

"Guided by the Spirit"

With today being Mother's Day, it's only natural that we think of the things our Mother's have taught us over the years. Do you remember everything your mother told you? My Mother taught me LOGIC ... "If you fall off that swing and break your neck, you can't go to the store with me." My Mother taught me MEDICINE ... "If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they're going to freeze that way." My Mother taught me TO THINK AHEAD ... "If you don't pass your spelling test, you'll never get a good job!" My Mother taught me ESP ... "Put your sweater on; don't you think that I know when you're cold?" My Mother taught me HUMOR... "When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me." My Mother taught me how to BECOME AN ADULT... "If you don't eat your vegetables, you'll never grow up." My Mother taught me about GENETICS ... "You are just like your father!" My Mother taught me about my ROOTS ... "Do you think you were born in a barn?" My Mother taught me about the WISDOM OF AGE ... "When you get to be my age, you will understand." My Mother taught me about ANTICIPATION ... "Just wait until your father gets home."

I have to admit that, as a child, I thought my Mother was one of the smartest people in the world. But I also remember as a young boy watching movies about things that happened in the Bible and being impressed by how smart God was, and the overwhelming ways God used to get the attention of people. For Noah there was a stupendous flood, only to be accompanied by a stupendous boat. To the slaves who were leaving Egypt God parted the red sea. For Moses, there was a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. Jonah received a free cruise inside a whale. Mary and Martha witnessed their brother Lazarus returning from the dead. To everyone else, God rose Jesus Christ from the dead.

But he didn't stop there. We read accounts of the transfiguration where Jesus appeared in glowing robes - dazzling white - accompanied by Moses and Elijah. Last week we read accounts of the Ascension where Jesus ascended to heaven through the clouds. God does use overwhelming ways to get our attention. The story that surrounds Pentecost is no different. We read that the disciples were all together in one place. Then there was a rush of mighty wind in the house. I think of it something like an indoor tornado. But what makes this story rank up there with the parting of the red seas and the burning bush, is the part where: ...there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were filled with the holy spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now we have to be careful when we talk about how the Holy Spirit works among people. There are some groups who read this passage and say that unless you can speak in tongues, the Holy Spirit is not at work in you. Speaking in Tongues is only one of the Gifts available through the Spirit. Paul writes that you may also receive the gift of prophecy, or the gift of teaching, or perhaps the gift of preaching, or any one of the many other gifts that come from the Spirit. But for the purpose of the Pentecost event, the Holy Spirit gave the gift of speaking in tongues for a reason. They were not speaking in just any Language. These Galileans, who knew no other language, were speaking in the languages of all the people present in Jerusalem at that time. The people even asked among themselves: How is it that we hear, each of us in his own Native Language? There were Parthians, Medes, and Elamites. Residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Cretans and Arabians.

I love to travel. Although I had to study Greek and Hebrew in seminary, I have not mastered those languages to the point of being able to hold an active conversation with people from those countries. When I visited India I was fortunate to have my friend Asha speak the language. And while studying the Missionary

life of Paul and touring the sites in Turkey, I was very grateful for our Turkish Tour Guide. I always thought it would be great if you could go through some sort of booth, something like the Metal Detectors you walk through at an airport, and when you come out on the other side, you could speak the language of that country. It would be great! The people would know what you were saying, and you would know what they were saying. There would be so much that we could learn from each other if it were not for the language barrier.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit removed the language barrier. In our lesson from Acts, it does not say that they took this gift of Speaking in Tongues and went to the market place to bargain for the best deals. They began speaking in the languages of the people so they could tell them in their own tongues, the mighty works of God. The Holy Spirit gives the gifts that are needed in order to do God's work. Sometimes this happens in overwhelming ways. I think it would be easier if God wasn't so stupendous when he did some of these things. It would be easier to accept. Then again, that's what makes God, GOD! But how many of us can really relate to the Holy Spirit working through people by appearing as tongues of fire over their heads. That just seems to be too overwhelming.

When I drive from my house to the church, I come up Flourtown Road past one of the few farms still left in the area. This week I drove by it and thought of a "Holy Spirit" type story that takes place on a farm. Once there was a rich and powerful, but very kindly and generous landowner, who hired people to work on his large farm. He told them their job was to plow the fields. He promised to provide them with everything they needed to get the task done, and he promised that when they finished, they could retire to his huge mansion forever.

Then he gave them an instruction booklet. He and his manager had compiled and written the manual when the farm first started up and was so very successful. He stressed to them how important it was that they read the manual carefully, because it contained all the information they would need to get the job done. He then commended them to the care of his capable and talented manager, who would be fully available to them whenever they needed and requested his help.

At first the workers read the manual diligently, and they rarely did a thing without seeking the manager's help and guidance. They did their job well and accomplished much. But, as time went on, the workers were so anxious to get into the field that they rarely even glanced at the manual or consulted the manager before they went to work. They reasoned, "Who has time to sit and read, when there is so much work to be done?"

