



Faith is never possessed. However, faith is always received. Faith is never owned. However, faith is always gifted. Faith never comes from within. Faith always comes from without.

Grace. Mercy. Peace are yours through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Today we celebrate the Day of Pentecost. Last week we read how God was still leading and guiding his people through the selection of Matthias to be numbered among the original 11. Today, we see that leading and that guiding burst into flame with the rushing of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was never gone from the world. We can see that even in the very beginning, the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the deep. We can see that it was no one but the Holy Spirit who rushed upon the likes of Abraham, Moses, David and Elijah. Who possessed Moses when he confronted Pharaoh?

Who possessed David when we faced Goliath or when he wrote the Psalms – even Psalms 22 and 110 that speak very clearly about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Who possessed Elijah as he stood against the prophets of Baal? We could go on and on about the possession of Daniel, Jonah, Amos and many others. Who was the power? Who gave them the words? Who was with them from the beginning? The Holy Spirit. And so, it is most certainly true that the Holy Spirit has always been guiding, teaching, even believing for God's people, in the Old and in the New.

In all these moments, faith is never possessed; faith is never owned; faith never comes from within. Having faith is like breathing. We breathe in; we breathe out. We possess the air that we breathe no more than we possess the Spirit that we believe. So, faith in-and-by-the-Spirit, is never possessed. Rather, it is you who is possessed by the Spirit. Faith is never owned. Rather, it is always gifted and never withheld from those who believe. Faith never comes from inside of us. Inside is only sin. Inside is only death. But truth, life and salvation all come from God and his Holy Spirit.

Now, if all of this has been true since the beginning, why the day of Pentecost? If the Holy Spirit has always been, how does the church celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit? What we celebrate today is that first Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit did indeed come upon the disciples in a very special and miraculous way. We celebrate that while we also hold in tension that the Holy Spirit has always been lurking and bubbling in the cracks and corners of belief and faith. We can say both are true: it was the Holy Spirit who compelled Peter, James, John and the other disciples to follow Jesus when Jesus called out to them saying, "Follow me." And yet it was also the same Holy Spirit who (promised by Jesus) rushed upon the same disciples, giving them the power to speak in different languages. The Holy Spirit was the active ingredient in faith for Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah just as he was for Peter, James, John and the others.

But, yes, Pentecost is special. Something new has happened. The disciples are given the power to speak different languages. Keep in mind, this is not the first time the disciples were given power. It was not long after their call when Jesus sent them out two-by-two to preach the kingdom of God and equipped them with authority over illness, death and the demonic. But now, that Holy

Spirit power manifests itself in another special way, as those gathered hear the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed in their native tongue. The Day of Pentecost was like a boost, a jolt of energy, a burst of momentum for the new Christian church. Jesus gives them a head start. Knowing a few more languages will help get the word out and in the hearts of those who hear. Pentecost was like throwing accelerant on a camp fire. The Boy Scouts may have taught me how to start a fire using only a few tools; but my father taught me a sure-fire method that never fails. Forgot the sticks and the flint; dad has lighter-fluid. I remember one time at the farm when, Papa, dad and I were burning brush. It was heavy rain that day. Not exaggerating, there was about half an inch of standing water on the ground. And yet we three redneck Texans had a blazing fire. The secret was Papa and his tinkering madness. Papa fixed a car hose to a propane tank with a nozzle on the end. More gas made more flame. And as dad and I piled more brush on the pile, Papa stood there with his redneck flamethrower and kept the fire alive despite the downpour. By the end of the day, that tank was about empty; but all that mesquite was gone.

It was so at Pentecost. Jesus, the Lord of his church, gives his disciples the tool to get the job done, to get his church started. He throws heavenly lighter fluid on his church and ignites it into a beautiful evangelistic flame. The church will need it. Starting the Christian church in a dead and dying world is going to be like starting a fire in a rain storm. Persecution from Rome; internal conflict; temptation to sin and much more stand as obstacles against the fledgling church.

But such obstacles were not new to the Spirits work. Abraham faced his foes from unbelief to Abimelech. Moses faced Pharaoh and the Egyptian magicians, even his own people and their constant grumbling. David, of course, faced the giant Goliath and also, his archnemesis, his own sin and temptation. Elijah faced the prophets of Baal, the evil queen Jezebel, famine and death. All to say, the saints of God have always relied on the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit.

At certain times throughout Christendom, the Holy Spirit has appeared more magnificent. True enough, most of the time, the Spirit appears to be the shy, third Person of the Holy Trinity, lurking, hiding in the cracks and corners of faith and belief. But at all times, his work is just as miraculous as it was at Pentecost. Every time someone is brought to faith; every time a sinner is brought to repentance; every time you and I commune in the fellowship of faith and truth in the Spirit, he is working his miracle-work.

Maybe the incredible events of Abraham, Moses, David and Elijah have passed, perhaps never to be repeated in this post-modern world of ours. However, consider this, these Old Testament saints and heroes of the bible only dreamed of this Sacramental meal that you and I are about to receive. Christ, the Lord, in the bread, in the wine, working for us the forgiveness of sins and the ignition and sustaining of our faith. This was promised to the saints of old. But blessed are we, as we live in the age of the church in which that promise is delivered. No matter who we are or where we are on the timeline, faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are possessed. We are owned, bought with a price. We are saved by the God who came into this world. We believe by the work of his Holy Spirit.

Amen