

The Power to Change the World

Sterling UMC
Acts 1:1-14
June 5, 2011

This morning I would like you to use your imagination and transport yourself with me back to the time of Christ. It is 40 days following the resurrection of the Lord and you are gathered with a group of his disciples on a hillside. As they are finishing a meal the conversation turns to spiritual things. The disciples ask him, "Lord, at this time are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." And then he gave them a promise; "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. And with that dramatic and miraculous event Jesus passed the torch to his disciples. He gave to them the mission, to spread the word concerning him; to be his witnesses. But he did not leave them alone for just as he promised he sent them His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. And His Spirit was the power they needed to go on to change the world.

Today I'd like to talk about this third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

A tremendous amount of confusion and controversy exists about the Holy Spirit today. You can visit churches today where people experience hysterical laughter said to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, or you can go places where people fall down on the ground, where they even growl like animals...all in the name of the Holy Spirit. A generation ago A. W. Tozer wrote that when the average Christian thinks about the Holy Spirit "he is likely to imagine a nebulous substance like a wisp of invisible smoke which is said to be present in churches and to hover over good people when they die."

Why is there so much confusion about the person and the work of the Holy Spirit? Part of our problem is that the Holy Spirit seems so mystical. We can picture God the Father, because we've all seen fathers. We can picture God the Son because he became human and we can read about what he did and what he's like. But when we try to picture the Holy Spirit our minds go blank, and we end up with symbols like a dove, or wind, or fire.

Who then or what is the Holy Spirit? Well most of you I imagine have a general theological knowledge about the Christian idea of God as a trinity. The Trinity is simply a summary of the Bible's teaching that within the nature of the one true God there are three eternal persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit is a person, not merely a force or an influence.

I frequently hear people call the Holy Spirit an "it" as if the Spirit is like God's laser beam, but if the Christian belief of the trinity is true, and I believe it is, then the Holy

Spirit is a "he" not an "it." The trinity also means that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, he's God, and therefore, worthy of our worship and praise. The 66 books of the Bible present God the Father as our creator, God the Son as our Savior, and God the Holy Spirit as the one who takes what Jesus did and applies it to our lives. So you might think of God the Father as God for us, God the Son as God with us, and God the Holy Spirit as God in us.

Now, that settles the question of who the Holy Spirit is, but it raises the deeper question we need to answer and that is what does he do. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

There are many ways the Spirit works in our lives. It is the Holy Spirit that awakens those who are spiritually dead, convicting us of sin. Jesus also called the Spirit "the Counselor" the one who comes alongside us to offer us comfort, assistance, and encouragement in our times of need. The Spirit helps to open our eyes to who Christ really is. The Spirit is there to lead us and guide us and to help us make right decisions and to follow God's will and purpose for our lives.

But this morning I want to talk with you about the most dynamic aspect of the Spirit's role in the life of a believer. When we open ourselves up and allow ourselves to be truly filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit in our lives gives us power. And not just a little bit of power, but wonderful, incredible, dynamic world changing power. This is the power that Jesus spoke to the disciples about right before he ascended into heaven. This morning I want to talk to you for just a few minutes about that power, for you see today that same power, the same Holy Spirit is available for you and me.

Think about the disciples. After Jesus' crucifixion they were huddled in an upper room afraid for their lives. But after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, this tiny band of common ordinary uneducated men were transformed into a force that would change the world. Now instead of cowering in fear through, the power of the Holy Spirit they were preaching Jesus in the streets, in the temples, anywhere anyone would listen. They continued their work and ministry even in the face of persecution, imprisonment, and even arrest and execution.

My friends, that same power is available to us today. The power of the Spirit is the power you need to conquer bad habits, the power you need to start good habits, the power you need to tell others about Jesus, the power you need to be everything that God wants you to be. He doesn't expect you to do it alone, as a matter of fact he doesn't want you to do it alone, he wants to help you to do whatever it is you have to do.

This happens as we discover, cultivate, and use the gifts that he has given us. Now I don't know if this will come as a shock to you or not but if you are a Christian then the Holy Spirit has a gift for you, and he also has a reason why he gives it to you. As a means to make visible the Holy Spirit's invisible presence and as a means of helping the Christian community to be built up and strengthened, for the church to become vibrant, alive, and spiritually healthy.

The Holy Spirit helps us:

- sow faith where there is doubt; love where there is hatred;
- calm where there is anger; assurance where there is fear;
- peace where there is conflict; healing where there is sickness;
- unity where there is division; progress where there is a stalemate;
- joy where there is sadness; hope where there is hopelessness;
- power where there is weakness; purpose where there is meaninglessness;
- motivation where there is complacency; peace where there is conflict;
- direction where there is confusion; light where there is darkness;
- knowledge where there is ignorance; wisdom where there is uncertainty;
- service where there is selfishness; forgiveness where there is sin;
- and solutions when there are problems.

This is what happened when the disciples received the power of the Holy Spirit. The question is, why do we lack the Spirit's power in our lives today? I believe it is because most often it is because we are too full of ourselves instead of being filled with the Spirit.

The famous evangelist and preacher Dwight Moody once illustrated this truth as follows: "Tell me," he said to his audience, "How can I get the air out of this glass?" One man said, "Suck it out with a pump." Moody replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter the glass." After many impossible suggestions, Moody smiled, picked up a pitcher of water, and filled the glass. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then went on to show that power and victory in the Christian life is not by "sucking out a sin here and there," but rather by being filled with the Spirit

If we want the power and vitality of God's Spirit in our life, if we want to begin to change our world as the early disciples did then we have to listen. We have to obey. And we have to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

My friends, the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit comes to us today to awaken us from our spiritual sleep, to comfort and encourage us as we live our daily lives, to reveal to us what is the truth, and to give us power for living a victorious life.

Is it possible, my friend that you have God's Spirit "locked" away in a corner of your life some place? Are you trying to combat the world, the flesh and the Devil in your own strength? It's time to stop being foolish. It's time to let God help you. It's time to trust His Spirit that He has planted in you. It's time to realize that you have a friend who will never let you down.

Moody was to have a campaign in England. An elderly pastor protested, "Why do we need this 'Mr. Moody'? He's uneducated, inexperienced, etc. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?" A younger, wiser pastor rose and responded, "No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody." Let the Spirit have a monopoly on your life and He will empower you to do extraordinary works for Jesus.