

St. Andrew's UMC
May 31st, 2009
John 15: 26, 27; 16: 4b-15
"When the Spirit of Truth Comes"

There are times in life when things go so badly that you can't even pray. People say that your faith will help you pull through the trials and temptations. That may be true. But when you are beaten down and completely drained, both physically and emotionally, and when you see no hope in the situation, things are just not that easy, even though you may have been attending the church for decades. One might discover that there is no "magical" quality to one's faith: things just do not spring back to normal, just because one had the faith, just because one attended the church all his or her life, or just because one prayed.

When we were kids, our parents took care of our problems. If our toys broke, our parents fixed them. If we sent the ball through the neighbor's window, our parents paid for it. If we fell off the bike, and skinned a good patch of the knee, our parents took care of the wound. But that administration of the first aid was actually the little part. It was the

comfort and love that made us feel healed already.

Well, now we are grown up, we realize that our troubles also grew in size. We accept the fact that our parents cannot take care of our problems like they used to. Those problems we face as grownups are the kind of problems that we have to take care of by ourselves.

No one comforts and loves us like our parents did, and as we grow older, we come to realize things become less clear and less certain. And sometimes, the problems we face are so huge and deep, we just do not know where to begin, even just to describe it. Sometimes, we can't even say a prayer, and the only thing that comes out of the mouth is a sigh, a groan.

When we are that tired, that beaten down, and that worn out, we find that mere words just don't bring things back to normal. And those troubles are

St. Andrew's UMC
May 31st, 2009
John 15: 26, 27; 16: 4b-15
“When the Spirit of Truth Comes”

sometimes of the kind that is hard to share with one another.

How did our parents take care of their problems? How did the people of the faith manage their troubles? How about such giants as Apostle Paul? Was it like a cakewalk for him? Even though the posterity regards Paul as the colossal hero of the Christian faith, through the evidence found in his writings, we can peer into the darkest depth of despair that Paul had to endure. Unless he himself had to endure it, would he have been able to share this testimony with us? He writes in Romans 8:

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And he [God] who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Apostle Paul must have gone through many of such low points in his life. We do not know how devastating they were for him.

Yet he shared with the readers what helped him overcome those darkest moments.

There are times we find ourselves weak: not strong enough to fix the problems ourselves; not rich enough to oil the door hinges; not powerful enough to make people do the right thing, and not strong enough to protect our loved ones. And maybe we have tasted what it was like to be at the end of our resources and wits, and that there was nothing that can change it. How many of us have reached those points of life in the past?

Paul testifies to us in his writing that there is someone who comes to our side and intercedes for us. As we lose the words to lift up in our prayers—as we are too consumed to pray—the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. Yes, sometimes words just fail to describe what we feel and what we go through. Sometimes, the only thing that escapes from us is a sigh, a groan.

St. Andrew's UMC
May 31st, 2009
John 15: 26, 27; 16: 4b-15
"When the Spirit of Truth Comes"

Apostle Paul testifies to us that the Holy Spirit feels the weight of pain and trouble in our hearts. The Holy Spirit lifts up to God what we cannot put into words. And God knows exactly what is in the Spirit's mind, just as God searches the human heart and knows what is in it.

This is what the Gospel writer, John, also experienced and testifies to us in the chapter 15, through the saying of Jesus. John experienced the Holy Spirit as the Advocate, the Counselor. John shares with us another dimension of the Spirit: it is the Spirit of truth.

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

The Holy Spirit not only intercedes for us in our times of tribulation, but also communicates to us, so that we

may be guided into knowing the truth. The Holy Spirit helps us cut through the confusion of life, and discern what is true.

What is the chance that two individuals to testify to one thing that is unseen? Apostle Paul also talks about this discernment in detail in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. ¹⁴ The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (Ch. 2).

St. Andrew's UMC
May 31st, 2009
John 15: 26, 27; 16: 4b-15
"When the Spirit of Truth Comes"

The Holy Spirit may not be visible to every one, but both John and Paul describe exactly the same thing. Again, the Spirit of God guides us into the discernment of what is true.

The question is: how do we know that we have received the Spirit? How many of us have distinctively experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in life? How does one distinguish the Holy Spirit from other profound experiences of life?

