

The story of Pentecost is a story of wind and fire; of rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire on the heads of the Apostles. Wind and fire are our images for talking about God as spirit -- the Holy Spirit... Red, the color of fire and blood is the color of Pentecost.

And of course the story from Acts, of the Apostles being given the gift of the spirit and being able to tell of the marvelous works of God is most familiar to us, and it's sometimes foremost in our minds when we talk about our faith to others. We're given the promise that the spirit will be with us to give us assurance and comfort and to guide us as we interact with others.

Well.... Let me tell you a little story:

I served as a chaplain at a county hospital in the San Francisco Area as a part of my seminary education. I remember dealing with a patient, one of my first... I walked into the room, all cheery, and introduced myself to this guy, he was kind of a grey color, and all his hair was gone, and we talked about the weather and stuff like that, then after a few more superficial preliminaries, I begin to tell this guy about Jesus. Every once in a while, he would interrupt this almost flawless witness I was laying out and talk about uncertainty, at which point, I would launch into some other example (*right out of my own life, mind you*) of what Jesus had done for me. He interrupted me again and talked about fear, to which I prescribed faith in Jesus as the perfect antidote... And he nodded, and didn't say much after that, and when I was finished, he thanked me for my visit. I told him I would be back in a few days and visit him, and he just nodded and smiled...

And it occurred to me that I was great -- magnificent, actually...

I was really proud of this case; I wrote it up and submitted it to the Chaplain group as an example of sharing the Good News, and my supervisor agreed that this was a fine witness, and worthy of any sermon, then he said, "Bob, this man is dying alone of cancer in a county hospital -- and he's afraid of death and what that means. Why didn't you at least give him a chance to share that with you?" I said, that's not what I felt I should do, that I thought I was "called" to tell him about Jesus -- and my supervisor nodded and smiled... And it occurred to me that I may not have been as magnificent as I thought I was -- and at the end of our conversation, It was clear to me that the inner voice I was not listening to was **not** the Holy Spirit.

I resolved that I would be a better listener, and not pursue my own agenda when I visited him again, but when I went back, he was already dead....

I think I sold God short that day. My assumption was that the Holy Spirit was empowering me to TALK about Jesus to this man, and of course that's what I acted upon -- instead, I was being called to BE Jesus for him: to accept his fear and to share his uncertainty, and to grieve for and with him, and that's what I never got a chance to act on. It's a lesson I'll never forget.

And let me share that lesson with you more explicitly: Often we sell God short and underestimate what he wants of us and what the Holy Spirit will empower us to do. The

bottom line of the last six weeks of lessons from John has been that **talk is cheap**. *When we feel it's our duty to set people straight about matters of faith – when somehow we get the impression that what we say will mean more than what we do – well, that's the amplified voice of our own egos calling us, not the Holy Spirit.*

Action is the measure of discipleship.

You see, I think it's almost always, that we're called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to BE Jesus for someone, not just talk about him or bandy words about him. And that's a staggering thought... In the many and various ways we've been given gifts for ministry, we're called to use those gifts and BE Jesus, and to carry the cross of expectant listening to what God would have us do. And if we **do** that faithfully, people will **ask** us what makes our lives so full of meaning and purpose, and **then** the Holy Spirit will give us the words to share with them.

“Peace I give to you, my own peace I leave with you. As the father has sent me, So I send you.”

Not only are we called be Jesus to those around us, He has given us the gift of his spirit that abides within us. We have it within us to **be** Jesus for one another. And the Holy Spirit will be with us and will guide us in that.

We have it within us to work miracles of love and healing as well as to have them worked upon us. We have it within us to bless with him and forgive with him, and to heal with him, and once in a while maybe even to grieve and share pain with him at another's pain or to rejoice with him at another's joy almost if it were our own. And once in a while, **if** our witness is authentic, someone will **ask** us why our lives are the way they are, and **then** the Holy Spirit will guide us in what to say about Jesus.

God calls and empowers us through the Holy Spirit to be Jesus to the world around us, and most often, God calls us from out of the ordinary things in our lives, and unfortunately, we tend to tune out the ordinary (sometimes in favor of waiting for a bolt of lightning or a burning bush; sometimes because we are just so used to the ordinary)... He speaks to us through our neighbors, through our friends, often through our spouses; but because we are used to hearing their voices, we often don't realize who is speaking. He speaks to us through the situations which crop up in our everyday lives and because we've already experienced them, we assume we know what they mean.

Well,

I've said this before: Pay attention: Look and listen to what God is telling you -- Look and listen to what your brothers and sisters are asking you — not with your own agenda and preconceptions, but with your eyes, and your ears and your hearts.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.