

May 21, 2023
WHAT'S MY JOB?
[based on Act 1:6-14]

One night, a wife found her husband standing over their infant's crib. As she watched him looking down at their very first baby, she saw on his face, a mixture of emotions – disbelief, doubt, delight, amazement, enchantment, scepticism.

Touched by this unusual display, and the deep emotions it aroused, with eyes glistening, she slipped her arm around her husband.

“A penny for your thoughts” she said.

“It's amazing!” he replied.

“I just can't see how anybody can make a crib like that for only \$106.50!!”

Here lay one of the greatest miracles in God's creation, and all this father saw was a crib. He didn't see what lay within, but he isn't unique.

Many times, people look upon God's handiwork and only see the outside manifestations – never the miracle that lies within. It works that way with many things, whether it be the miracle of the birth of a new baby, or the miracle of the birth of a new Christian.

Acts 2:38 tells us that something very exceptional lies within each Christian. When we obey Jesus by repenting of our sins and being baptised in the Christian faith, we have the promise that we shall receive the 'gift of the Holy Spirit'. In fact, in Ephesians 1:13 we're told that God's Holy Spirit is a mark of God's ownership of us. “Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

There are those who believe that the Holy Spirit is an inanimate object, like the crib which held that baby, instead of the miracle inside it. Theologically, these people accept the idea that God's Holy Spirit can live within us, but they don't think He does very much. They are missing out on the miracle of what that Holy Spirit can *mean* for us.

It's easy to see how this can happen. There are churches that teach bizarre and unbiblical things about the Holy Spirit. However, we shouldn't allow those, or any other distractions, to cause us to forget the uniqueness that God's Spirit can have in our lives.

Some people in the Presbyterian Church in Canada change the subject when the Holy Spirit is discussed. It's considered a bit too 'Pentecostal' – it doesn't seem to fit with our rather 'conservative' ways.

Perhaps we feel that statements like “being saved” are a little too extreme for the likes of us.

Well, maybe some denominations do go a little overboard in their language regarding the Holy Spirit, for our taste at least, but we must not lose track of the fact that one of the last acts of Jesus, before He left this earth, was to tell us about how important the Holy Spirit would be for us both now and in the future.

“Let me assure you, it is better for you that I go away. I say this because when I go away, I will send the Helper to you. But if I did not go, the Helper would not come. When the Helper comes, he will show the people of the world how wrong they are about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment.”

So, Jesus was trying to explain that He was sending His Spirit in His place. The Spirit was to be Jesus’ CONNECTION to us – His power within us ... to help us in our prayers; to help us understand the deep messages of God’s Word; to guide us; to teach us; and to empower us.

But perhaps the most intriguing thing the Holy Spirit was sent to do is implied in Acts 1:8 where the disciples were told that FIRST, they would receive the Holy Spirit, and THEN they should be witnesses. Now doesn’t that seem peculiar? Shouldn’t it be the other way around? The disciples had been with Jesus through His entire ministry. They had been trained by Jesus, sat at His feet and absorbed His teachings, and even gone into the surrounding cities to preach that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Why not just start witnessing and preaching the Gospel right then and there?

Well, they could have, but they would have lacked the power to witness effectively! If they had begun witnessing *without* the Holy Spirit, it wouldn’t have had the same power. And it would have been frustrating, like a man using a hand trimmer on his lawn when he had a gas mower sitting in the shed. He would still get the job done – it would simply be more difficult.

Have you ever felt frustrated or embarrassed in attempting to witness – talking to people about Jesus, or inviting them to church? They don’t seem to listen to us. They politely put us off. They seldom come to church – too many other things to do. Especially at this time of year, when you drive in to church, it is highly probable that you will see men working on their roofs, folks putting yard sale signs on telephone poles and people mowing their lawns.

At times we probably feel it would be easier to witness if we could be like Lucy in the old Peanuts cartoon. She tells Charlie Brown that she would have made a great evangelist. Charlie asks her how she came to that conclusion. She tells Charlie that she convinced a boy at school that her religion was better than his.

Charlie asked, "How did you do that?"

Lucy answered, "I hit him over the head with my lunch box!"

It's my belief that part of our frustration in witnessing, can come from not understanding the pivotal role that the Holy Spirit plays in helping us share our faith.

You and I don't have to change people's hearts with regard to salvation – that's the Spirit's job. *We are the witnesses!* In a court room there is a judge, a prosecutor, a defence attorney, the defendant, and witnesses. Who gives the testimony? The witnesses do. Do the witnesses prosecute or convict the defendant? NO! Witnesses ... witness – and they do their best to give honest, true testimony, because they realize that the verdict may hinge on how well they witness. Their only job is testifying.

Convicting people of their sins, and convincing them of the need for righteousness and of the closeness of judgment is the Spirit's job – NOT OURS. In 1 Corinthians 2:3-5, even Paul realized how much he needed God's Spirit to be successful. "I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

The late Rev. Jim Hutchison, my friend, mentor, and pastor when we attended St. Columba in Belleville, told me the story of an event that occurred in the first church he served. A young man came frequently to church, but wouldn't make a decision to become a member there. One day, out of the blue, he told Jim the time had come. Jim smiled and jokingly asked, "Was it because of my powerful preaching, my good looks or the precision of my delivery?" The young man simply replied, "Actually, sir, I finally had a personal nudge from the Holy Spirit."

Indulge me in one more preacher story. A skeptic, promised British preacher, Alexander MacLaren, that he would attend his church for four Sundays when MacLaren was to speak on the main tenets of Christianity.

He was true to his word and after the fourth Sunday, he presented himself for church membership declaring he had received Christ as his Saviour.

MacLaren was delighted and like Rev. Jim, couldn't resist the impulse to ask what brought him to this decision? Which one of the sermons did the trick? The skeptic replied, "Your sermons, sir, were helpful, but they were not what finally persuaded me."

Apparently, after church one Sunday, he helped an elderly lady on a slippery sidewalk. She looked up into his face and said, "I think you must be a Christian by the way you are helping me." The skeptic replied that he wasn't quite sure that he was a Christian.

The elderly lady said, "I wonder if you would like to know my Saviour, Jesus Christ? He is everything in the world to me, and I would like you to know Him too."

It was a simple comment, but with the working of the Holy Spirit, it changed the skeptic's heart, as no power-filled sermon could ever do.

Brothers and sisters, pray that God's Spirit will prepare the hearts of the people we want to talk to and then trust that the Holy Spirit will do His part.

Listen for God to guide us in the direction of the people He wants us to speak with, then speak about what God had done in our lives and what He means to us.

Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. AMEN