

Sermon for Sunday, May 25, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"OPEN HEART SURGERY FOR A SONG"

Ephesians 5:15-20

Text: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Ephesians 5:18,19

Today marks a very special day in the Christian year. Today is Pentecost, the day in which we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those first Christians in Jerusalem. Pentecost ought to be very important to us for two reasons. First, Pentecost ought to be important because it is the time in which we celebrate the manifestation of the Third Person of the Trinity to the whole world. Second, Pentecost ought to be important to us because of the work that the Holy Spirit does in our hearts and in our lives. Today, on Pentecost Sunday, I want to talk about these two things.

Let's begin by talking about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when the third person of the Trinity was manifested or revealed in a very special way. The fact is, most people are not very aware of the third person of the Trinity. There are some people who believe only in God and by that they mean they believe in God the Father. They believe that there must be some great, supreme being who created the universe and who is the author of all things that exist. But there are some who take their belief one step further. They not only believe in a supreme being, but they also believe that God is a loving being who cares about men. As a consequence they also believe that God broke into our human condition in the person of Jesus Christ. They believe that Jesus is truly God, that his death on the cross somehow became necessary because of man's sins, and that somehow his death pays for our sins so that a loving, caring God who is also a just God can forgive us for our sins. And many people recognize how much we need that. Many people recognize that Jesus is more than just a good example. After all, our problem isn't a lack of good examples. We have got more examples now than we can follow. Even the teachings of Jesus, as fine as they are, are not what we need. We have got more good teachings already than we are able to follow. No, the sensitive man recognizes that he doesn't need a better teaching, a better moral code, or a better example. What he really needs is forgiveness because not only can he not live up to the best that Jesus teaches, he cannot even live up to the best that is in himself.

Isn't that true in your life? I know it is in mine. I not only cannot live up to the high standards of Jesus, I can't even live up to my own standards. So, as it turns out, new moral codes, better ethics, finer standards don't help me at all. As a matter of fact, they only worsen my condition because they make me even more aware of my failures. That is why the man who is spiritually sensitive sees in Jesus something more than a bringer of moral codes and standards of behaviour. He sees him as someone who brings forgiveness because that is what we all need.

So, there are some people who believe in God as the creator and sustainer of the universe--God above us--and then who also believe in God and in Jesus as this same loving God who breaks into our human condition to offer us forgiveness--God for us. Unfortunately, most of us stop right there. We believe in God the Father and in God the Son and we stop. But Pentecost is extremely important for the believer because it tells him a third thing about God and about himself. Pentecost tells him that since he can't be the person he ought to be that God not only forgives him he wants to provide him with the spiritual power to be better than he is.

Well, I don't know about you, but that is exactly what I need! I just can't be what I know I ought to be. No matter how hard I try to measure up to what God wants me to be, I can't do it. Is that your experience? Do you try to be loving to those who treat you badly and fail? Do you try to be forgiving and fail? Do you try to put others first and end up being selfish? I suspect we all find ourselves in that boat. So, if I want to be good, if I want to follow God's laws, if I want to be the kind of person God wants me to be, I discover that I need some help. If the fires of my love for God are to remain bright and hot, I need some help in stoking the furnace. Don't you need some help, too?

So, the Bible tells us that God sends us the Holy Spirit. And what does this Holy Spirit do for us? Well, the Bible says the Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in our hearts, in our inner being, and he brings spiritual power into our lives. He comes to help us in our efforts to live for God. He comes to give us inner, spiritual power to help us be what God wants us to be.

You can see then that this aspect, or part of God, or person of God is extremely important. We not only need a God above us who is the creator and sustainer of the whole universe; we not only need a loving, forgiving God who prays for our sins and brings us forgiveness as God for us; we also need a God who comes to give us spiritual power to live a new life for him, a God who is God with us. Yes, God above us, God for us, and God with us.

