

Sermon 4: The Uniqueness of Jesus: “Jesus alone meets our deepest hunger”

Pentecost is the anglicised form of the Greek word for 50th and refers to the 50th day after Passover. As we read the New Testament we note that Jesus appeared to the Disciples for 40 days after the Resurrection and then ascended into heaven. Ten days later we read that the Holy Spirit came upon the one hundred and twenty gathered in the Upper Room. As we continue to think this morning about the uniqueness of Jesus we will consider how Jesus alone satisfies our deepest hungers because he invites us to receive the Holy Spirit. It is as we are willing to receive his Spirit that we will more deeply know what it is to be truly satisfied for we will know what it means to have communion with God.

In order to help us better understand what it means to receive the Holy Spirit I want to use this balloon as an illustration.

A “dead balloon” -- has no life. It continues to lie wherever you put it. It doesn't move. It has no power. Take a "dead balloon" and blow in it. What happens? It's full of air; but it is still dead, going nowhere until that power is released. [As an illustration, the "powered balloon" can be released.] Under the "spirit's power", the balloon can move. It goes out. However, when the wind power within the balloon is released, you don't know where the balloon is going to go; but you know it's going somewhere.

Jesus did not give the disciples the Holy Spirit's power so that they could stay behind locked doors in fear. Jesus said to them "As the Father has sent me so I send you." In saying this he was wanting to them to realize that it was as they went out from the upper room filled with the Holy Spirit's presence that they find true meaning and purpose in their lives.

Let's return to our balloon. Now what happens to the balloon after it has “spent” its power? It seems dead again. It's flat. There's no more “spirit/breath” within it. On one hand we are not like that balloon. Jesus promises that the Spirit will be with us forever. We will never run out of the Holy Spirit's power. On the other hand, we read in Acts that the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. Their filling didn't just happen once, but over and over again. We also need to be refilled. Weekly we come together as the church to be refilled. To receive Jesus' Spirit again in the hearing of the word and in the sharing of sacrament and through the fellowship of the saints. What

happens to a filled balloon that doesn't use the power within? Over time, the power leaves. The balloon, without doing anything, will go flat. The same is true with muscles. Muscles that aren't used, become useless through atrophy. The same happens with faith. However as we realize that we have been given the Holy Spirit we recognize that to receive him into our souls satisfies our deepest hunger. Let me explain.

If we were to enumerate all our hungers, we might be surprised at how many legitimate hungers there are. The hunger for love, the hunger for truth, the hunger for meaningful work, the hunger for acceptance, the hunger to express and create, the hunger for exercise, the hunger of the mind for learning, the hunger for significance.

Here is the point. Some of our individual pursuits may meet some of these hungers. Education may bring knowledge. Romance may bring a sense of belonging. Accomplishments may bring a sense of significance. Wealth may bring some material items within reach. Going to the gym will enable us to exercise the body. However when we make the attaining of these hungers the primary goal of life not only do we remain unfulfilled, but in their very pursuit comes a disorientation that misrepresents where the real satisfaction comes from. This is very important for us to realize.

A book by Jon Krakauer *Into thin Air* relates the hazards that plagued the spring 1996 expedition to Mount Everest. The attempt to reach the summit resulted in a great loss of life. Some circumstances were out of their control, but fundamental mistakes cost them dearly. Some of those mistakes were made while still within the reach of solutions.

One of those who lost his life was Andy Harris, one of the expeditions leaders. Harris had stayed at the peak past the deadline that the leaders had set. On his descent, he became in dire need of oxygen. Harris radioed his predicament to the base camp, telling them of his need and that he had come upon a cache of oxygen canisters left by the other climbers, all empty. Those who had already passed by the canisters on their own return from the summit knew that they were not empty, but full. Even as they pleaded with him on the radio to make use of them, it was to no avail. Already starved for oxygen Harris continued to argue that the canisters were empty. (*Into Thin Air*: 187-88).

