

June 11, 2000

Preacher: The Rev. Dr. Charles Wright

May the God love, the Christ that sacrificed, and the presence of the Holy Spirit be with each and all as we look to the Lord in prayer. Amen.

I want to thank Dean Baxter and his lovely wife for inviting us to preach this morning and give my greetings and the greetings of my family to all who are a part of this community—the Cathedral community—and also to give greetings to those who have made their way from Georgia, from their church there. For many years I pastored next door to St. Luke's, and we had wonderful times together. So I feel right at home with my Georgia friends.

I want to give you first of all, one text from the Gospel reading that we might rivet our attention upon and, through that attention, receive the grace of Christ.

"Jesus breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" The spirit of life, the spirit of love, the spirit of laughter.

That Spirit of God that has come at Pentecost is also out in the world where you and I live. We're gathered here. We may be afraid of Sunday morning—Monday morning, Tuesday morning—but God is out in the world by the Holy Spirit. Way back at the creation of creation, prior to creation when it says in Genesis, it says there that there was formlessness, emptiness, and darkness. Even then in that kind of a world, the Holy Spirit moved over the face of the earth. And choosing a lump of clay God made people like us. But notice even in Genesis it says, "He breathed into them his Spirit," the human spirit given by the Spirit of Christ.

Pentecost means that God's Spirit is in our world. Lord Shackleton writes about his two years on the ice of Antarctica. He wrote, "When I look back on those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us, not only across the ice fields, but across the storm white sea that separated us. I know that during the long, racking march of thirty-six hours over unnamed mountains and glaciers, it seemed to me that often that we were four, not three." His sea captain later said to him, and he wrote it in his diary. Captain Worseley said, "Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was another person with us."

Out in your world. Out in your world there's another person unseen, quiet, ready to help you. The Holy Spirit that's come at Pentecost.

When we go out into our world, why don't we go expecting the presence of God to meet us? Did you know that he gets to work Monday morning before you get there? He's there when you arrive. You can count on the Holy Spirit and his grace to meet you in your world and in my world.

In 1994, it was Palm Sunday, my wife and I were in Kigali, Rwanda. On Palm Sunday morning going down to the cathedral with our wonderful ambassador who was serving there and his wife, David and Sandy Rossen, we were so impressed by the presence of God's Spirit among those people, in their world. Before we went into the cathedral church, a large truckload of young people came up swinging palm branches and singing joyously, wonderful hymns. They had a spirit of life, of love and of laughter, and we could celebrate that God was in their world and in their church. And we knew it was the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of Christ who himself said before he went to the cross to his beloved friends, "I'll send you another Comforter." The Spirit of Truth that will be not only *with* you but *in* you. And then he also added very quickly in the next breath, "And I will be in you."

Ten days after that visit on Palm Sunday, soon after we departed from Rwanda, the genocide, the holocaust began where 500,000 people were killed. And I often wonder, what about those young people? What about the joy, the life and the laughter that they had? Did they make it? I don't know. But I do know this. And I can say this to anyone out in the world who is following Jesus Christ: that Spirit of God is with you. He meets you. It is God's presence out in your world.

Our family has a friend by the name of Michael who is a member of the Moscow City Duma. And when he was in our living room a couple of years ago I asked him—he was raised under the Soviet system—and I said to him, "How is it that you appear to be a believer?"

And so I was told the story that just a few years prior to that, after the walls had come down, that one day of column of Soviet tanks were moving down the main, the main boulevard through his district of the city. And he was the elected member for the city council for that region. And he said, "I had to do something." The tanks were going to come down and take over the Kremlin, ending our freedom. And he said with great fear and trembling, facing the clanking of the chains on the wheels of those tanks, the roaring of the motor of that long column, he said, "I went out and stood in front of the main tank." And he said—he's a big bear of a man—he said he put up his hands against that tank, expecting to be crushed. Instead, he said, "I felt a great peace." Just like the Gospel reading, "My peace I give unto you." "And the experience," he said, "of the presence of the Holy Spirit," he said, "that's when I believed."

The colonel got out of the tank, a Russian colonel, and broke down and wept, and led the tanks down a side street. God is in your world. Why not go out and stand? It's in those circumstances that we find out that Pentecost is genuine and real.

When you go out to work tomorrow morning or next week and you've got an ethical problem to face, a difficult situation, do it in the compassion and love of the Spirit of Jesus that's come. But take a stand.

God's Spirit is out in the world.

But isn't it wonderful also that he's within the church? He's within this community. Your dear dean just last week went to the funeral of his dear mother, and he was thanking those of us with robes—Presbyterians don't know what to call that!—the love and the support, the community.

You see when the Spirit came, it came to the community of believers. Oh, they were gathered in emptiness. They were gathered with fear. They were gathered in darkness. And what I like about this passage of Scripture that we've read this morning, the thing that excites me so much about Pentecost is this account of how Jesus, fifty days before Pentecost, when he was risen, went to these friends who were fearful of their world and certainly fearful of what was going to happen to their lives without a Savior.

I like it because Jesus couldn't wait to help his friends. And he gathered with that group that was together in their fearfulness, and it says in John, "He breathed on them, and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

He was so excited about giving them his Spirit, he couldn't wait for Pentecost. He had to get to where his people were. He spoke to them and breathed into them just his life and his goodness and his grace, and took away their fear and gave them peace.

And may this be true across the whole Church!

You will notice in the book of Acts, as well as in the Gospel, that there's something that we are supposed to be as the Church. Now listen to this. We're supposed to be together. "They were together." And then in Acts 2: "They were together." And it's in being together, even with this need and weakness, that the Spirit of God finally at Pentecost, rushes out upon his people, and in all languages announces his presence to his whole Church to people everywhere.

Now this morning, you're sitting here, and I know we've talked about the world, and we've talked about the Church a little bit, and the presence, but be together. Be together out in your school. Be together out in your medical profession. Be together in government. Be together with the poor. Be together with the children. Be together with families. Because being together is almost a requirement to the experience and power of the presence of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Jesus in us.

But what about you? You're not interested in Church. You like the world probably, but then you're fearful just a little bit. But what about you this morning? What about you with your emptiness, your search for meaning when things are meaningless? What do you do? You will notice in the book of Acts, when he breathed on all the Church, it says specifically he came to each one, each one. You. And you. And me. The coming of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is Jesus saying, "I'm not only with you, by the Spirit I come to be *in* you." And so the Spirit of Christ breathes on us this morning.

I like that old hymn, "Breath on me, breath of God." May that be your prayer this morning.

And I close this opportunity to preach this morning to read a little narrative written by a Lithuanian lady, speaking at a small group, gathered together, members of parliament and government, in an old run-down monastery in the middle of Lithuania, just two summers ago. She was a mid-level government worker. And I give you sort of as a prayer to take with you. This is what she said, and I have had it translated from her language to our language. Here it is. She entitled it, "Let me love you."

"Don't be afraid. I am near by to talk to you. Be ready to hear me. I have fallen in love when you turn to me. Because you are a human person I love you. You can't live without me. I love you with eternal love. My love will never die. Please let me love you. Please let me love you through those people who love you. I want to take you to my shelter. I will do all for your sake. What must we do? We must let it come into us. Give your life to me. Don't be late. The Spirit of Jesus is for all. And he's for you. His Spirit of life, of love, of laughter, even in tears."

May God's grace and presence be upon you and give you the promise of the Spirit this morning.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.