

Sermon for Sunday, May 29, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor  
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"GOD'S UNWRAPPED PRESENT"

Acts 2:1-18, 36-39

Text: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"   
Acts 2:38

This year we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of Lindberg's crossing the Atlantic to Paris non-stop. It is such a commonplace event today that it is hard for us to realize what a remarkable event it was in 1927. And in less than 50 years we have gone from crossing the ocean for the first time to actually landing a man on the moon. But crossing the Atlantic for the first time and landing a man on the moon had something in common that perhaps you had not thought about. In both cases, there was a lack of communication at certain critical points and the pilots were totally alone. Lindberg had no radio and once he left land, there was no more communication. And when Apollo 10 swung around to the back side of the moon, at the point the retro-rockets were to be fired to determine the success or failure of the mission, there was a total communications black-out as the moon blocked all transmission. What a lonely feeling that must have been in both cases. Surely it was such an awful loneliness as this that the disciples experienced just before Pentecost. Jesus had ascended to his Father and the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. They were alone - terribly alone - cut off from the communications with Jesus they so desperately needed.

The Bible tells us that they were all together in one place. I suspect all of us would have done that - we would have clustered together, trying to draw strength from one another in such a time of loneliness and awful isolation. As it turned out, they were not to be together much longer. Soon they would scatter all over the world preaching the good news about Jesus. Often they would be alone, often they would be persecuted, often they would be in strange and sometimes hostile places, often they would endure danger. But never again would they be lonely for they were to have in their hearts the living presence and power of Jesus. Yes, they would receive the Holy Spirit; the promise of Jesus would be fulfilled, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you."

When the promised Holy Spirit finally came to the disciples, some strange things happened. One of those strange things was the phenomena of speaking in tongues. I want to say a word about that because there is a charismatic revival going on in the world today in which speaking in tongues is a part. In our scripture this morning we are told that when the Spirit came upon the disciples, they began to speak in other tongues. Does this mean that they were suddenly given the ability to speak in a foreign language they had never learned. It could be. However, later on we know that when St. Peter went to Rome he had to have an interpreter travel with him for he did not speak Latin. On the other hand, could it be a miracle of hearing? It would be, for the people from foreign lands present there in Jerusalem said, "How is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?" On the other hand, some of those who heard them thought it was drunken babbling, for the Bible says, "But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine.'"

But however you explain it, something miraculous happened when the Holy Spirit fell on those first Christians. As a result they shared the story of Jesus with fantastic power, so much so that on the first day, 3,000 people were converted.

About the turn of this century there began to be a recurrence of this strange and little-understood phenomena of speaking in tongues and out of it came the

Pentecostal Church, the fastest growing Christian group in the world today. They began to teach that speaking in tongues is the initial and necessary evidence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer, and if you do not speak in tongues, you do not have the Holy Spirit. Today there is a rapidly growing movement within Roman Catholicism as well as main line Protestantism where this same gift of speaking in tongues is manifested. As a result, a tremendous spiritual renewal is literally sweeping the world, called the new-pentecostal movement or the Charismatic movement. I do not think there is any question that this is a valid spiritual experience, nor do I question in the least that it is entirely biblical.

However, I do question whether speaking in tongues is the only evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit and I do question its relative importance. For example, sometimes when I look up in the sky I can see a white streak across the sky--the contrail of an airplane. I know that if I follow the contrail to the end, there I will find an airplane. But the contrail is just evidence that an airplane is there. Would I be correct to say that if I don't see a contrail, there is no airplane? Well, of course not! Sometimes I see the plane anyway. It may be that I have heard the sound of its motor; it may be that its shadow passed over me to indicate its presence; it may be that the glint of the sun on its wings caught my eye. So, the sound or the shadow or the glint give evidence of the presence of the plane just as surely as the contrail. The fact is, all are evidences of the presence of the plane. Is one more important than the other? Not really. They are all different, yet each is a true and genuine evidence of the plane's presence. Actually, none of them are the plane, they are simple evidences of its presence.

