

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, June 9, 2019

Rev. John Tapscott

“GOT THE SPIRIT?”

Romans 8:14-17

Some years ago a piece of music was written entitled “Got the Spirit.” It was actually a jazz piece with a gospel feel to it. Now the title was a statement, “Got the Spirit.” But I’ve put a question mark behind it, “Got the Spirit?” Do you and I have the Holy Spirit? And if you say, “Yes, I’ve got the Spirit,” how do you know that you have the Spirit? Sometimes we think that it is some exotic sign like speaking in tongues which indicates that a person has the Spirit. But the evidence that one has the Holy Spirit is much more basic than that.

The Holy Spirit’s work in our lives is so deep and quiet that we may overlook the fact that we even have the Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in us has been compared to wearing glasses. The purpose of glasses is not to draw attention to themselves, usually at least, unless you’re Elton John. The purpose of glasses is to help us see more clearly what we are looking at. The Holy Spirit is like that. The Spirit enables us to see what we cannot see without him. Or the Holy Spirit is like a key. The Spirit unlocks the door to greater realities than we could ever discover on our own. Got the Spirit? Here’s four signs which indicate that you have the Holy Spirit.

*The first and most important sign is that you are a believer in Jesus Christ.*

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:3, “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” If you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and seeking to follow in his way, that’s the clear sign, the essential sign that the Holy Spirit is active in your life.

Let’s not forget what the apostles did after they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. They courageously went out into the streets of Jerusalem and preached to their fellow countrymen about Jesus. ‘Peter raised his voice and said, “You Israelites, listen...Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders and signs - this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from the pains of death...therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”’ That very day three thousand people came to faith in Christ and were baptized.

The Holy Spirit was working there in two ways. Yes, the Holy Spirit came powerfully into the lives of those who believed and were baptized. But the Holy Spirit was active even before they believed. As Peter preached, the Spirit was swirling around opening the hearts of the listeners.

The Holy Spirit goes to work whenever the Gospel is preached. The Holy Spirit works through the word to bring people to faith. So if you believe in Jesus Christ it's because the Spirit has worked through the word of the Gospel and brought faith alive in you. And the Holy Spirit is within you now, sustaining and strengthening your faith in the Saviour.

Here's another analogy. The Holy Spirit is like natural gas which burns in the furnace on cold days. It brings your house up to the right temperature. And then it continues burning to keep your house warm. So the Holy Spirit works through God's word to bring you to faith in Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit works in you to maintain your faith as you keep hearing the word and receiving the sacrament. Now why it doesn't happen for some people, even as they hear the Gospel, I don't know. It's a real mystery. Certainly it is God's desire that all people will be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. And we can be sure that the Holy Spirit is still working to overcome resistance and break down barriers. The Holy Spirit never stops working through the proclamation of the Gospel to bring people to faith in the Saviour.

Now some people say that you must have a particular born-again experience to be counted as an authentic Christian, that you must be able to name the date and the time that you moved from unbelief to belief, from doubting to faith. Certainly the three thousand who came to faith on Pentecost could name the day. It's the case for some people today. But that's not the only way it happens. Sometimes the movement into faith is slow, almost imperceptible. It may take years. But the main thing is that by the work of God's Spirit it's happened for you in some way. If you can say "I believe in Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord," then you indeed have the Holy Spirit. And if you can't yet make that confession be sure that the Holy Spirit is working through this preached word and opening your heart so that some day, perhaps even today, you can claim such faith.

*Another sign that you have the Spirit is that you call on God as Father.*

Paul writes in Romans 8:15, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry 'Abba, Father' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Now there has been a push in recent years to use more names or images for God, and that's fine as long as they come from the Bible. But the particular name that Jesus gave us for God is the intimate family name - "Abba, Father." "Abba" is the Aramaic word for how a child would address their father, almost like our "Dad." And Jesus not only gave us the name to use but also revealed the Father to us. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," he told Philip. Jesus himself is the image of the invisible God. And that image is best summed up in the name, "Father." That's God as he really is. In fact, we Christians will always use that name because it's the opening address in the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven."

