

Holy Spirit: What Did He Do?

Texts: Acts 2:32-42

June 19, 2011

Last week was the Pentecost celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit coming powerfully on Jesus' followers transforming them into the Church. The sermon was about whom the Holy Spirit is and how the Spirit of God has been active throughout history all the way down to the day of Pentecost when the followers of Jesus were welded together into the invincible Church of Jesus Christ. I said last week that the Holy Spirit is the least-known member of the Holy Trinity, and I hope this series of sermons on the Holy Spirit will help us all become more familiar and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. The goal is that we can see how the Holy Spirit is working in and around us today. Next week we will talk about how the Holy Spirit works in our lives now to help us become and do all God has in mind for us.

A number of years ago a true story from England came to light that began many years earlier where two boys, school mates, were best friends. They did everything together, that is until they graduated from Preparatory School (High School). One had excellent grades and was admitted to a university while the other friend chose another path. The friend who went to university became a very successful barrister (trial attorney) while his friend chose the low road, a life of crime. The attorney eventually was appointed to the bench as a judge where he served with distinction many years. One day when the judge took his bench and examined the docket for the day, he was shocked to see his old friend was to appear before him for a crime. When the judge saw his old friend from school in trouble he wanted to let him off, but he was sworn to uphold justice regardless of the person or the crime. He was torn as to what to do with his old friend. Then the judge must ask his old friend, "How do you plead?" Stay tuned for the thrilling conclusion of the story.

This sets the scene that day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit, with a multimedia presentation, attracted a truly international crowd who heard the apostles proclaiming in their own native languages the powerful deeds God accomplished in Jesus Christ. Over the jeers of those who suggested they may be drunk, at 9:00 in the morning, a sense of perplexed wonder rose to the lips of many who asked, "What does this mean?" That was Simon Peter's cue to, present the case against those who gathered there, "Guilty!" Simon Peter says, "You crucified and killed," Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the only true Son of God, as foretold hundreds of years earlier. They were party to this crime, in spite of irrefutable evidence that the miraculous good deeds done by Jesus, he was doing by the power of God. As further proof of his identity Jesus was raised to life again by the power of God, the same who poured out the promised gift of the Holy Spirit on them that day.

"Therefore," Peter said, "Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

This is the same point of the earlier story. How will they plead? If they had claimed innocence it is likely that a riot would break out and most or all of the believers there would have been stoned to death. However, this is where something else profoundly supernatural happens. The texts says that they were "cut to the heart" for their guilt and begged Peter, "Brothers, what should we do (now)?" That was in essence their plea, "Guilty, your honor." At that point Peter tells them to repent and express their faith in Jesus as their Messiah by baptism to receive forgiveness. And, as proof God would grant them the same gift.

You see, the Holy Spirit was not only at work in the apostles, but was also working with the audience of Jews who were party to Jesus' execution. I ask you, Who would have willingly admitted before Peter and the others that they were wrong about Jesus and guilty of the crime? No one, if not for the Holy Spirit showing them their guilt. We United Methodists call that "Prevenient Grace," God at work with a person even before they are aware of it. This follows along with a statement by Jesus found in the Gospel of John 16:8-11(TMSG),

8“When he comes, he’ll expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: 9He’ll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; 10that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; 11that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted.

John says three things about what the Holy Spirit was going to do:

1. He would expose **SIN** which results from **not believing in Jesus**, the Way, Truth & Life.
2. He would demonstrate that true **righteousness comes only from God**, since Jesus is no longer walking among us.
3. He would convince people **there is a judgment coming soon** for everyone because the evil one has already been found guilty and will surely be punished.

All three of these works of the Holy Spirit are seen in what happened that Pentecost day.

First, the Holy Spirit used Peter’s words to convince the listeners that they were indeed guilty of the murder of Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God. The Jewish leaders said he was a liar about being the Messiah and many people believed them and followed the crowd mentality calling “Crucify Him!” But, if they had believed the many first-hand reports of all the miraculous good deeds he did, they would not have been a party to the crime. It was their **unbelief in Jesus** that was their downfall.

Second, it is easy to compare ourselves with those around us and conclude that we are as good or better than everyone else. So, by that standard, righteousness is relative, not absolute. But, Jesus said many times and ways that only God is righteous, which of course included himself. While some think there is no standard of true righteousness here on earth since Jesus went to heaven, it takes the Holy Spirit to convince us that there really is a standard of true righteousness from which we all fall terribly short.

Third, Judgment is coming for everyone whether we believe it or not. Many seem to think they will get off “Scott free” believing that there is nothing after death. But, the Holy Spirit is at work trying to convince everyone that there will be a time when we have to “Pay the piper.” No one escapes the justice of God. The Holy Spirit is working to convince everyone that God’s justice will be met for all. That is why the Jews present on the day of Pentecost asked the question, “What should we do now?” They knew there was a price to pay. But, Peter shows them the way out of judgment and eternal damnation. **Believe** in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit, the promise of our salvation...**REPENT, BELIEVE!**

But, what about us Christians who believe in Jesus? We have all sinned since we first believed, haven’t we? Do we have to stand before God’s judgment at the end of our time? The answer for the Jews on Pentecost is the same answer for us. Yes there is a judgment for all. But, in the case of those who believe in Jesus, he stood in our place at our judgment and took our punishment on the cross. Our trial was 2000 years ago, and our sentence was carried out on Jesus instead of us. What do we have to do? Jesus said to Peter in the upper room, “You are already clean by believing in me, all you need is to have your feet washed.” We need Jesus to wash our sins off, the muck of the world, our sins, washed away every day. Don’t allow it to accumulate; it will weigh us down and poison us. Ask Jesus to forgive us often, as soon as you are aware of our sin. Don’t let sin disrupt your free relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Going back to our opening scene, we are about to hear the defendant declare his plea. If he pleads “innocent” he will endure a withering barrage of accusations, any one of which would sink his claim of innocence. But, if he pleads “Guilty,” the sentence would be sure and swift. To this question, his

friend responded, "Guilty, your honor." At that the judge rendered the appropriate sentence, a stiff fine of £10,000 (over \$20,000 at the time). What a predicament he felt himself caught in. After his gavel fell, the Judge arose, took off his robe, stepped down from his bench to his friend's side and offered him a personal check made out for £10,000. At this point he had a serious decision to make: would he allow his old friend to pay his debt knowing he could never repay it, or would he refuse the gift and spend his future as a prisoner behind bars?

This is what Jesus did for us all. He stepped down to our level and offered to take our punishment for our sins, his spotless righteous life for our sinful life. The final sentence is our choice to make – accept Jesus and live or refuse his offer and suffer for our own sins eternally. The jury is not made up of our peers, but only ourselves. How will you decide on judgment day?