

*Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'* <sup>6</sup> *Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.* <sup>7</sup> *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.* <sup>8</sup> *When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:* <sup>9</sup> *in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;* <sup>10</sup> *in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;* <sup>11</sup> *and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:5-11)*

### **How Does the Holy Spirit Come?**

When I was growing up, my dad wanted to be a writer. His dream was to write novels. And I remember when I was little, he used to sit down in the basement and write. You could hear the typewriter clacking away. He wrote a couple of mystery novels. He and my mom even wrote a children's book about our St. Bernard. He did the text and she did the illustrations. But he never got published. He tried. He submitted his books to various publishers, but he could never break through. I'm sure there were days when he wondered, "How do you get a book published?" You know what? I still don't know the answer to that question, and I've researched getting a book published. I've discovered that there are literary agents out there whose job it is to walk your manuscript through the process – for a fee, of course. But it's hard even to get a real literary agent to look seriously at your book, to say nothing of a publisher. So, how does a book finally get into print? I don't know. To lots of would be writers all over the country, it's a mystery they can't solve.

In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus reveals another mystery that we would never figure out on our own. It has nothing to do with getting books published. But it is something that many people have thought about. Like my dad pounding away on his typewriter in the basement, some Christians have spent years of their lives pounding away, trying to get the Holy Spirit to come. That's the mystery. Today is the Festival of Pentecost. In our lesson from the book of Acts, we heard how the Holy Spirit descended in power on the apostles in Jerusalem and enabled them to do miracles. For two thousand years, people have been trying to repeat that event. A man named Simon Magus once offered to pay the apostles for the ability to make the Holy Spirit come. Since then, movement after movement has arisen trying to get the Holy Spirit to come – not always with tongues of fire, but always with miracles, like speaking in tongues. All those efforts have misunderstood the lesson of Pentecost. So, my friends, **how does the Holy Spirit come?**

#### **I.**

**Jesus sends him.** That's what he said in our gospel lesson for today. The events in our gospel lesson took place almost two months before the day of Pentecost. It was Maundy Thursday. Jesus and his disciples had gathered to celebrate his last Passover on this earth. After eating and instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus began a long conversation with his disciples about what was going to happen and what it would mean for their faith. Jesus led them down from the upper room and through the darkened streets of Jerusalem out to the Garden of Gethsemane. And he talked the whole way. These words were part of that conversation.

Jesus told them that he was going to leave them. He knew his news saddened them. They loved him. They had left everything to follow him. They believed he was the promised Savior and that he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. But now he was going away. You and I, of course, know the story. That night in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas Iscariot came with a mob and they arrested Jesus. His disciples ran away while Jesus was dragged off to face a series of rigged trials and then torture and death. Already at that moment when he was dragged away, Jesus left them, because after that, they never really spent the kind of time with him that they had for the last three years.

But they did see him again. Jesus died on Friday and he rose on Sunday. Over the next forty days, he appeared to them again and again, even though he didn't stay with them. When Jesus said these things, he was really looking past all that to ten days before Pentecost, when he ascended into heaven. After that, the disciples did not see him as they had before, even though Jesus did occasionally appear to some of them in the years to come. From Ascension day on, the Church would know Jesus only by faith.

That leaving was sad. So, Jesus said, **“It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”** What was Jesus talking about? The day of Pentecost. The Counselor is the Holy Spirit. Jesus called him that to underline his role in guiding us through life. By God’s plan, the Counselor would only come after Jesus returned to heaven. On the day of Pentecost, Jesus poured the Holy Spirit out onto his Church to give that Church the gifts it needs to do the work Jesus created the Church to do. That was so important that Jesus told his disciples that it was better than him staying with them. All the miracles of that day – the tongues of fire and the ability to instantly be able to speak in languages they had never learned – were signs of God working, signs that God’s plan is best for the Church.

But do you know what the real miracle of that day was? Peter stood up and preached one of the most powerful sermons in all of history. That was a miracle. God took a fisherman, a man with a talent for speaking without thinking, and he made him one of the greatest gospel preachers of all time. But even that wasn’t the greatest miracle of that day. What was? Three thousand people came to faith. Three thousand sinners were cut to the heart and then were baptized and for given and joined the church that day. And it only happened because Jesus went back to heaven where he rules all things for the good of the Church, and he sent the Spirit to work through us and the gospel we proclaim.

