

“The Surprises of the Spirit”

Imagine that you were one of those disciples.

You had followed Jesus for three years.

You had believed in him and had given up everything to follow him.

Then you and your friends had betrayed him, denied him, and abandoned him,

and he had allowed himself to be executed like a common criminal, and your entire world had collapsed.

But then, three days after he had died, he appeared to you alive again!

And for 40 days – Praise the Lord! – you had had him back!

During that time he had taught you, told you, promised you things.

1. He had reiterated what he had said during his trial –
that his kingdom was not something physical or material, but something spiritual.
2. He had told you would be baptized, not physically with water, but spiritually with the Holy Spirit.
3. He had promised that when you were baptized by the Holy Spirit you would receive power.
4. And he had said that this power would turn you into witnesses for him,
beginning right where you were and then taking you to the ends of the earth.

Now remember that you’re imagining what it must have been like

to be one of those disciples caught in time between the Ascension and Pentecost –

which means that all you knew was that you were to stay where you were in Jerusalem

and wait for Jesus’ promise to be fulfilled.

And all you knew about that promise

was that you would experience some sort of spiritual baptism that would empower you to witness.

And think about what you didn’t know!

1. You didn’t know how long you would have to wait.
You didn’t know if it would be a day or a week or a month.
The timing was not up to you. It was totally up to God and all you could do was wait.
2. You didn’t know what it would be like to be baptized by the Spirit.
You had never been baptized by the Spirit.
You didn’t personally know anyone who had been baptized by the Spirit,
except perhaps Jesus, although you hadn’t been there when that happened;
you had just heard the account from others.
3. You didn’t know what kind of power you would receive from the Spirit or what it would allow you to do.
Would it be power to perform miracles –
like walk on water, or still a storm, or feed a multitude, or change water into wine,
or heal people or raise the dead?
4. And you weren’t sure what it meant to be a witness here in Jerusalem, let alone in far-flung corners of the world.

You didn’t know when, you didn’t know what, and you didn’t know how.

You were just expected to wait and see what God would do.

All that the passage from Acts tells us that the disciples did while they waited was to devote themselves to prayer.

But it’s probably also reasonable to assume that they searched the scriptures for references to the Holy Spirit.

1. There was **the passage from Numbers** that we read this morning about Moses gathering 70 elders
and God coming and distributing the Spirit among them causing them to prophesy.
2. There was **the psalm** we read today that says that
when God takes away the Spirit, people die, and when they are given the Spirit, they are created and made new.
3. There was **the passage from Joel** that Peter quotes later on
that talks about God’s Spirit being poured out on all kinds of ordinary people,
causing them to prophesy and see visions and dream dreams.
4. And certainly there were other passages as well.

But you can see, can’t you, that even such passages from scripture
couldn’t really tell you what was to come or what to expect?

**So all you could do was to devote yourselves to prayer as you waited – and waited – and waited –
for God to do a new thing in your life and in the lives of your fellow disciples.**

And then it happened!

There was a roaring sound like that of a violent wind,

and when you looked at each other, you saw tongues of fire above your heads,

and you were all speaking in languages you didn't even know, and as you rushed out into the streets,
there were people from all over the world saying they heard you speaking in their own languages,
and others were accusing you of being drunk even though it was only 9:00 in the morning.

And then there was Peter preaching with a power and polish that was certainly not his own!

And you found yourself preaching, too, and telling everyone you met about Jesus!

You had spent days hiding in fear of being executed like Jesus,

and now you were shouting to the whole world that Jesus was the center of your life!

The thing about the story of Pentecost is that it's the only explanation for how 12 ordinary uneducated Galileans
(later helped by 1 other guy named Paul) changed the world and the entire course of human history.

It was their baptism by the Spirit that empowered them and turned them into witnesses for Jesus.

Now here's the thing.

We are not here to simply learn about an historical event;

we are here today to hear God speak to us today through this event.

And what that event has to teach us is this:

1. Jesus' kingdom is not a physical or material entity.

It's not about church buildings or institutions or organizations or membership
or anything that can be seen or measured directly.

Jesus' kingdom is a spiritual entity.

2. Jesus promised to baptize us, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit.

Those are two different things, and so if we've only been baptized by water,
then we have not yet received the baptism of the Spirit.

3. If we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit,

we will have received incredible power which will be demonstrated in lives
that are completely different from what they've been before.

4. We will no longer be just ordinary disciples of Jesus, but our lives will have been transformed
& we will have a power that not only enables us to do things we have never done before,
but actually causes us to do those things.

And one of the things that that power will have us doing
is witnessing to who God is and what God has done in our lives.

And the only way to receive that baptism of the spirit is to wait for it and pray for it.

Have you been baptized by the Holy Spirit?

Has your life been transformed?

Can you feel the power of God at work in you?

Do you find yourself witnessing to the boundless power and the infinite love of God in Christ Jesus?

Because that's what being a Christian is all about.

God has promised to clothe us – Salem – with power from on high.

God has promised to transform our life together as a congregation.

God has promised to make us witnesses to Jesus.

I can't tell you when or how God will do that or what exactly it will look like

anymore than those disciples knew when or how God would act in their lives,

or what that experience would be like for them.

I can't tell you those things & you can't tell me those things because I am not in charge of the schedule & neither are you.

God will decide when, and God will decide how, and God will decide what.

Our job is to wait and pray.

And if we do that, then I am convinced

that God will do something just as amazing here and now, as God did at that 1st Pentecost.

So here's our assignment: Wait and pray and then hold on for the ride!

Because God can use 12 of us just as easily as God used those first 12 disciples

to change the city where they were and then the entire world!

Because that's how powerful the Spirit of God is! Amen