Now, that is why I said in the beginning that Pentecost is very important to the Christian. It is when we celebrate an event that ought to rank with Christmas. As Christmas celebrates the coming of Jesus who is God for us, so Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit who is God with us. Let me ask you this question: do you believe in God who reveals himself in three persons? Do you believe in a God who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable as God above us; in God who is loving, forgiving, who dies in our place as God for us? Do you believe in a God who comes to take up residence in human hearts and brings power to help individuals live for Him who is God with us? You see, that is the God of the New Testament. Until we know him in all three aspects, in all three persons, our knowledge is inadequate and defective.

But let me take this whole matter one step further. Notice what I just said very carefully. I said that unless you know God as God above us, God for us and God with us, your knowledge is inadequate. But knowing these things is not enough. Adequate knowledge won't save you. We must also have an adequate experience of God. It is not enough to know that Jesus is the Son of God who brings forgiveness, we must also receive him as Lord and Saviour. By the same token, it is not enough to know about the Holy Spirit. Did you realize that not once does the New Testament ask us if we believe in the Holy Spirit? No, the question the New Testament always asks is this: did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? I'd like to ask you that question this morning: did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? If not, then your experience of God is inadequate.

This brings me back to the second thing I wanted to say this morning. First, Pentecost is important because it reveals the fullness of God as God above us, God for us, and God with us. But second, Pentecost is important because of what God with us wants to do in our hearts.

Do you realize how much the Bible talks about hardness of heart? Remember what happened to the Pharaoh of Egypt when he refused to let God's people go? And it all happened because he hardened his heart. Remember what Israel suffered in the wilderness? And all because they hardened their hearts against God. Why, the Bible even tells us that the very disciples of Jesus often did not understand him because their hearts were hardened! (Mark 6:52)

Do you know what happens to people with hard hearts? Let me share a passage of Scripture that occurs just before our Scripture for this morning. There St. Paul writes, "...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart..." (Eph. 4:17-18) Then St. Paul tells us what to do. He says, "put off your old nature (get rid of your hard heart) which belongs to your former manner of life... and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

So that is what God wants you to do this morning. He wants to perform heart surgery on you and me. He wants to take away our hard hearts and give us new hearts. He wants to give us new hearts filled with the power of the Holy Spirit so that we sing and make melody to the Lord with all our hearts.

Do you have heart trouble this morning? From a physical standpoint, a lot of people have real heart trouble. Just last Sunday, a person attending our services had a heart attack up in the balcony. A number of you have had heart surgery to by-pass places that have become hardened. There are some of you here this morning who have pacemakers in your hearts to make them beat regularly. There are some of you here this morning with nitroglycrene tablets in your pocket or your purse because you have a heart problem. And undoubtedly there are a number of us present here this morning who will not be here twelve months from now because a heart failure will cause our deaths.

But there is a far more serious problem among us this morning. You see, there are a large number of us here this morning whose hearts are hard towards God. That hardness of heart will lead to our spiritual death and we will be lost eternally. If you knew your heart was defective in some way, would you go to the doctor and ask him to treat you? Wouldn't you want to do all the doctors told you to do? Well, how about your spiritual heart? Do you have heart trouble there? If you do, the Bible tells you what to do. It tells you to let God give you a new heart. That's God's promise to you. The Bible says, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances." (Ezek. 36:26,27)

So today is Pentecost when we celebrate the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The real question this morning is not whether you believe in the Holy Spirit, but have you received the Holy Spirit. Have you? Have you had open heart surgery? Have you let God operate on your heart so that he takes away your old, hard heart and gives you a new heart, a heart filled with the Holy Spirit so that you are singing and making melody to the Lord?

On that first Pentecost long ago when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers Peter told the crowd that gathered what had happened and how God was pouring out his Holy Spirit. Then the Bible says, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart..." Yes, God performed heart surgery. That day many believed and God gave them new hearts. This morning God wants to do the same thing for you. Will you let him give you a new heart?