No efforts on our part will ever cause a miracle like that to happen. Simon Magus couldn’t buy it and neither can we. While God uses the offerings we bring to support the preaching of the gospel, it’s the preaching, not the offerings that are the power of God. No programs we invent, no fervent prayers we offer, no fasting or self-imposed sacrifices or emotional manipulation will bring the Holy Spirit on the Church. He’s already here! He came because Jesus sent him two thousand years ago. And he is always working. We don’t need tongues of fire and the miraculous ability to speak foreign languages to prove that, so he no longer gives those abilities. But he continues to do the real miracle: he reaches into hearts and he makes us believers. He strengthens our faith and gives us peace. He guides us through all the trials and challenges of life and he brings us home to heaven. On the way, he gives us all the gifts we need to share the good news about him. All that Jesus began for us, on the first day of Pentecost.

## II.

I don’t know if my dad was waiting for some kind of miracle – some editor would read his manuscript and be convinced it was the next great American novel, or he’d meet some guy on the street who turned out to be the guy to make it happen, or some even more unlikely sequence of events would get it published. All I know is that it never happened. I have known quite a number of people who are looking for another kind of miracle. They want Pentecost to happen again today. Many people through history thought that their preaching signaled a new wave of God’s grace. But Pentecost could only happen once. It began the final age of this world’s existence, the age of the New Testament Church.

God never promises us that we’ll experience tongues of fire on our heads. I’ve been studying foreign languages since I was fourteen years old – six languages over forty years – and not once did any of them just come to me in an instant. While I’ve dreamed of this congregation doubling or tripling in membership – and I still hold out hope that God will grant us growth – I doubt that I will ever preach one sermon that leads to three thousand baptisms, even with the help of the internet. But that doesn’t mean that the miracle of Pentecost is over. That miracle is about more than three thousand people. It’s about the millions, even billions of people who have come to faith in Christ in the two thousand years since Jesus poured the Holy Spirit out on the Church. The Counselor is still doing the miracle of Pentecost today. So how does it happen? **How does the Holy Spirit come? The gospel brings him.**

That’s why you have to understand what the real miracle was. Sure, the fire and the languages were miracles. I can’t make those things happen. But even less can I give a fisherman the gifts to proclaim the good news, to say nothing of taking a heart that is dead in sin and making it a living heart of faith. Those are the miracles that continue today.

You and I were born dead in sin. That is the reason that it’s so hard for us, even today, to lead truly holy lives. Our hearts are corrupt. They always want something different, something spectacular, like tongues of fire and a new Pentecost. They are never content with something as ordinary as a middle-aged guy standing up here and preaching about Jesus. But that’s what God gives us.

Jesus said, **“When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”** The Holy Spirit works through preaching, specifically here, preaching of the law. He convicts the world in regard to sin because they don’t believe in him. It is a sin to reject Jesus and the Holy Spirit’s job is to proclaim that truth. The Spirit convicts the world in regard to righteousness because it can’t see Jesus. Without him, we humans have to be perfect to reach eternal life. Not just good, but perfect. No one can achieve that. The Counselor convicts the world in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned. That’s the devil. All that he has done for thousands of years to obstruct the gospel, to drag people away from God, has all been brought to light. The devil will pay for leading Adam and Eve into sin. He will pay for the billions of people who have died and gone to hell because they embraced the lies he tells. The Holy Spirit proclaims that condemnation.

But he does it so that he can proclaim the gospel. The Holy Spirit convicts us so that he can forgive us. You and I are sinners born and bred and we show it every day. We show it every time we’re bored with the same old gospel message and every time we want some miracle cure for the church’s ills. And we show it every time we fail to put in the hard work that is necessary to build the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We deserve to have the Holy Spirit condemn us before God himself. But that’s not what the Counselor does *to us*. He does that to the unbelieving world, but to us, he whispers a message of peace and forgiveness. Jesus died for the sin we were born with. Jesus died for every sin that ever came out of our hearts. Jesus died for all our words and actions and all our thoughts and feelings and desires that deserve to be condemned. Jesus died for all the times we were bored with the gospel and wanted some bigger miracle. His blood wiped all that sin away. Jesus rose and we are forgiven. He ascended into heaven so that we can follow him there.

And that message brings the Holy Spirit. He comes and does a miracle that changes our lives forever. He comes when we proclaim that message through the water of holy baptism and he gives faith to our infant children. He comes when we proclaim that message in the body and blood of Christ hidden in, with and under the bread and wine of communion and he forgives us again and renews our faith. He comes every time you and I gather to hear that good news.

And the miracle of Pentecost never stops, as long as this world continues. We don’t see tongues of fire when we gather here. But the miracle keeps happening. We don’t instantly know foreign languages that we never studied, but God guides our efforts to communicate the good news. And the miracle of Pentecost keeps on rolling. God works through us every time we share the gospel with someone else. God works through us as we send missionaries around the world. The miracle continues. The Holy Spirit comes because Jesus sent him. The Holy Spirit comes through the gospel. He comes to you. Amen.