

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“The Spirit In You: Promised Gift”

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Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:36-42

Do you recall receiving a gift some time in your life, a gift that sort of overwhelmed you? You obviously hadn’t paid for it, or earned it; you hadn’t done anything to deserve it. It just came! It was a gift that you realized you really needed!

Maybe it was not a physical gift, but some great deed of kindness or some affirming word. Maybe it was just someone’s presence at a significant time of sorrow or celebration in your life. It was a gift!

Jesus promised a gift; a gift long ago foretold, as Murphy just read. Jesus spoke to the disciples of someone who would be with them in an even greater way than He himself had been. He said to them that last night He was with them, “It is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Paraclete won’t come – Pastor Jay spoke about that last week, the Advocate, Counselor. If I do go away, then I will send Him to you.

And 50 days after the resurrection, the Holy Spirit did come with great signs and wonders amongst believers in Jesus in Jerusalem. And Peter stood before the divided and bewildered crowd around those who had been filled and said, “This, what you see and hear, this is from Jesus, whom you nailed to the cross and killed, but God raised; He is the One who has poured out from the Father what He promised.”

In this second week in our sermon series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, let us listen for how this gift came, and comes from Acts 2:36 – 42. [read passage]

At Peter’s preaching that day, the crowd who saw and heard the Spirit come upon Jesus’ followers, was divided; numbers of them scoffed. Many were moved with remorse, with deep

regret over what they had been part of concerning Jesus, that they had been part of his demise and they cried out, “What should we do?”

Have you ever cried out like that, by something that really moved you? I know I have. “What should we do?” the people cried out at that very real moment of conviction.

Peter says, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, and for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.”

It’s as if Peter said, come, acknowledge that the One you rejected is the very One that you know you need, Jesus Christ. Turn to the Lord and be baptized as a sign of your belief, and be washed of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (We wonder how we “get” the Holy Spirit; there it is.)

I’ll always remember the summer of 1981, my 2nd summer of college, when I was working in a small hotel on Lake Chautauqua, in upstate New York. My job was as one of the breakfast cooks (having responsibility for all the pancakes and the French toast every morning), and at lunch, I was the salad girl, never forgetting the day I had to make 50 pounds of waldorf salad.

That summer a fellow college student also working at the hotel continued to pose a question to me: Had I received the gift of the Holy Spirit? Well, that was a question!

I told her that I had accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior – the one to forgive my sins - at age 9, as only a 9-year-old at camp, sitting on a log outside her cabin, can do, and I confirmed that at age 14, my decision for Christ, and what my parents had committed over me years before at baptism, parents who had shown me so much of what it means to have the new life; and I was planning after college to become a missionary or to go to seminary. Yes, I have the Spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

She pursued this question with me all summer, for she doubted that I had the Spirit. She said I had to do something in addition to coming to Jesus, to pray hard, to seek, to be obedient in order to get the gift, the filling of the Spirit.

So I prayed “Dear God, please give your Spirit.” I prayed that all summer, and I suppose it finally dawned on me, through quiet times that I already had the Spirit. The Spirit was inside of me, because Jesus promised this. I had repented/turned, been baptized. And yes, as with all of us believers in Jesus, I was called to learn to *know the Spirit in me*, to listen, to delight in, to be filled and fueled by the Spirit, to surrender to the Spirit’s work in me, on me, through me to be taught and convicted and not to grieve the person of the Holy Spirit inside, this gift. Scripture says we can’t even know God without having born by water and by Spirit.

I am grateful for that summer encounter with my friend, and what her question prompted in me, and I'm grateful for those in other Christian faith traditions who inspire us to look more to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit's filling of us.

Peter's words that day were "Repent, and be baptized and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." It's a simple message, a world of change. God's very spirit and presence is in us, more ready to give than we are to ask- the One who helps us, strengthens, directs, teaches us, prays in us, cheers us on- and whose role is always to be a spotlight to what God the Father has done through the Son.

What we might notice about this passage as they heard Peter speak of Jesus Christ and His Spirit, it says "they were cut to the heart." I guess that means their hearts were open. They were in a place of need. Maybe that's when we, like them, can receive God's gift for all He is worth.

Maybe some of you were ministered to, as I was, by William Young's 2007 book, The Shack, which tells the story of a man named Mack, who through a horrendously painful experience in his life, moves further away from the God he only knew partly before this tragic event. But God, who loves Mack, woos him to the very place he needs to be, to a homey shack in the woods where Mack meets the three persons of the Trinity, and experiences such love, a knowing of himself more than he ever has, with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who all three work together to replenish Mack and show him the way back to fullness of life.

Fullness of life is what the early church knew, as the Spirit drew them into a powerful community, such that the world had never seen before; it's still that way as the Spirit is moving in and through the Church. And 3000 people turned and were baptized and drawn into a life of discipleship and into fellowship, and into the breaking of bread, and prayers and witness.

They were not alone!

Little 2-year-old Jason wailed as his parents handed him over to Miss Sarah one Sunday morning. It was the toddler's first time in the nursery at church while Mom and Dad attended the service – and he was not happy. Sarah tried to soothe him with toys and books, but everything was met with bigger tears and louder cries. Then she whispered five simple words in his ear: "I will stay with you." Peace and comfort came. That was just what he needed to hear.

"Learning to become aware of the presence of the Spirit," someone has written, "lies right at the heart of growth in life as believers." And so may we know the Spirit and experience Him, in ever deeper ways these coming weeks, as we explore through Scriptures his life-changing work in us, on us, and through us.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, you have the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, with you and in you and in me. Thanks be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!

