

May 21, 2017

The Holy Spirit is Present, is Powerful, and in You

#### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. AMEN

#### SERMON

Have you ever stopped to think what an awesome time the first century was for those who believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God? It wasn't an easy time by any means, but it had to be a very exciting time for the disciples as they were creating this community that Jesus spoke to them about. This kingdom of God that they were a part of and were tasked to invite others to come and be a part of as well. But it was a very difficult thing. The task was huge. This was something new.

And of course, it was coming from the Jews, the people of covenant. But trying to convince them that this man named Jesus from Nazareth was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God was not an easy task. After all, Jesus was only among the people for three years. He walked up and down all of Israel. He would preach in the synagogues and in the temple. He would teach. He'd perform miracles, some in front of a group of 5,000. Some that were only seen and witnessed by the twelve disciples. And now these disciples were tasked with the...the task to go and convince the same people that handed Jesus over to the Romans. And the Romans crucified. Now they had the job of trying to convince them that this same person was the Christ that they had looked for and prayed for.

That this was the same Messiah that they had cried out to God for. Even though he had been crucified. Not an easy task and yet that was the task given. They had to raise their voices. They had to go to the temple. They had to go throughout the lands. They had to go to the dispersed community of the Jews throughout the areas around Israel as well to try to teach and preach and show them that this Jesus that they've been telling them about or might have heard about or might have even witnessed his crucifixion. This was the man who was not only the Messiah but the Son of God. The one who was offering not simply to raise Israel back up to a place of prominence. But the one who brought forgiveness of sins to all people who offered a salvation that their faith in the law could not bring them.

There was a lot to do. There was a lot to say. There was a lot to share. And it could not just be in the hands of the disciples. Nor could it just be in the hands and voice of Paul. Paul never knew Jesus during his earthly ministry. Paul only knows the risen Lord. Paul had heard about Jesus and had rejected the idea of him being the Messiah. He could not fathom that this person who didn't obey the law as he felt as a Pharisee should be obeyed. He could not possibly be the Messiah. And these followers of his were leading good faithful Jews astray. And so, he was willing to persecute these people who did believe so that they would not be led astray or lead others astray.

Until he had that moment of conversion on that road to Damascus, when he was introduced to the risen Lord, then his life changed. And he became the voice to the Gentiles. And he would go to the different cities and preach in the synagogues, he would preach to the Jews as well. We already know what difficult task that was to try to change people's belief. That this was how God was moving them. He also had to preach to the Gentiles who had their own set of Gods. Had their own way of looking at life.

Had their own way of dealing with the world and the kingdoms of the world. He had to try to convince them that they should change all that they had been and all that they had done. To come to be a citizen of this kingdom of God, a God that they were just being introduced to. And yet with a God of love, a God of justice, a God of mercy. It was a big task.

That's one of the reasons why it wasn't just left for the Apostles and for Paul. That's why we hear in Peter's letter to the church. That first century church that they need to stand ready. Every person who is a part of this community, Ecclesia the church, needs to be ready to defend the hope that is in them. They have to be prepared to share why they believe. They need to stand up, to invite others. To say here is a way of hope, here is a way of life and living. Here is a way of salvation. And it's a way of justice for all people. Not just the rich. It's a faith of mercy, where we lift one another up. We forgive one another because we recognize that the God, the creator of all things has forgiven us our sins. Has called us to live together in peace in unity. That was the message.

And they had to not only proclaim it by word but live it in their lives. And they were sometimes persecuted for that because it went against what other people thought was the norm. The only way for people to be. Trying to get as much power and authority as possible. Trying to get as many resources so your life could be as easy as possible. And then there's this growing community that says, that doesn't have to be the way.

We can all live together. Matter of fact, that is what our creator wants for us. To live together in peace. To live together under the commandment of love. As opposed to living under the commandments of the earthly kingdoms that we happen to be born under or conquered where I was born. It was a message that had to be shared not just by the leaders but by everyone. It's the only way that community could grow beyond itself. It's the only way that the message could get out to people. And they could say, "Yes, this is a new way. This is a better way of living. This is a truer way of being in relationship with God and with one another." When we look beyond the differences that we can see in the faces of one another.