The problem was that the lack of what he needed so disorientated his mind that though he was surrounded by a restoring supply he continued to complain of its absence. The

very thing he held in his hand was absent in his brain and ravaged his capacity to recognize what he was clutching in his grasp.

What oxygen is to the body, the Holy Spirit is to the soul. Without our being filled with him all other hungers will be improperly perceived. In fact, in like manner, if over a prolonged period of time a person lives without a recognition of their need to be filled by the Spirit, they conclude that the communion he makes possible seems worthless.

As we live in the power of the Holy Spirit we are free to trust God in ways that will see us surrender control so that he can be more fully in control. But just as the disciples were to move out into the world in a particular way so are we. Look at verse 19-20 of John 20: We read Jesus saying to the disciples: "Peace be with you." After he said this he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

These verses teach us something very important about what it means to live under the Holy Spirit's power. Notice that Jesus says to the disciples "Peace be with you." The meaning of this greeting is understood by what comes next. Having said "peace" Jesus shows them his hands and his side. That he shows them the place where the wounds left by the nails and the spear that had pierced his side immediately after saying "peace" to them is very important. He doesn't do this because they would not otherwise have recognized him. Rather it is as the one who suffered that he presents himself to them. It is like saying "Please don't think I have left all that behind!" We can say that it reminds us that the resurrection is not about turning away from life poured out in forgiveness on the Cross. Jesus didn't say to them peace be with you because although the other side thought they had won, my resurrection shows them I won after all! Let's join the winning side and reap the benefits. Rather Jesus asserts that his death on the Cross was effective and accomplished the purpose for which Jesus died.

As I reflected on this verse I saw afresh the wonderful coherence in John's Gospel. In the opening chapter the first title given to Jesus is by John the Baptist is at verse 29: "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". John is declaring that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness and grace for he takes away our sin. And now here in chapter 21 we see the marks in Jesus, the Lamb, who saves us because of what he did on the Cross. It is as we appropriate for ourselves that fact that we are forgiven

in Christ that our deepest need is met.

This is such a different understanding of forgiveness to the one found in the Koran. In Islam to be worthy to attain forgiveness requires of men and women unrelenting self control in the service of God by means of good works and prayer. It says in the third chapter of the Koran: [3.25] “Then how will it be when We shall gather them together on a day about which there is no doubt, and every soul shall be fully paid what it has earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly...” You see Islam teaches that at the end God will judge the works of people. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will enter into paradise, because of what they have earned. The rest will be consigned to hell. In a book called “Understanding the Essentials of the Islamic Faith”, Islamic scholar Fethullah Gullen writes: “Following death, the spirit is taken to the Presence of God. If it led a good, virtuous life in the world and accomplished refinement, the angels charged with taking it to the Presence of God wrap it in a piece of cloth made of satin and take it, through heavens and all inner dimensions of existence, to the Presence of God.”

How different this is from what Peter says in the last verse of the passage we had today from Acts: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” How different this is from what Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Then in Titus 3:4 Paul writes “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

Did you catch the last bit of that? As we are renewed in the Holy Spirit we come to know more fully the forgiveness of God. And it is in knowing this that our deepest need is met so that we can be like balloons that are sent out.

Verse 22 underscores this point. Here we read that Jesus breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit”. He then goes on to say “If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any they are retained” What does this mean? I think it can be understood at two levels. On the literal level it means that we have been given the Holy Spirit so that we can forgive those who sin against us and not hold onto their sins. However, if we choose to retain their sins they will be retained. But if we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit we will follow in the example of Jesus.

However I also think it means that the primary work we are called to as the church is to bear witness to the fact that forgiveness is a gift given to us at the Cross. It is the call and responsibility of those who call themselves Jesus followers to live in such a way that we are sent out to live out the message of the Cross. That message is that our deepest hungers are met when we see that we can be a forgiven people not only after we die but now. And this dear ones is what happens whenever we gather to share in broken bread and the cup. In this simple meal life finds its true meaning in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' death in the past is remembered in the present and points to the future when we will break bread with him in eternity.