

Sermon for Sunday, June 2, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

### PENTECOST FOR PRESBYTERIANS

Acts 1:1-8

Text: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

About six or seven years ago I preached a sermon on Pentecost Sunday entitled, "Pentecost for Presbyterians." I had long since forgotten about the sermon until several months ago when a letter came from the editor of a conservative magazine asking permission to print the sermon in his journal. I suppose he had somehow gotten a copy of the sermon and put it away in a file. When the time came to print a series on the Holy Spirit, my sermon was among the material he decided to publish. In the weeks following its publication, I received a number of letters from across the denomination expressing appreciation for the sermon. However, this past week when I was wrestling with what to preach on Pentecost Sunday--today--I received a letter from one of our missionaries on the foreign field. She wrote, "I've just read 'Pentecost for Presbyterians' in the 'Journal'. It was tremendous in lifting my crying spirit." We think of our missionaries as being spiritual giants who never have needs or problems. But God laid it on my heart to understand that even a missionary has spiritual needs. And as I thought about it I was led to understand that the message of Pentecost is still very much needed today for there are many of us with crying spirits. For that reason I want to share with you some things that have happened in my own life and share with you what the Bible has to say about the Holy Spirit.

By the time I had been in the ministry approximately ten years, I had, in a sense "arrived." I was pastor of the tenth largest Presbyterian Church in Texas, I had a lovely home, and an influential people to pastor. I had a large staff with adequate personnel and adequate financing to do almost anything we wanted to do. We developed a church program so large and complicated it took a multifold brochure just to list the activities. In the city in which I lived I had been asked to serve on various community organizations and gained a reputation as community leader. Within the denomination I was given positions of leadership and through my books my name was known throughout the General Assembly. I had all of the outward trappings of the successful young pastor and I was not unaware of this.

Yet, in spite of this apparent success, something was wrong. I woke up one morning to discover that I did not want to go to work--my ministry no longer had meaning for me. As I examined my own life and ministry, I made a discovery. I discovered that in spite of all the church activities and the flurry of things in which I was involved, there was nothing of spiritual significance going on in my own life. My relationship to God was occasional and spasmodic. Of course, there were moments in my life to which I could look back and know that God had been real in my life. Yet, that sense of closeness to God, that deep inner awareness of his presence, was not a day-to-day experience and there was no spiritual power in my life or ministry. This is not to say that God did not use my ministry in spite of me--I know he did. But I had become keenly aware of my own need for a new relationship to God if my ministry was to be really meaningful. This is not to imply either that I questioned my salvation. I did not. I knew that I had accepted Jesus as my Saviour and that I was loved and forgiven. Yet, I also knew that something in my life--in my relationship to God--was missing.

I think there are many of us in the church today in that same position. We have

accepted Jesus as Saviour, yet our lives have no power for him--we do not have that close, intimate, inner awareness of his constant presence in our lives. We are aware that somehow our relationship to God is not what it should be, but we are not exactly sure what is wrong. In a real sense, we are powerless people. We have no power to live the life of Christian love, sacrifice, or service; we have no power in our witness. And when we meet people who do, we think them somehow strange and fanatical. Yet, if one reads the books of Acts, he discovers that persons who have the dynamic awareness are the norm of the New Testament and not the exception. As I have criticized zealous Christians in the past, I realize now it was because deep in my heart I knew they had something I did not have and my criticism was a way of self-justification. It was easier to criticize and write them off than it was to examine my own life and make the adjustments that were needed. In the months that followed this first awareness of my need, I made a discovery that I want to share with you this morning.

As one reads the books of Acts he is acutely aware that here are men whose lives are power-filled. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached a sermon to which three thousand people responded. Phillip preached to a Samaritan city and the whole city believed and was baptized. Dramatic things were going on and the disciples were channels of the very power of God. They themselves lived in such joyous union with God that when they were imprisoned and beaten and threatened, they rejoiced to be allowed to suffer for the sake of Jesus. They lived in such close communion with God that Stephen at the moment of his death gazed into the very face of God. Could I--living in the mid-20th century in a scientific age--be such a channel and know such a fellowship? I searched the Bible--I read widely--I talked to others--I prayed earnestly as I sought the answer.

