

Jesus
“Walking in the Spirit”
John 16:13-15

May 23, 2010
The Reverend Fitz Neal

Pentecost

It’s Pentecost Sunday—the church holiday nobody knows what to do with. Ever walked into a department store and said “Happy Pentecost”? It would be sort of fun to try, wouldn’t it? We could send out Pentecost cards and hold Pentecost brunches with some kind of food appropriate to the occasion—something really spicy, like red hot jalapeno salad, or super hot Thai cashew chicken. We could go to the office on Monday, stake out a position around the coffee maker and ask everybody, “How was your Pentecost?”

Maybe not. Yet what we remember on this Sunday every year is as important as Christmas and Easter. Without what happened on the first Pentecost there would be: no faith, no experience of the presence of God, there would be no grace to receive and no forgiveness to offer. We would not understand the essence of the Bible—in fact there probably wouldn’t BE a Bible. We would not know the heart of the Father; we would awaken each day with overwhelming mountains of fear and spiritual confusion facing us. We would have no inner source of spiritual power for life. We would never be sure of the love of God, and would have little to no love to share with each other. There would be no inner push toward conscience.

Above all we would have no personal knowledge or experience of Jesus Christ – his grace and salvation, his righteousness, his justification, his words or teachings or goodness. We would have nothing that we live by every day, but seldom go over, as I just did.

Apart from the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing. Between the first advent of Christ 2,000 years ago and his second advent, we live in the age of the Spirit. We do well to honor the Spirit today in worship – it is by the Spirit that we are able to worship.

The Spirit of Christ

But why is it that we know so little about the Holy Spirit? Is it because we don't talk about the Spirit enough? Or is it because as Christians who call themselves Presbyterian, we are skittish about all that 'spirit' language? You know what I mean: speaking in tongues, loud, exuberant sensationalism, and backwoods shouting preachers.

Actually, no. That's not really why we don't know more *about* the Spirit. The real reason why there is not as much emphasis on the spirit as you would think, is because that's the way the Spirit *wants* it.

We learn this from Jesus' most extensive teaching on the Holy Spirit, contained in his last supper discourse in John 13-17. This one little section 16:13-15, tells us a great deal about the Spirit:

- **We learn that the Spirit is a 'he' not an 'it.'** The personal pronoun he is used 9 times in these 3 verses. The Spirit is the third person of the triune God and is to be worshipped and glorified as God.
- **We learn that the Spirit is truth** – Truth is not so much a gathering of correct information as it is the personal presence of God, who then becomes the center and source of all that is true.
- **The spirit guides us into all truth** – There is truth and there ARE falsehoods, especially spiritually and morally. The Spirit is there to lead God's people in the direction of truth and to protect us from falsehood.
- **This truth the Spirit guides in is always connected to the rest of God's revelation** – “Whatever he HEARS he will speak...” the Spirit will never guide us against that which is clearly revealed.
- **The Spirit's main work is to glorify Christ** – “He will take what is mine and declare it to you.”
 - The Spirit desires that our focus would NOT be on the Spirit, but on the Son and on the Father.

- This is very important:
 - Justification
 - Faith – conversion & daily trust
 - Sanctification
- These are Christ's – they aren't ours. They are imputed to us to our lives by the Spirit.

Walk in the Spirit

So what do we do about the Spirit? That's really the wrong question. It's much better to ask, what does the Holy Spirit do about *us*? What *does* the Spirit do with us? He makes Christ real and places his merits and benefits upon us; and then gives us the power to live every day in Christ.

Ok...but is there something WE can do to be connected with God through the Spirit?

I'm so glad you asked. Yes. We can walk in the Spirit. In Galatians 5:25 we hear these words, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Or IN the Spirit. This phrase is repeated throughout the epistles whenever the Spirit is talked about

To walk by the Spirit actually means to live in the Spirit. The same word in Greek is used for living life day-to-day, and walking. You live. You walk – you walk through life by doing certain things habitually. Hopefully they are good habits! They're part of your daily life – you never wake up – or at least I hope you never wake up and decide to re-decide and re-learn everything you do by habit... "Shall I use my legs to move from the bedroom to the closet? Or shall I crawl? Will I be left-handed or right-handed? Shall I brush my teeth? Or not?" No! we just do those things – they are a normal part of life – of our daily walk.

You don't think ABOUT these activities, you learned them growing up until they are that *through* which you do all kinds of things without having to think and decide about it first.

It's like walking itself – when you first learn to walk it takes concentration on every step. But after you learn and gain experience, you don't concentrate on

walking at all – you let walking be that through which you do all kinds of other things.

It's like that with the Spirit – Paul says over and over again... you HAVE the Spirit by faith in Christ, therefore walk in the Spirit – live by the Spirit so habitually that you aren't even thinking about it anymore.

Jesus called the Spirit the Paraclete – or the one called alongside to encourage and accompany you in life. God the Spirit walks beside us every moment. Our job is to get in step with him. And then walk every day beside him – continuing to match our steps with his until we don't even think about it – it's just supernatural.

Eugene Petersen tells a story about walking that helps us understand this...

Some years ago Jan and I spent a year in Pittsburgh. We were in a new place where the streets and the people and the work were all unfamiliar. We had left the routines and rituals of thirty years behind us. We felt the strangeness, missed the familiar, and deliberately set out to make ourselves at home in this new calling, to fit in. One of the things we did was to take a walk each day at noon to a park a mile or so away, strolling around a large pond, observing the birds and plant life, and reflecting on the meaning of this abrupt change in our lives and how it might play out in the years ahead. One day as we were walking to our meditation pond, a man on a bicycle passed us, then suddenly braked and waited for us to catch up with him. Without introduction or preface he asked, "How long have you been married?" We were startled by the out-of-the-blue abruptness, but managed a puzzled but courteous, "Thirty-three years."

"I knew it," he said. "Do you realize that you walk in perfect step with one another? I mean absolutely synchronized perfect. My wife and I have been married for five years and we haven't got it down yet. We're always just micro-seconds off." That was it. He was back on his bike and on his way.

We resumed our walk, pleased with ourselves that across thirty-three years of marriage we had mastered this miracle of walking together in perfect rhythm. We had no idea we had achieved something in our marriage that

*could stop a bicyclist in his tracks. This required comment and further conversation. But the moment we became self-conscious about it, we couldn't do it. WE felt clumsy, un-coordinated. The harder we tried to recover our marital rhythm, the worse it got. Eventually we quit trying and just went back to walking. We did observe, though, that 'walking in perfect step, doesn't come from setting that as a marital goal and disciplining ourselves to an hour of practice each day.'*¹

It's simple, really – “Learn to walk in, or by means of the Spirit. Do it so regularly and so naturally that you get in step with the Spirit so you're your gait matches his gait.” How?

- **Pray about it** – every day
- **Walk in daily absolute trust and dependence on the Spirit** for everything you can think of
- **Apply what you know from scripture** – do it.
- **Rely on the Spirit's power** – power isn't about sensationalistic things – it's the ability to do what you know God wants you to. That's real power.

Conclusion

We are about to begin a Summer of prayer. One of my prayers for us is that we will learn what this means – to walk in the Spirit. Daily to let God the Holy Spirit be the source of our living, praying, working, and family lives. As we do that, what I know from this Bible passage is that Christ will become more and more real, and the Father more known, loved, and followed.

¹ Eugene Petersen, *Practice Resurrection*, pp. 178-179.