

May 23, 2010

SAY YES TO LIFE

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.....” Acts 2:4

In his book *Healing Grace*, Dr. David Seamands tells a story about a farmer who had fallen on hard times. He had gone through several tough years in a row, and his crop production was way down. Consequently, he was having financial problems, so he went to see the manager of his bank.

“I’ve got some good news and some bad news,” he told the banker. “Which would you like to hear first?” “Let’s get the bad news over with first,” the banker replied. “Okay,” said the farmer, “what with the bad drought and inflation and all, I won’t be able to pay anything on my mortgage this year.” “Well, that’s pretty bad,” the banker observed. “Hold on, it gets worse,” said the farmer. “I also won’t be able to pay anything on the big loan for all that machinery I bought.” “My, oh my, things really are bad,” the banker exclaimed. “Well, it’s worse than that,” the farmer continued. “You remember I also borrowed money to buy seed and fertilizer and other supplies. So of course, I can’t pay that back either.” “That’s just awful,” the banker said, “but now tell me quickly. What is the good news?” “The good news,” said the farmer, “is that I fully intend to keep doing business with you!”

Now, there’s some valuable theology in that story, if we reverse the subjects. The good news of the gospel is that, in spite of our moral bankruptcy, God keeps on doing business with us. That is one of the great promises of the Bible, and in a sense, this is what the Pentecost story in Acts 2 is about. The disciples were spiritually bankrupt: their minds were confused; their confidence was shaken; their nerves were jangled; their strength was sapped; their energy was depleted; their hearts were empty.

Over the preceding few weeks, they had been on an unbelievably emotional roller coaster, with its incredible ups and downs. Just think of it – there was the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But that was quickly followed by the arrest of Jesus; then the trial and crucifixion. They had not counted on that. It wasn’t in their game plan. It shook them. It scared the life out of them.

And as if that weren’t enough, next came Good Friday and the crucifixion. That was the toughest blow of all. Their hopes were dashed, their dreams destroyed, their spirits crushed. But then came Easter morning! Their Lord was

resurrected and their spirits were resurrected too. They were ready now to take on the world.

But then came another jolt! Jesus told them: “I can’t stay with you. I must go to my Father, and I want you to take up this torch. I want you to take up this ministry of love! I want you to do it now! I want you to be the church! I want you to teach the world this message of love and sacrifice and commitment and grace. I want you to be my witnesses to all the world.”

“But, Lord,” they protested, “we can’t do that! We don’t have the strength. We don’t have the know-how. We don’t have the power. We don’t have the courage.” “Don’t worry,” the Master promised them. “I won’t leave you alone. I will send you a helper. I will send you strength and power. I will send the Holy Spirit to be with you always.” And then Jesus ascended into heaven.

They waited. But soon they heard something – a strange sound, away off in the distance, becoming louder and louder as it moved toward them, a sound like the rush of a mighty wind – and it blew on that place! And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they received courage and confidence and strength and new life. Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, they said “Yes” to life, and they became the church of the living God on that day of Pentecost. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, they were empowered to take up the preaching, teaching, healing, caring ministry of Jesus Christ.

Have you heard the story about the young man who approached the father of his girl friend to ask his permission for them to marry? The father was skeptical. He said, “Son, I like you. I think you are a fine person, but I honestly don’t think you know what you’re asking for. My daughter has very extravagant tastes. I doubt very much that you will ever be able to support her. I’m a wealthy man, and I can barely manage it myself.” The young man thought for a moment before he answered: “Sir, I think I have it. You and I could just pool our resources!”

That’s the promise of Pentecost, isn’t it? We are not alone! God is with us! We can pool our resources with God, and God’s strength will see us through – it will carry us; it will save us. Because of Pentecost, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, because of God’s sustaining presence with us, as Christian people, we can face the future with steady eyes and hopeful hearts.

Even when things sometimes look bleak and dreary and scary, we can live with courage and confidence and grace, because God is with us. Let me show you what I mean.

FIRST, THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLES US TO SAY YES TO LIFE. In those critical days after the crucifixion, I imagine that there were some hard, uncertain, discouraging moments, when the disciples were tempted to throw in the towel and quit on life. We all know the feeling.