However, in all fairness, I must go on to say this: if there is no contrail, no sound, no shadow, no glint, there is probably no plane either! So it is with the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. There are many evidences of His presence in our hearts. As St. Paul puts it, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one." In the lives of Christians we may see many and varied evidences of the Holy Spirit--it may be the gift of knowledge, or works of mercy, or prophetic ability, or speaking in tongues, or other gifts mentioned in the Bible. They are all evidences of the working of the Spirit in the life of a Christian. All of them point beyond themselves to the important thing--the gift of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Is one more important or more necessary than another? No, not really. What is important is this: if there is no glint of sun, no sound of a motor, no shadow on the ground, no contrail in the sky, there is no plane. By the same token if there is no speaking in tongues, or no evidence of love, or no evidence of spiritual wisdom, or no evidence of compassion and mercy, or no evidence of faith, or evidence of any other gift of the Spirit, there is probably no Holy Spirit in a person's life.

On this Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers, the question is not do we have any one particular manifestation of the Holy Spirit as opposed to another. No, the real question is, is there any manifestation--is there any evidence in our lives that we have the Spirit?

I'd like to put that question to you this morning on Pentecost. Are you aware of God's Spirit at work in your heart? Are you aware of God's presence in you? Are there manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit that the Bible talks about in your life?

On the day of Pentecost as Peter preached to his fellow Jews about Jesus, the Bible says that they were cut to their hearts. They fell under conviction about Jesus. And the Bible says they cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter told them to do two things. In our text printed in the bulletin you will see what those two things were. First, Peter said, "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name

of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;" That is, believe. Believe in Jesus, turn from your old way of life, and because of the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for your sins, God will forgive you of those sins. Yet, believe. But secondly, Peter says that simply to be forgiven isn't enough. He says that God wants you to live a new life, a better life. But you can't do that. Many of us have tried. We have tried our best, tried our hardest to be better than we are, and we have failed. So Peter says that God is going to do something else for us. He is going to put his power in our hearts. He is going to give us the very Spirit of Jesus at work in us. He is going to give us spiritual gifts, spiritual power, to help us live our new lives in Jesus. So St. Peter says, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So, if you want to be a Christian, two things should happen to you. First, you believe and second, you receive. You first accept Jesus as your savior (that is believe) and second you receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, the fact is, I know many Christians who believe in Jesus. They have accepted him, believed in him, as their personal savior. Yet, the fact is they have little spiritual power in their lives. There is no contrail, no sound, no shadow, no glint of sun in their lives to indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit. As a result, they are defeated lives. God means for Christians to live triumphant lives, victorious lives, lives of spiritual power, lives where the spiritual gifts the Bible talks about are manifested. Yet, for many there is no such power. Why? Simply because they have not received the gift of power, the Holy Spirit. They simply have not unwrapped God's gift to them. They simply have not let God's Spirit work in their lives.

Have you believed in Jesus? If so, praise God for that. It means you have received salvation. But have you also received the Holy Spirit. Have you unwrapped God's gift of spiritual power to you that gives victory to your life as a Christian? You see, every Christian has been given the gift. But some are living defeated Christian lives, they are experiencing no victories, no spiritual success, no spiritual power because they have never unwrapped God's gift, they have never let God's power loose in their lives to live a new life.

Is that your experience? This morning if you feel you don't live the life God wants you to live; if you feel that you live a defeated spiritual life; if you have no power in prayer, no power to deal with trouble or sorrow or temptation, it may be that God's gift to you has never been unwrapped, it may be that you have not let the power of God's spirit loose in your life.

This happened in my own life. I became a Christian - I believed in Jesus. And God even called me into the ministry. But after a few years I was disappointed. I was successful in the ministry, but I knew it was the result of mostly human effort. There was little spiritual power in my life. And I began to pray. I said, "Lord, what's wrong with my life? Why don't I feel your presence in my heart more strongly? Why am I such a defeated Christian? Lord, in the Bible I read about the spiritual gifts, the spiritual power that I should have, and I don't have it. What is wrong, Lord?" And do you know, the Lord revealed to me that when I believed in Jesus I also received a gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit, but that I had never unwrapped his gift to me; I had never let His Spirit loose in my life. So, one day in my study I knelt down and I prayed. I said, "Father, you gave me the gift of the Holy Spirit. I want to surrender my life, my will; to that power already in me. Lord, so fill me with your Holy Spirit that your power may be at work in me and control my life." And, do you know, when I prayed that prayer, God filled me with his Spirit. My life has never been the same since. I know what it is to have the power of the Holy Spirit working in me; I know what it is to have spiritual gifts for ministry. It doesn't mean I'm perfect or that I don't have failures and disappointments, but it does mean that life has never been the same since. And, do you know, God has that spiritual power for you, too!

