

Title: “The Spirit of the Crucified Christ”

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Acts 2:1-21

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Service Readings: Num. 11:24–30; Acts 2:1–21; John 7:37–39

Pentecost is not about the Spirit instead of Jesus. It is Jesus giving Himself through the Spirit.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ... ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

These devout Jews saw the disciples; they *heard* the disciples; they even observed a phenomenon that was unexplainable. And to their benefit they even asked an excellent question: “What does this mean?” It seems like the right move for them. They were curious and looking for answers. But the problem was that they were focused on only what they could see and what they could hear. They were focused only on what they could explain! And because they couldn’t explain it they came to the wrong conclusion. These disciples, they stated, are simply drunk.

But not us, right? We see the work of the Holy Spirit and always arrive at the right conclusion, don’t we? *Don’t we?* Have you ever woken up and not *felt* like a Christian? Your prayers *feeling* empty, God’s Word *feeling* distant. And in these times you might even ask, “if the Holy Spirit is really alive inside of me, shouldn’t I *feel*.... *something?*” And if you feel nothing, do you start to wonder if maybe something is missing... or worse if *you* are missing something?

Or, maybe you believe that Jesus died for you. You believe that he rose. But deep down you continue looking for proof that he did that *for you*. And so you go searching, but not to the cross, not to his promises. You go searching inside of yourself. You look for evidence that you have changed enough, that you feel close enough to God, that you *feel* the Holy Spirit. And when the evidence is weak or uncertain, you begin to question Christ’s work *for you*.

You see, the people on Pentecost were looking at what they could see and hear, trying to figure out what it meant. We do the same thing, just in a different direction. We look for what we *feel* or don’t *feel* and then try to decide what it means about the Holy Spirit. The crowd tried to understand the Holy Spirit by what they saw... and they got it wrong. We try to understand the Holy Spirit by what we feel... and we get it wrong too. And the consequences of this are despair or, as we saw with the crowd, pride. When we look for the Holy Spirit *anywhere* other than where Christ has promised to give him we will find ourselves in one of those two places: despair or pride.

But notice what Peter does to correct them. In his sermon he doesn’t ask them to analyze their feelings, nor does he explain what they are seeing. He doesn’t point them inward to themselves; instead, he points them outward to Jesus. He reminds them that this Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, had died, was risen, and now is

exalted. And he tells them that it is Jesus who has sent the Holy Spirit. You see, Pentecost is not simply about the Holy Spirit showing up... it is about Jesus giving.

Jesus gave himself by entering into creation.

He gave himself by bearing our sins upon his shoulders.

He gave himself by suffering the judgement from the Father.

He gave himself by entering into death and rising again so that he could defeat it.

So often we look for evidence of the Holy Spirit in ourselves. We separate him from the Trinity and treat him as an independent measure of our faith. Sure we believe in Jesus, his death, and resurrection. Yes, we know what he did for us and that he did it out of love. But too often we rely on our feelings for that confidence and in the times where our confidence is low we worry. We begin searching ourselves for evidence that the Spirit is within us.

And sometimes I wonder if maybe how we teach our doctrine contributes to this crisis of faith. Not because we teach it incorrectly but because maybe we don't spend enough time explaining Christ's gift that is the Holy Spirit. We state that our faith is a result of the Holy Spirit working within us and then we quickly move on to whatever point we are trying to make. And in those moments I wonder if maybe what we *hear* is this: the Holy Spirit gives me faith and because it is given to me, I must find evidence of it. And in the times that I don't, or in the times when that evidence is weak, I look for an explanation. I analyze and reason. I do what the crowd does... and I come to the wrong conclusion. I conclude something about my faith and I despair.

But here is the thing: the Holy Spirit is not about the measurement of my faith. The Holy Spirit is not even about the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is *about Jesus*. *He is always about Jesus*. What started on Good Friday, continued through Easter, is now displaying its fruit on Pentecost. Pentecost is not an independent event that can be disconnected from Christ and the cross. The Holy Spirit is not something that can be separated from Jesus and viewed in isolation. No! The Holy Spirit is a gift given by the risen Lord. And that gift is not given so that we can *feel* something; it is given so that we can *know* something. Christ sends the Spirit because the confidence of our salvation cannot, must not depend on how we reason or even how we *feel*.

Someone once said, "you don't find water by staring at your thirst; you find water where it is given." This is Peter's message. We don't find confidence of our salvation by staring at the Holy Spirit; we find salvation by staring at Jesus. The level of our belief, our *feeling* of confidence is of no consequence. Don't start with the Holy Spirit; start with Jesus. Start with Good Friday; Start with Easter Sunday. The Holy Spirit is a gift, and with this gift is given another gift - the gift of faith. And these gifts have one purpose, and one purpose only; and that purpose has nothing to do with your feelings. It has everything to do with Jesus and what *he* did for you. Period.

So, look at the Holy Spirit as a *gift* that has been given to you. And where do we find evidence of this gift? Not within ourselves but where Christ has promised to give him. You see, when we look for the Holy Spirit *anywhere* other than where Christ has promised to give him, we either become proud or we despair.

And where has Christ promised to give this gift? In the preached Word. In Holy Baptism. In Absolution. At his table. Not as ideas. Not as symbols. But as his own giving.

You may not feel like the Spirit is present. You may not understand how he can be. But Pentecost is not built on your feelings. It is built on Christ— who was crucified, who is risen, and who now pours out his Spirit.

So do not look inside yourself to find him. Look to Christ— and to where he is giving himself to you. Because the Holy Spirit is not found in you— he is given to you by Christ.

Please pray with me.

Lord Jesus, fix our eyes not on ourselves, but on You. Give us Your Holy Spirit through Your Word and gifts, and grant us sure confidence in Your promises; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Amen.