We Don’t Have to Do It Alone

John 14

I. Pentecost Sunday is one of three big days on the Christian calendar – the other two being Christmas and Easter. Pentecost, coming 50 days after Easter, is usually crowded into Memorial Day weekend. This year it has to compete with Mother’s Day. So, while we know Christmas celebrates the birth of God’s Son into our world, and Easter remembers the Resurrection and Christ’s victory over sin and death – a lot of people would be hard-pressed to say what Pentecost is all about and why it is so important.

1) Pentecost is the day Jesus kept His promise to the disciples to send them the Holy Spirit. The glorious good news of the Gospel is that not only are we pardoned by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live this new life. We are not on our own. We don’t have to do it alone.

2) We Christians need to continually rehearse the Gospel story. This Jesus whom we have accepted as Savior and are seeking to follow as Lord

- Was once a baby in His mother’s arms. But He is not that now.
- He was once a carpenter, teacher, companion, and friend – One whose healing love mercifully blessed all He touched, all He could see, and hear, and speak to – but He is not limited by time and space now.
- He was a self-giving suffering servant who hung on a cross, pouring out his life and love on our behalf – but He is not hanging there now. God raised Him from the dead!
- There is more. This Jesus ascended, and the curtain went up on a new act in the drama. Pentecost happened. The Spirit of the Ascended One was poured out on His followers, and the Church was born.

3) At Pentecost, the people of God became the Spirit-filled body of Christ. So the church lives and functions by the action of the Holy Spirit. All the disciples needed, and all we need today, came to the world on the day of Pentecost. It is essential today that we do not close ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s empowerment. There is a crucial difference between ordinary men and women, and ordinary men and women empowered by the Holy Spirit.

II. The Holy Spirit is constantly available to Christ's followers,

- showing Christ to us,
- forming Christ in us,
- guiding us into truth, and
- empowering us to live a Christ-life in the world.

1) To be a Christian is to change. It is to become a new person in Christ. Conversion may be a miracle in a moment, but becoming a new person is the process of a lifetime. Paul said we are new creatures in Christ Jesus.

> ***". . .created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*** (Ephesians 4:24)

This is the work of Christ in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

A man once said to Dwight L. Moody, "Sir, I am a self-made man." Moody replied, "You have certainly saved the Lord from a very grave responsibility."

a. One of the major works of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to sanctify us to make us holy. Holiness is not an option for God's people. God speaks clearly:

> ***"I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy."*** (Leviticus 11:44)

Paul makes plain that we have been blessed and chosen by Christ to

> ***". . .be holy and without blame before him in love."*** (Ephesians 1:4)

b. God's saving activity in our lives not only forgives us from sin but also makes us capable of obedience. Obedience is the key to growing and developing in our walk with Christ.

Often we hear someone explain becoming a Christian in this way: "Just give your sins to Jesus" or "Let go and let God" or "Stop trying and start trusting." There is truth in all these sayings. What we do – "our works" – has no merit for our salvation. But, the truth is, we can't merely give our sins to Jesus; we must give ourselves to him.

c. The Spirit empowers us for obedient living, which is the dynamic of a holy life. Paul tells us,

> ***"If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."*** (Romans 8:13)

Becoming holy is a joint venture. The Holy Spirit enables, but I must act. The Holy Spirit's refining power and my obedience in "putting to death" of the old life are two sides of he same coin. The Holy Spirit provides the power for us to move from a mediocre life devoid of victory to the life Paul was pointing us to when he said:

"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

E. Stanley Jones said it best: "Unless the Holy Spirit fills, the human spirit fails." Thus, a holy life is a life of victory as we grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

d. In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells about the forgiving power of the Holy Spirit operating in her life. After her release from the concentration camp where her sister died, she lectured and preached all over the world about the need to forgive our enemies. Then one day she was uniquely confronted by her own message. Following one of her sermons, she was greeted by a man whom she recognized as one of the guards at the concentration camp "shower room." Suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, her sister Betsie's pain-blanched face.

As the church was emptying, he came up to her beaming and bowing: "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!" He thrust his hand out to shake hers, but Corrie ten Boom says: "I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. 'Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.' As I took his hand, a most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed."

Corrie concludes: "And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

It is not easy to forgive – we know that. Corrie ten Boom confessed that empowerment beyond herself was at work. The Christ who told her to love her enemies gave love, and the Holy Spirit empowered her to put that love into practice by forgiving.

2) Pentecost was a missionary event, because God is a missionary God. The Holy Spirit is the chief evangelist. Jesus made it clear he would send the Spirit to empower us for ministry.

> ***"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."***
> (Acts 1:8)

Earnest Christians will discover that we cannot keep the Spirit to ourselves. To neglect mission and ministry as individuals or congregations is to grieve, even contradict – at least to neglect – the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises the presence and power of the Spirit for local ministry "in Jerusalem," and global mission "to the ends of the earth."

You see how fantastic this promise is when you remember something else Jesus said.

> ***"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."***
> (John 14:12)

Can you imagine a more radical possibility? If this is even close to the truth, then the least we have to confess is that we have been satisfied with far less than He promised and far less than is possible.

3) Another major work of the Spirit in the Christian community is the giving of hope. When the Holy Spirit came in vivid power at Pentecost,

- God's expectant people knew that the messianic age their prophets had proclaimed had dawned.
- They soon realized that the coming of the kingdom was only partial; final fulfillment was yet to come.

The Holy Spirit is both a gift and a promise. God puts his seal of ownership on us, giving us His Spirit

> ***". . .as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."***
> (II Corinthians 1:22)

The scriptural metaphors are inspiring and challenging. The gift of the Spirit is like the reaping of the first fruits, with the guarantee that the rest will follow. It is like the first course of a banquet, with the entrée to follow. The Holy Spirit provides the Christian community with gift and promise, experienced reality and future hope.

a. When I think of the hope and the triumph of the kingdom now and in the future, I remember a moving story I read that took place about 20 years ago when the Iron Curtain came down.

One by one as those communist satellite countries began to fall like dominoes from under the grip of the Soviet Union, we began to see how brave and vigilant the Church had been during those years of persecution under communism.

Czechoslovakia was just one example. For years the church there had been severely restricted by the Communist government. Christians could not evangelize. They had to be careful about how they spoke in public. They could post no public notices on their church buildings or signs outside them. They could make no public declarations. They could not even ring their church bells.

Then, in November 1989 a group of students confronted a group of young soldiers, and this proved to be the catalyst that brought a simmering revolution against the government out in the open and to full flower. It was decided on November 27 at noon, everybody in the country would walk out of homes, businesses, offices, factories, or fields. Every bell in every church in Czechoslovakia would be rung at noon.

When that day and time came, bells that had been silent for forty-five years began to ring. Everybody took to the streets, and the old Communist regime knew that it was over. It was electric!

Dr. Vilem Schneeberger, one of the pastors, said that for the first time they were able to put a sign in front of their church in Prague. On the sign were written four words: *The Lamb Has Won.* What a truth! What a victory! What hope! The Lamb has won! Not the bear, but the Lamb! Not the tiger, but the Lamb! Not the lion, but the Lamb!

b. We can believe it. The Holy Spirit secures the hope that one day
> ***". . .every knee should bow. . .and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."***
> (Philippians 2:10-11)

Amen! So be it!