
RENEWED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

Does it feel like this last year has beaten down your spirit?

- Listen to the sweetness of this promise from God, *"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove your heart of stone."*
- Hard times can harden hearts into insensitivity.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost is all about God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

- The gift of the Spirit is a big deal. The gift of the Spirit is the gift of life and connection with God and others renewed.
- Faith itself is not our work but the gift of the Spirit, a gift worked in us through the power of God's Word.
- If you pay close attention to a baptism, you'll notice it has two parts, the baptizing and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that works faith within us.
- If you pay close attention to the words at a confirmation service or on new member Sunday, you'll notice that we pray that the Holy Spirit would be "stirred up" in them. The Spirit was already given in baptism; now we pray that that same Spirit would be "stirred up" and fanned into flame.
- An entire campfire can be rekindled from just one coal stirred up and fanned into flame.
- It wouldn't be surprising if your own spirit needed a little stirring up and renewing after all we've been through. That's what worship is for, to bring you the word of God that will do that for you.

But know this, when God gives you the Spirit, it's not just about you; it's for connection. The Spirit comes with a calling, a job description. Sure you're enlivened and empowered, but for a purpose that is bigger than you alone.

- Living for more than yourself alone is also a key to finding renewed life again.

The image we have of the disciples on Pentecost is that they were still recovering from all they had been through.

- Pentecost was just 10 days after the Ascension, when Jesus had charged them with a worldwide mission, and then promptly ascended. The disciples staring at each other, "What! We're in charge now?"
- In Matthew 28, at the ascension Jesus commissioned them, *"Go and make disciples of all nations."* – What? No wonder the disciples were overwhelmed.
- Acts 1 adds that at the ascension Jesus charged them to be his witnesses in *Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and "to the ends of the earth."* -- What? Was Jesus serious? Yes.
- In Acts 1 Jesus also said, *"Wait,"* don't start with this, *until you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit.* Jesus said, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses."*
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is all about being empowered to be Christ's witnesses.

So the disciples waited, feeling the challenge too big, huddled in fear together in one place, but then the Spirit came upon them, firing them up.

Pentecost is called the birthday of the church. The church was born when the Spirit came upon the disciples for the purpose of sending them out to bear witness and call people to faith in Jesus.

- Acts 3:41 says the result of that one day alone was that about 3,000 people were baptized and saved. The work of the Spirit, indeed.

The church is not a club for its members. It's about Jesus, worship, discipleship, and not just service but witness to those who don't yet know Jesus. Yes, including witnessing to people of other faiths. Because everyone needs Jesus. The Bible couldn't be clearer on that point.

Listen to these quotes on this subject:

- *"The church exists for what we sometimes call "mission," to announce to the world that Jesus is its Lord."* ~ Theologian, N.T. Wright
- *"The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning."* ~ Theologian Emil Brunner
- *"Every heart with Christ is to be a missionary; every heart without Christ is a mission field."* ~ Missionary, Dick Hillis
- *"The church exists for the sake of the world...The ultimate goal of all ministry is to reach others for Christ."* ~ Evangelist, John MacArthur

There are birthdays and there are death days. Just as the church was born when it became a missionary church, the death day of a church is when it ceases to be an evangelizing church and stops seeing it as a priority to call others to faith in Jesus.

This is a very real danger for some mainline churches these days, including, and it breaks my heart to say so, for many in our own ELCA.

- Here's how serious and concerning this has gotten, there's a resolution circulating that proposes to remove these words from our ELCA constitution about the purpose of the church, *"Reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ."*
- There are birthdays and there are death days. The day we no longer see it part of our purpose to "reach out to all people to bring to faith in Christ" sure sounds like a death day of a church to me.
- *"I will make you fishers of people,"* is what Jesus said from day one of calling disciples.

The Holy Spirit is calling you to worship, calling you to new life and daring to live again, and calling you also to share with others the story of your faith and life with Jesus.

Amen.