

Excitement or Power?
Acts 2:1-21

I once heard a quote which has really stuck with me, because it described my experience so well. The quote was this: “My mind is learning today what my heart understood yesterday.”

That’s a pretty good description of God’s prevenient grace. The Holy Spirit has been whispering the truth to the deepest parts of our hearts from our earliest moments. In the deepest levels of our souls, in our consciences, we know what is right and true, because we are being taught by the Spirit of God. But it’s only when we decide to seek truth and righteousness that we become consciously aware of the things we have known in our hearts.

When we respond positively to the teaching of the Spirit, we become aware of the present of the Spirit in our lives. Some respond so easily and so quickly that they become aware of the presence of the Spirit very early. I have had many tell me that they cannot remember a time when they didn’t feel the presence of God in their lives.

Then there are other people go through life with their fingers in the ears, spiritually speaking, going “la la la la la la,” to drown out the still, small voice of God. We don’t have to pay attention to what the Holy Spirit is teaching us. We can ignore our consciences. We can say no to our hearts. We can say, “I refuse to listen to you. I don’t like what you’re saying.” Those who do so go through life never knowing of the presence of God.

Then there are others who struggle with the Spirit. They are like Jacob wrestling with the angel at Peniel. When they finally yield to the leading of the Spirit, the awareness of the Spirit bursts upon them like a volcano erupting. The fire of the Holy Spirit burns deep within our souls. When we allow ourselves to be moved and guided and taught by the Spirit, the Spirit slowly, but surely, moves to the surface, transforming us. People can see changes taking place. But no one really understands what is happening. You don’t know what is happening. Until the day the Spirit finally explodes through to the surface, with the power of God’s glory, majesty, love and grace.

That’s what happened on the Day of Pentecost.

For three years Jesus had been preparing his disciples for this day. The disciples had been led by the Spirit, although they were unaware of it. It was the Spirit who whispered to them when they first met Jesus, “This is the One sent by God to bring salvation and life.” When Jesus invited them to follow him, it was witness of the Spirit that persuaded them to say yes. The teachings of Christ warmed their hearts because Jesus was saying what the Spirit had already been whispering in their hearts.

For forty days after Easter, Christ appeared to the disciples, to convince them of the truth of his resurrection. On the fortieth day, he led out of Jerusalem to a place where they could be alone. Then he told them he was leaving them. He told them to return to Jerusalem and stay there until the Holy Spirit came. After giving them final instructions, as his disciples watched, he ascended into heaven.

They returned to Jerusalem and spent the next ten days gathering together daily to pray. On the Jewish holiday of Pentecost, the feast of the first harvest, which came fifty days after the Passover, as the disciples were in the Upper Room praying together, suddenly the Holy Spirit erupted. The Spirit within them broke to the surface and there was a mighty explosion of power and glory and love.

Now, some people ask, "Why doesn't this happen anymore?" The answer is, it does. Every time the church gathers together for worship and prayer this Holy Spirit is present among us.

"But," they say, "It's not like it was on the day of Pentecost. There's no excitement. People aren't worshipping ecstatically. People aren't running out into the streets and grabbing people and telling them how wonderful God is."

Well, the answer to those folks is, there can only be one first time. I remember when my son came home from Iraq. The first time I saw him, I ran up to him and grabbed him and hugged him and I cried tears of joy. That was appropriate at the time. Now, if I grab my son and cry tears of joy every time I see him, that would not be appropriate.

There is an energy, a power, a presence, every time we come together. There is a sense of transcendence. When we come together, the church is the door to heavenly realities. The Spirit of Christ moves easily into our presence and passes among us.

It is a wonderful gift. However, I'm reminded of the coach who warned his players against excessive celebrations when they score a touchdown. He said, "Don't act like it's the first time you've ever been in the end zone."

Christ was present with us last Sunday. Christ will be present with us next Sunday. The Holy Spirit is a constant and abiding presence. You can't live in a constant state of over-the-top emotions.

We become like a couple who have been married many years. There may not be the giddiness of falling in love. They may not be as demonstrative in their affections as they once were. But their love for each other is probably far deeper and stronger than it was at the beginning.

Jesus tells us that it is far more important to be faithful in our service to him than to be emotional in our testimony of him. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

We don't measure a person's love for Christ by how emotional they are. The real measure of a person's love is whether they walk with Christ in faith and obedience day by day.

Now that is not to say that there is anything wrong with getting emotional. Some people are just more open with their emotions. Some people stay on a higher emotional level than others. Personally, I enjoy it when people get excited in church. But anyone who thinks that those who are quiet in their worship and in their service are not as sincere are just plain wrong. As the old saying goes, "Still waters run deep."

I remember when I was in a science class, the teacher was teaching us about electricity. There was a light bulb attached to a battery with wires. One wire was cut. The teacher explained about how there has to be a closed circuit for the electricity to flow. He picked up the ends of the wire where it had been cut and slowly brought the ends together. When they were nearly connected, an arc flashed between them. It was a

dazzling sight. Sparks flew. But the bulb barely flickered. It didn't burn brightly until the two ends were firmly connected. When the wires were firmly connected, there was no evidence of the flow of electricity except the light burning brightly.

At Pentecost the Spirit reached down from heaven and the Spirit from the disciples reached up. As they came close together, the sparks flew. There was a mighty fireworks display that created awe and wonder and great excitement. Since then, the connection between the church and heaven has grown firmer and firmer. Every now and then the Spirit decides to create sparks and fireworks. But most of the time there is just the steady flow of the power of God. The Spirit empowers us and guides us to faithfully proclaim the word of God and to do the work of God. Usually there's not a lot of excitement. People don't usually come from church saying, "Man, those people are either crazy or drunk." But the light of God's presence is burning brightly.

That's what Christ wants in the church—less fireworks and more power. We want the connection between the Spirit within us and the Spirit reaching down from heaven to be firmly and permanently connected. It may not be as spectacular as that first connection. But it is even more powerful and effective in touching people's lives with the love of God.

Don't let the quiet efficiency of the church fool you. The presence of the Spirit is alive and at work among us in a powerful way.

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