Instead, they would head straight for the plows, grasp the chains attached to them and begin pulling the plows through the fields. It was very hard work! A few of the laborers became discouraged and quit, but most of them kept on pulling the plows because they were so devoted to the landowner, and because they looked forward to the retirement plan so much. But the work was difficult and slow! Occasionally the foreman would conduct an evening exercise class to help the workers develop bigger muscles. This helped a little, but as soon as a workman developed more strength, they would pair him with one of the weaklings, and he would soon get discouraged because that would just slow him down and mean he had to pull a bigger share of the load.

Then, lo and behold, one day one of the workers began reading the instruction manual carefully and he discovered something wonderful! The manual said that the landowner had an unlimited supply of tractors available to anyone who asked for one. All the laborer had to do was to approach the manager and ask for one – just ask! The worker who discovered this was so excited that he immediately approached the manager and asked for a tractor. The manager replied, "Surely! I'll be glad to give you one immediately! And he did!

That very afternoon the worker on the tractor went out into the field and plowed dozens of acres of land.

When the other workers learned what he had done, they were amazed! When they asked him how he did it, he told them all he did was to read the instruction manual and do what it said - ask for a tractor! Most of them doubted his story. Some of them said he was a fanatic. Others said he was crazy or that he had hit the wine bottle too early in the day. Some even got angry with him and said to him. "You really think you're something special, don't you?" He insisted he was not special, and he even got frustrated and told them, "No, I'm not special. I didn't do anything by myself. All I did is what it said in the instruction manual. I asked for a tractor, the manager gave me one immediately, and my work was made much easier.

The others shook their heads in bewilderment and went back to pulling their plows with their own muscle power. Why? Most of them thought they had to be "extra good and worthy" to even ask for a tractor. Others felt the work was supposed to be hard, tiring, and draining because the retirement plan was so good. Just a very few of them even ever read the instruction manual, and the few who did assumed the tractors were just a special dispensation, only intended for the first workers.

Who knows, maybe someday all of the laborers will read the manual, believe what it says, and ask the manager for a tractor to help them do the work he has asked of them.

Here endeth the modern day parable, and the listings of credits in our mini-drama are:

You and I are the laborers

God is the landowner

The manager is Jesus Christ

The Holy Spirit is the powerful tractor

The field is the world, ripe for God's harvest

The manual is the Scripture, with all God's powerful promises, especially that part of Scripture which is today's text - the whole Pentecost account in early Acts - and, by all means, Acts 1:8 "But you will be filled with power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.... and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth..."

There are many dedicated laborers in this congregation. It is really an advantage to be the Pastor of this congregation. Quite a few of you have felt comfortable to share with me stories of how the Holy Spirit has worked in your lives. We don't always feel comfortable sharing such events, and because they are not shared too often, people begin to wonder if the Holy Spirit really is working among the people? Many Church members have their hands on the plow for the Master, - Jesus Christ. And most of the laborers seem to be content with the promise of a Great Retirement Plan. But until we reach retirement, we continue to plow by hand, struggling on working very hard. Eventually, some laborers get too tired and experience Spiritual Burnout. This doesn't have to happen, but too often it does happen because we have gotten away from reading the manual- and asking for a tractor.

Today we are going to witness 9 young people Confirming their Baptismal Vows. When people become members of a congregation, it's as though they are becoming workers on this field within the large farm. In the beginning, as with any new job, the workers are excited and eager to do the work. But as time goes on the work seems more tedious and strenuous. I often wonder how those disciples reacted a week, or a month, or even a Year after that Pentecost event? Did Speaking in Tongues become such an every day happening for them that they lost sight of its value?

Most people, when they first join the Church, come into its fellowship because they have been moved by the Holy Spirit in some way or another. But we start to become so comfortable with the Spirit's presence that we lose sight of its value. It's as though we received the first dose and feel that that's enough!

I remember a particular visit with a church member who had just come home from the hospital. She told me that the doctor had just called her with the results of her tests. "What did he say?" I asked. "He told me that I have a 'Chemical Imbalance', but that it can be controlled through medication. What bothers me pastor, is that he told me I would have to take it for the rest of my life." After we talked for a while, she came to the conclusion that that was a small price to pay for good health the rest of her life. That is what God wants us to realize in our lives! We will be needing regular doses of the Holy Spirit for the rest of our lives.

When you become a member of the Church, whether it be through Baptism, a Profession of Faith, or through the Rite of Confirmation, that is only the first dose. That is why you are asked: Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism? And the response is: "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me."

We don't have to work in the fields alone. Pentecost was the first time he sent his Holy Spirit. But he has continued to send the Spirit ever since. On some medicine bottles the label says: "Take as needed" but on many it says: "Take contents until finished." The same is true with the Holy Spirit. We must be taking from the Spirit's strength and power until our fight against the infection of sin is finished.

In our Creeds we profess faith in the Father, the Son, and the HOLY SPIRIT. If we call on the Spirit, it can be like the worker who had a Tractor to help with the work and we will have more strength left to do the work. One dose is not enough. We have to continue to call on the power of the Spirit, for the rest of our lives. It is a small price for us to pay to assure "Good spiritual health". But it was not a cheap price that was paid for us. Paid through the death of Jesus Christ who gave us the spirit.

Remember when you became a member of god's church. You were asked: do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism? Your response was: "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me." Continue to ask for God's help and guidance. Ask in whatever Tongue is most familiar to you. And God will send the Holy Sprit to help us. Amen