For some Christians, the presence of the Holy Spirit is exemplified by the gift of speaking in the foreign tongue. They tend to refer to the description found in Acts, chapter 2, as the prime example of experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit: the Christians were gathered in a house in Jerusalem, suddenly there blew violent winds within the house; flames appeared on each person; every one began to speak in foreign tongues. Is it possible, however, that God may approach

individuals differently, besides the way found in Acts, chapter 2?

In other places of the Bible, the Spirit of God is not found in the spectacular form or setting as that of the Acts 2. In the Gospel of John (Ch. 20), Jesus sends the Holy Spirit in this way:

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus showed up to the disciples on the evening of the Easter, and Jesus just blew his breath on the disciples. How does that compare with the way disciples received the Holy Spirit in Acts, chapter 2?

As for the discernment of the presence of the Spirit of God, this is how prophet Elijah discerned the presence in I Kings 19:

¹¹ And he [Lord] said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before

St. Andrew's UMC
May 31st, 2009
John 15: 26, 27; 16: 4b-15
"When the Spirit of Truth Comes"

the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. ¹³ And when Eli'jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Eli'jah?" (I Kings. 19:11-13)

Prophet Elijah was on the run from King Ahab who sought his life. At the cave he stayed, he heard the voice of God. There he witnessed the violent force of the nature: The winds strong enough to destroy the mountain and split rocks blew before him; then earthquakes came; and then the fire. Yet the LORD was not in any of those. Instead, the prophet discerned God's presence in a very small voice—perhaps a whisper that is difficult to make out, the kind of soft

whisper, unless one really concentrated to hear it.

If we expect that God's Spirit to make the entrance into our lives as the Hollywood stars do—with the camera flashes and the swooning crowd of people—we will surely miss God's Spirit. What we need is the sensitive discernment that can tell the small voice apart from the violent winds that destroy the mountains and split the rocks, from the earthquakes that shake the foundation of our lives, and from the fire that consumes all we own.

The Spirit of God came to Elijah as a very small voice, after the great terror and commotion. Yet Elijah picked up the small voice of God. Likewise, God may come to us yet in a small voice. God still seeks to communicate with us, even in the midst of great tribulations.

There are times in our lives that we do face the violent winds that throw our lives around and leave

St. Andrew's UMC
May 31st, 2009
John 15: 26, 27; 16: 4b-15
“When the Spirit of Truth Comes”

the aftermath of destruction. There are times when the earthquakes completely level our faith. There are times when fire turns all our passion and zeal into ashes. Even then, God's Spirit comes to speak to us—in the small, non-spectacular way.

The people of the faith in the Bible experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lowest points of their lives; Elijah, when he became the enemy of the state and pursued by the king's army; the disciples, when they were broken and disillusioned; Paul, in his countless rejection by both believers and unbelievers. They all went through the despair of life, when The Comforter, the Advocate, the Counselor helped them in their weakness.

Did you know that you could reject the Holy Spirit, and drive it away (I Thess. 5:19)? That you could bully God's Spirit away? We have to be honest about this: if we are not sure whether we have received the Holy Spirit or not, there are only two

possibilities. 1) Either we have received it, but do not know it, or 2) we have received it, but quenched it. If you are sure that you have not received it, then all you have to do is to invite the Spirit into your life.

God's Spirit is a gentle Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not barge into our lives and spell a magical solution. We have to invite God's Spirit into our lives, in order to receive it. God's Spirit wants to dwell in our hearts, and transform our hearts.

God's Spirit is the Comforter, the Advocate, the Counselor who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words—for we live through the tribulations of life that are too deep for words. God's Spirit guides us through the tribulations that took away our words, through the violent winds that destroyed our peace, through the earthquakes that flattened our confidences, and through the fire that consumed all of our achievements and belongings. Even then, the Holy Spirit will guide us through the

St. Andrew's UMC
May 31st, 2009
John 15: 26, 27; 16: 4b-15
"When the Spirit of Truth Comes"

aftermath of the destruction, and
comfort us, pray with us, and
intercede for us.

May you receive this Spirit this
Pentecost, and may this Spirit
continue to guide you this day
and onward.