I discovered first of all that there are two sides to a man's relationship to God. Notice I did not say there were two separate things, but there are two parts to the one thing which is our relationship to Jesus. The first part has to do with accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This is my accepting by faith what Jesus has done for me and in that act of faith I am forgiven and redeemed. I become a new person. But the second part of my relationship has to do with the kind of life I live as a result of this. You see, Jesus not only wants me to be forgiven, he wants me to live a new life for him. Now, on my own I cannot live that new life. So it is that Jesus offers me power to help me--he offers me power to do what he wants me to do and the Bible calls that the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who comes with power to enable me to have power to serve, power to witness, power to suffer and sacrifice, power to live a triumphant and victorious Christian life.

So, there are two parts of my relationship to Jesus, first to accept him as my saviour and second, to be filled with His Spirit. Look at the disciples of Jesus himself. After the resurrection they were surely Christians. They had long since accepted Jesus as the Son of God and now they knew he was the Saviour of men. Yet, in spite of this relationship to Jesus, he said to them, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." (St. Luke 24:49) So, to their faith in Jesus was to be added power. We see this again in the Scripture we read this morning, "and while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 1:4, 5) So again we see that to their faith in Jesus was to be added a power--the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, just a few verses later, we come to our text for this morning, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." It is only after this power has come that they are to begin their ministry and be his witnesses. And, of course, we know that

this power came to them on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

But this power was not for the disciples alone. It was for all who would believe. On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached, we read, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" Peter replied, "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." Now, that is the first side of our relationship to Jesus. Then Peter concludes, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." That is the second part of our relationship to Jesus--a new power in our lives that equips us to live--to truly live--for Jesus.

Have those two things happened to you? Have you accepted Jesus as your Saviour and have you been filled with the Holy Spirit? If not, it raises a question: can these two things happen at different times? Back in 1965 the Theology Committee of our denomination responded to that very question. It said, "We would agree that, since Pentecost, baptism and receiving the Spirit belong together in a single experience. But both Scripture and the Confession of Faith face the possibility that there may be a lapse of time between the two." The fact is, in the book of Acts, we have illustrations of both. For example, in chapter 10 of Acts we have the story of the conversion of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius. There the two events--receiving Christ and being filled with the Spirit--occur together. You will remember that God had appeared in a vision to St. Peter to prepare him to preach to the Gentiles and God had also told Cornelius to send for Peter. When Peter came to Caesarea to the home of Cornelius he began to tell them about Jesus. As he preached, the Bible tells us they believed and we read, "While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word..." So, here faith and power came in a single experience.

But, on the other hand, the two can be separate in time. In Chapter 8 of Acts we read how Philip went to the city of Samaria and began to preach about Jesus. The Bible says, "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Here were people who responded in faith and belief in Jesus and were baptized. Then we come to this: "Now when the apostles as Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." They they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:14-17)

We see, then, that there are two parts of a man's relationship to Jesus--believing in Jesus and receiving his power, the power of the Holy Spirit. The two belong together in a single experience, but both Scripture and our Confession of Faith face the possibility that there may be a lapse of time between the two.

In my own life, I discovered that while I had accepted Jesus as my Saviour, I had not been filled with his Spirit. There was, indeed, something missing in my life. It was in this awareness that I asked God to fill me with the Holy Spirit. One afternoon in my study, as I felt a compulsion to pray, I knelt down beside my desk and asked Jesus to fill me with his Holy presence. That day he heard my plea and quietly, beautifully, there came into my life something that was never there before--the fullness of the Spirit, an inner awareness of his presence, a new spiritual power that filled my whole being. And while the first glow of that inner experience may have faded, something happened to me that day that can never be undone and since that day life has never been the same. I praise God for that.

On this Pentecost Sunday as we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit with power, perhaps there are some of you who are where I was--you have accepted Jesus but you have never asked him to fill you with His Spirit. If so, there is something missing in your life and God has so much more he wants to do for you. As we pray, will you ask him to fill your life?