The Rev. Roland Rolheiser was a teacher at Newman Theological College in Alberta, Canada. He also wrote for *The Catholic Herald* in London. Some years ago, he wrote an article called “Ten Commandments for the Long Haul” – Ten Commandments for facing life over a long period.

The one commandment that caught my attention most was the last one – “Don’t mummify. Stay alive and alert, and celebrate life.” In other words, “Don’t quit on life and walk through your days like a mummy.” By the way, Webster defines *mummy* as “lifeless flesh.” If you’ve ever seen a mummy, you know that there is something physical there – there’s a body there, but it is lifeless! There is no breath, no heartbeat, no vitality, no spirit, no soul, no life.

Sadly, some living people are like that. They have become disillusioned with life. They have lost their fire, their drive, their hope. Somberly, they just go through the motions. They get up in the morning, they go to work, they eat, they sleep, they exist, they endure, they watch TV. But they are “mummified!” They have thrown in the towel. They have given up. They have quit on life. They have no zest, no joy, no spirit. They are “lifeless” flesh. They are all wrapped up in the clothes of death and defeat. They have forgotten how to seize the moment and celebrate life. So they trudge, they drift, they stonewall, they tune out, they “mummify.” Please don’t let that happen to you. Please don’t drop out. God has a better plan for us than that. God has a better way. Say Yes to the Savior. Say Yes to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will enable you to say Yes to life!

SECOND, THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLES US TO SAY YES TO OTHER PEOPLE. On the Day of Pentecost, people from many different nations were brought together, and the Holy Spirit enabled them to communicate, to understand one another. The Holy Spirit brought them together.

When the noted poet Edwin Markham reached the age of retirement, he discovered that his banker had stolen much of his retirement money. He was

heartsick. Understandably, he felt hurt and betrayed, and he became bitter. As the days passed, his bitterness became such a poisonous venom within him that he could no longer write poetry. He could only entertain thoughts of revenge.

One day while sitting on his desk, thinking about the man who had so wronged him, he suddenly felt the Spirit of God sweeping over him, saying, “Markham, if you do not deal with this thing, it’s going to ruin you. You cannot afford the price you are paying. You must forgive that man.”

Following the lead of the Holy Spirit, Edwin Markham dropped to his knees and prayed: “Lord, I will, and I do freely forgive that man.” Later he said, “Then a miracle occurred. The resentment was gone and the poetry began to flow once again.”

It is the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit that enables us to forgive like that, to love like that. The Holy Spirit enables us to say Yes to life, and to say Yes to other people.

FINALLY THIS MORNING, THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLES US TO SAY YES TO GOD. We can say Yes to God because God has already said Yes to us.

If we were to make a list of the most beloved hymns of all time, one certain to make the list would be the gospel hymn “Just As I Am.” It has been called the world’s greatest soul-winning hymn, partly due to the influence of Billy Graham and his crusades. As a young man, Billy Graham walked to the altar in his conversion to the singing of that hymn, and ever since, his crusades on every continent had used it as the invitation hymn.

But the real power of that hymn is found in the one who wrote the words many years ago. Her name was Charlotte Elliot. She was born in England in 1789. When she was thirty-two, she suffered a rare illness that left her a permanent invalid. She sank into great despair and into angry, hostile, rebellion against God. The next year, her concerned father brought a minister into their home to talk with his daughter. God was with that minister that day. He said just the right words in just the right tone of voice, and suddenly the presence of God was felt powerfully in that room.

When Charlotte Elliot felt the Holy Spirit touching her heart, she gave up her rebellion, placed her complete trust in Jesus Christ, and accepted him as her

Savior. From that moment until her death at age eighty-two, she always celebrated her birthday on that date – the day of her spiritual birth.

“That’s the day I really came alive,” she said. “The day I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior is my real birthday.” Later, she wrote the famous hymn that is her own spiritual autobiography:

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
O lamb of God, I come, I come.*

Friends, it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to say Yes to life, Yes to other people, and Yes to God.

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