesus our true brother.

In our passage in Romans 8, Paul calls the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Adoption” –
¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption (into the family of God). When we cry,

“Abba! Father!” ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ

Some of you may remember this story I’ve told before, **of Tracy Hill and her husband Scott, who adopted two girls, two sisters, when they were older:**

Tracy and Scott were passionate that these two sisters would become a part of the family, and that the sisters would call them ‘mom’ and ‘dad.’ To begin with, however, this was not happening, which made life feel awkward. They certainly did not want to force the issue, just to hear the words said, but not felt. If the words were to be used at all, “Mom”, “Dad” they wanted them to be “real.”

And this is how they describe how it happened.

After about four months [out of the blue] our oldest daughter asked me if she and her sister could call us mom and dad. I was so excited. Holding back, I told her that we would love-them-to call us “mom and dad,” *but* they could call as anything they were comfortable with. To which she replied “*Thanks Tracy!*” Approximately a month after that incident, as I was kissing the girls good night, they looked at each other and said together “1, 2, 3, ‘*Goodnight mommy.*’” Next morning I waited to hear the word ‘MOM’ again, but my bubble was burst after they said the usual, “*Thanks for the breakfast, Tracy!*” It was only over the next couple of months that things began to really change. They would occasionally call me “mom,” as if trying it on for size. **And then by the time we’d been together for six months**, almost all the time ***we had become mom and dad.***

<https://www.bcadoption.com/> “What’s in a Name? Waiting to Be Called “Mom” and “Dad.””

Something happened!! It became true *not just legally* but experientially and the girls knew it:

- they belonged,
- their lives were truly connected to Tracy and Scott;
- they *knew this* not only about each other (sisters by blood)
- but they *knew this* about their parents (parents by adoption).

And this was not only new, and real for them – “*We did not receive a spirit of slavery, says Paul, to fall into fear but a Spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba father,” it is the very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are [I mean, we **really** are] children of God.*”

Evidence of the presence of the Spirit that God wants all of us to know and experience.

God within us – by the Spirit

1. Convicting our **Consciences bringing us to our knees**
Do you know this?
2. Changing our **Character** to make it Fruitful
Do you know this?
3. Giving us **Gifts** and challenging us to Use them for God
Do you know this?
4. And then, finally, **convincing us of our new relationship** with God
 - Willing to live under Christ’s direction not just as friend, but Boss/Lord
 - But also having a deep assurance that we are loved!
 - The boss will never lead us in the wrong way!

- We belong!
- We're truly in God's family;
- God is our true Father – forever – not just 'words'

God within us. How amazing is that.

May you **know** it and **experience** it!!

May we all know it, together.

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