

That day of Pentecost came at the Jewish celebration of the Feast of Weeks. It was the time of the spring harvest; a time to gather in Jerusalem and thank God for the bounty of the crops that had been planted in the fall and watered by the winter rains. Jews living all across the civilized world were present in Jerusalem for this festival. There was quite literally an ingathering of the nations. Some may have been there since the Passover celebration nearly two months earlier. Others would have made the choice to come to this festival or that one—the long, dangerous journey would demand a choice.

Observing Passover and the Feast of Weeks and the Festival of Booths in the fall was all a part of being Jewish—of being God’s chosen people. Each observance provided the pilgrim an opportunity to renew their relationship with God; to remember the promises God had made to them; the deliverance from slavery God had provided them; to remember their place in God’s plan for creation—to be a light among the nations—a light that revealed the glory of God—God’s power.

This remembrance of Luke—Luke who wrote the Gospel and then this account of the Acts of the Apostles—in other words, what Jesus’ disciples did; this scene of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples helps us all remember that life without God in it is pretty meaningless. That’s a fairly simple statement, but look way back at the “beginning” story and imagine the Spirit of God hovering over all those brooding waters. The earth was “void” the story says—pretty meaningless right there, until God stirred those dark waters to life; until God breathed life into us. The Spirit was there; God was there; and life took on form and purpose—originally a purpose of goodness as seen in the eyes of the Almighty. It was that goodness that framed the giving of the law to the wandering tribes of Abraham there in the wilderness. The tablets Moses brought down from Sinai were not designed to lay a heavy weight upon us, but instead, to define our lives in such a way as to bring freedom and health and the joy of life lived to its fullest before our Maker; but somehow, all that did not work.

You read Luke’s Gospel—his particular story of Jesus—and you read an account of God stirring in Creation in a mighty way there in the little town of Nazareth. Luke cannot tell us about Jesus without the Holy Spirit: the Spirit bringing life to Mary’s womb; Jesus, filled with the Spirit, resisting the deadly temptations of the devil; Jesus, filled with the Spirit, beginning his ministry of bringing the life of God near to the hearts and lives of the people he touched and healed and walked this earth with. And then Luke turns his hand at telling us the story of the church in the Book of Acts—the beginning of the church and once again, here is God stirring about in that room where the disciples were, with the rushing wind and fiery vision of the Spirit bringing them to life—to a lifetime of purpose and meaning as they took on the task of telling the whole world about Jesus Christ the Son of Almighty God; the God of Creation; the God of desire and good intention for all that was created.

When we speak of the Holy Spirit, we are talking about life; about the life of the witness of God’s love and will here in this church; about the life of the witness of God’s power in each and every believer’s life. When we speak of the Holy Spirit we are talking about the living presence of God with us; present every step of the way we go in this life; present in the courage it takes to live our lives; present in the boldness it takes to bring the witness of Christ into the circumstances of life; present in the peace and joy we will know in life in times that are filled with uncertainty; with worry. When we speak of the Holy Spirit we are talking about God’s way having its way in a world that defies

goodness; that laughs at justice; God's way standing as a bold challenge to a world that lives in the darkness of its own desire and self importance.

The Spirit is mystery, yet at the same time, the Spirit brings clarity and understanding to us that we could not find on our own. The Spirit is hidden, yet at the same time works in our very real world in very real and distinguishable ways. The Spirit is a part of the life of every believer and yet reaches out to include a world that is not a part of us; not like us; a world as far flung as Pontus and Asia; as Phrygia and Egypt. The Spirit blows where it wills—in other words, it is involved in life wherever it chooses to be. The Spirit is at work in ways we will never know yet as well, at work in ways that we will be familiar with as we are a part of its own work. It is God stirring among us; stirring within us; bringing us to response and knowledge; bringing us to be the living Body of Christ in this world as we are called together in the church.

We are the church; we are his witnesses; only as the Holy Spirit stirs us to be. Apart from the Spirit, our mission would be futile. What we ourselves can accomplish is limited. What God can accomplish through us through the power of the Holy Spirit will never be bounded by what we can sift and measure and count as our own. Remember I said that life without God is meaningless? Imagine our lives without God in them; the life of the church without God in it; this brooding world without the Spirit of God hovering over it. Then imagine the Spirit moving through God's own people ever there to speak God's word of "good;" ever there to bring God's "good" to fill up the emptiness; shape the void; offer hope and encouragement in the Spirit's own way.

Time to stop imagining. Time to wake up and look around and recognize the power of the Spirit that we are together here, gathered in the Name of Christ. Always time to be God's people in this place; time to be God's light among the nations however the Spirit tells us to shine; wherever the Spirit points the way.

...and ever and ever, Amen!

"The Spirit Forever!" Acts 2:1-21 051108 Mkh