And when we call upon God spontaneously, not in some written prayer, but at a moment's notice, we often find ourselves saying, "Father." If someone points to me and says, "John, please pray," I often find myself starting the prayer by saying, "Father." I do it almost without thinking. And I make no apologies for that. I just can't help it, because that is the work of the Holy Spirit within me. In fact, as Paul tells us, to cry out "Father" is the very Holy Spirit inside us witnessing to our human spirit that we are children of God. When you cry "Abba, Father" it is the assurance that you saved, and belong to the redeemed people of God. To cry "Abba, Father" means that we are children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, of both his sufferings and his glory. When you pray do you ever find yourself crying out to God - "Father?" If so, that is a sign that you indeed have the Holy Spirit.

*A third sign that you have the Spirit is that you sometimes have the experience of being carried beyond yourself.*

What do I mean? Well, I'm talking about those times when you find yourself doing things you thought you could never do and it almost seems effortless. That is the Spirit at work within you.

There was a church organist (not our John Shillingberg) but another organist who told his minister he believed in the Father and the Son, but didn't believe in the Holy Spirit. His minister asked him if he had ever played better than he usually plays and the organist was eager to tell him about those times. And the minister pointed out to the organist that he really could believe in the Holy Spirit because he had experienced his work. It could happen to a teacher, whose lesson for the students suddenly comes alive with interest and clarity and captivates the students. Sometimes it even happens to a preacher as they preach. Now this doesn't happen all the time and it can't be predicted and controlled. You do your best preparation, then suddenly the Spirit lifts you to a level beyond yourself. It's like you are skating on a frozen lake and a gust of wind comes up and just seems to carry you along.

When I was in Grade Five, I remember the teacher telling the class about a man who had singlehandedly lifted a Volkswagen Beetle and freed a person trapped underneath. We were amazed and wondered how it could have happened. Well, I suppose it might have been the adrenalin flowing, rather than the Holy Spirit, but it is the kind of thing I'm speaking of. The Holy Spirit enables us to go beyond what we think we can do. It doesn't have to be an emergency, though it may be. It can be in your daily occupation or your service for the church. I wrote a letter the other day which almost seemed to write itself. It all came together in my head and I wrote it without a much effort or editing. It just flowed out. That was the Holy Spirit at work in me.

Many people, when thinking about some task or duty say, "I could never do that." But I say, "Well, you don't know that. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you." And when they do, they find themselves providing leadership, or praying for a friend, or visiting someone in hospital, or speaking with someone about faith. I'll bet those apostles never could have imagined preaching in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. But they did, very effectively, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to do things greater than we can imagine. It's just a matter of obediently taking the first step.

If you have ever had an experience of going beyond yourself, and most of us Christians have, it's because you have the Holy Spirit.

*One more sign that you have the Holy Spirit is that you experience the peace which passes all understanding.*

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Have you been in some situation where outer circumstances should be causing you to fall apart, but instead you feel peace within? Rather than an inner storm there is calm. You are thinking clearly. It feels strange, and makes no sense from a human point of view. But that is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, stirring up Jesus' gift of peace. It doesn't always happen, but when it does you know it comes not from yourself, or from the world, but from a divine source. And that divine source is the Holy Spirit within, bringing alive Jesus' gift of peace.

I remember a Christian man saying that he was called into his supervisor's office one day, and told that he was being let go after many years' service. He should have been very upset, but instead he heard a steadying voice speaking inside. "I am with you. I will sustain you and see you through. Do not let your heart be troubled or afraid." It was the work of the Holy Spirit within him.

Got the Spirit? I'm guessing that you do have the Holy Spirit, that you have received God's great gift, perhaps without even realizing it. The main sign is that you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your Saviour. If you are leaning on those everlasting arms, then you indeed have the Holy Spirit. And don't let anyone tell you otherwise.