Where the values that are different from one kingdom to the next are pushed aside. And they live together as a community that cares for each other. That holds up justice for the poor and for the rich. That calls for people to have mercy on one another. That was the message of the first century church. And that message needs to be proclaimed now. Because somehow the church has gotten a little timid about the message. We've pulled back a little bit from that message of all people. And forgiveness of sins of all people and we begin to look at ourselves as special. Or sometimes we're just inundated with voices that talk about fear. Talk about anger. Talk about the differences. Talk about how they are not us. They don't believe like us, they don't live like us.

Well maybe that's because they haven't heard the message. Maybe you haven't shared with them your experience of faith in God. That's why it's so important for the voices of all people not just the leaders of the church. Not just the bishops, and archbishops, and presiding bishops or even priests or cardinals or (whatever you want to call them) the pastors of the churches. We all have a voice but the voice of every person is the voice that goes to the ends of the earth. The voice of each person of faith that can share that own personally story of God's hope, of God's salvation. Of the call to love beyond the surface. The call to care about every person. One of the things that the early church was known for. That people were in awe of was that this thing called the church, the Ecclesia, they were taking in the widows. They were taking in the orphans. They were making sure every person was cared about. And

the rich who were part of this Ecclesia were helping the poorest who were part of this Ecclesia. That's how the church was known. And sometimes it was persecuted for those very reasons because it went against the norms of the kingdom that they were living in. But it didn't matter. Because they knew what they were doing was right in the eyes of God. They knew it was right to take care of the weakest. They knew it was right to visit those who were sick. They knew it was right to visit those who were in prison. And to share with them the salvation from God. That's the message that we have to share. And not be timid about it.

Certainly, the voices that go against these things of justice, of hope, of salvation, of mercy. Those voices are loud and clear. You need to take care of yourself. You need to worry only about you because nobody else is going to worry about you. Well the church says that's not true. We worry about you. We want you to do your part. We don't care where you came from. We don't care how poor you are, how rich you are, we don't care where you came from. We only want you to know that the God and creator of all, has seen the good in humanity. Has given his son so that we can become a force, a kingdom of God in the world. Where we can hold up justice, and mercy, and hope, and the love of God.

And that's who we are, and that's who we will be until the day we die. And if we get punished for that, that's okay. It's not what we want, but that's okay. Until the world sees the hope and the love of God, the message has got to be. Everyone is invited to come, everyone is invited to participate. Everyone shares in the forgiveness of sins. Everyone is invited to be a part of the kingdom of God. And it could be a dangerous thing, it could be a scary thing. But we are called to not be afraid. We are called to proclaim from the rooftops what Jesus was sharing with his disciples that night. It's a message that the world needs. It's a message that God wants the world to hear. It's an invitation to all people.

We can't always decide how they will respond. But we do know that we are not proclaiming alone. It's not just me it is the Holy Spirit it is that advocate of Jesus' promises to his followers. That we received in baptism. And if you feel like the Holy Spirit hasn't been a part of your life and living. If you feel like the Holy Spirit hasn't been a part in your journey of faith. Then I have to say it's because you haven't asked. The Holy Spirit and God are present with us, will help lead us. Will help guide us, will help take the fear away. Give us the words to speak.

One of the things that I am complimented on the most in my ministry, is the ability to stand in front of a congregation (sometimes even larger than this...laughter) and to try to proclaim the gospel. Please believe me, and I've said this before, please believe me it has nothing to do with me. And I would not be able to stand before you and share with you the gospel if it were not for the power of the Holy Spirit. It's my prayer as I try to prepare a sermon it is the last prayer I pray before giving a sermon. The Holy Spirit is a powerful force. It can take our fear away. It can give us the words to speak. It can give us the courage to face the world that so many times is contrary to what we believe. And yet to proclaim the truth that we know. And we invite the Holy Spirit to be a part of our lives and expect the Holy Spirit to provide for us what is necessary at any given moment. Because I promise you, the Holy Spirit is present. The Holy Spirit is powerful. And the Holy Spirit is in you.