

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It was a Saturday or Sunday morning.

I had gotten up early as 3 year olds sometimes have a habit of doing.

I had finished my bowl of cereal and was parked on the den floor in front of the television. I was watching a Christian program.

They were singing songs and talking about Jesus.

At some point, the lady on tv said that if you wanted Jesus to come and live in your heart, all you had to was pray and ask him

and he would do it. That sounded like a wonderful thing to me.

I had already heard some stories about Jesus in Sunday School and at church. So alone in my den, I folded my hands

and tightly closed my eyes and begged Jesus to come to my heart.

I wasn't sure if asking him to come one time was enough

so I prayed over and over again concentrating with all my might that it would come true and Jesus would come to live with me.

A few years later in middle school, my concern became whether or not

I had received the Holy Spirit. From some books I had been reading,

I was worried that if I had not been given the ability to speak in tongues then I had never received the Holy Spirit.

Apparently those lessons about what happens at Baptism

had not sunk in with me along the way. So just like the 3 year old,

I prayed and prayed in my bed at night to have the Holy Spirit in my life. According to my understanding at the time,

I would know that Jesus had sent me the Holy Spirit

when I was able to speak in tongues. As hard as I prayed,

it never happened. So for a while I was not sure

that I had the Holy Spirit with me.

Lucky for me, around this time in my life I learned that I wasn't

the only strange kid at church wrestling with faith

and barraging our poor pastor with questions.

John was a couple of years younger than I am

and he was trying to figure this God thing out too.

John's main complaint was this: Why doesn't God / the Holy Spirit

talk to us today like he did to the people who lived back

in Bible times?

In the Old Testament, the spirit of God was on prophets like Moses and Elijah. God spoke to them and told them what to do. The voice of God even came to Samuel in the middle of the night and kept waking him up. God came to Joseph in dreams and told him about the famine that was going to decimate Egypt and what to do to prepare for it. And then at Pentecost, the Spirit came upon the disciples with violent wind and tongues of fire and they were given the words to go and share the good news of Jesus with others.

John wanted to hear God speak directly to him. He practically demanded to hear a voice. He wanted God to send him angels or a sign or something to direct him to make sure he was following the right path in life. It sure would make it a heck of a lot easier if God would consistently operate that way. After all, John and I were feeling jipped. Why should the Spirit speak plainly to them and not to us?

I think what John and I were both really after was this: we wanted our faith to be real. Both of us wanted to experience God. We wanted to know for sure that Jesus was there; that Jesus was with us. We didn't want some head trip or to simply go through the motions on Sunday morning and it really not mean anything. We wanted our lives to be worth something. We wanted a purpose. And just like those prophets from the Old Testament and Jesus' first disciples, we wanted to follow God and know beyond the shadow of a doubt that we were connected to him. Pastor, show us God, let us hear him and we will be satisfied.

I am a few years further down the road now than I was then. Some things have changed. Some things stay the same. According to God's sense of humor, now I am the pastor with kids coming to me asking me the difficult questions. I still pray hard over things, especially the things about God and the world that I just can't comprehend. But my perspective on some issues has changed.

I am not so sure anymore that God ever spoke so clearly and directly

to people like Moses and Abraham and Sarah and Elijah.

I don't think they heard a booming voice from heaven giving them step by step instructions for what was coming next.

The more I read their stories, the more I hear confusion and doubt and struggle. Moses got exasperated with the children of Israel in the wilderness and complained to God and doubted and wanted to quit.

Abraham and Sarah tried to believe God's promise

that they would have a child but as the years went on

and Sarah didn't become pregnant, Sarah gave Abraham her maid, Hagar, so she could have children through her. God had given Elijah

a great victory on Mt. Carmel and through him defeated the 400 prophets of Baal. But instead of feeling confident, Elijah fled into the wilderness because of one woman, Queen Jezebel.

He feared she would kill him, lamented to God about his sorry life, and refused to eat hoping to die.

The more I read their stories the more I am convinced

that they are just like you and me. They were just doing the best they could to try and follow God. The Spirit would guide them and they would try to follow. Sometimes they got it right. Sometimes they didn't.

Sometimes it was only in looking back that they could begin to see why the Spirit had led them to do certain things and understand the significance of it for them and for others.

I'm also convinced that we are not aware of how active the Holy Spirit is in each one of our lives. Through our Baptism into Christ,

God has adopted us as his children. God has poured out his Spirit upon our lives so that the Father and Jesus can make their home

with us forever. It is the Holy Spirit within us that makes us

long for relationship with God. More than anything else,

the Holy Spirit longs for us to be deeply connected

to the love of Jesus and our heavenly Father.

And with that being the case, it is impossible for you and me to avoid God.

The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives whether we desire it,

whether we are aware of it or not. And the Spirit will work tirelessly

to connect us to the love of God and to help us love and serve others

in Jesus' name.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit tries to use everyone, everything, every situation in our lives as an opportunity for us to encounter God and for God to speak to us. Every plant, every animal displays in its being the glory of the God who created it. Every person you run across in your day is someone bearing the image of God.

That holds true whether you happen to get along with them or not.

Every good thing that happens is an opportunity to thank and praise God for his goodness towards you. Every mistake you make is a chance to seek God's forgiveness and favor.

Every hardship you face, as painful as they may be, provides with it a chance to more deeply understanding grace and what it means to rely on the strength and mercy of God.

Everything in life, the good, the bad, and the ugly is harnessed under the Spirit's tutelage to bring us into God's embrace.

So why don't we see God everywhere and in everything all the time?

For myself, I think that I don't always see God because I get distracted.

I get all wrapped up in my own world and what I want to do and my own issues that I put on my blinders and can't see anything else.

The other reason is that I forget to ask God to open my eyes and know that God is there. If you and I got up each day and prayed that the Holy Spirit would allow us to see God working in our lives and Jesus in the people that we meet, do you think God would actually turn down a request like that?

Over time our eyes would become more keen, our ears more sensitive to God's voice and we would begin to see God everywhere we looked.

The trick for us is to have eyes and ears and hearts open to recognize the Spirit at work and hear what God is longing to teach us.

For the Spirit constantly seeks to compel, muster, charm, nudge, beckon, call, woo, hit us over the head, do whatever it takes to enlighten us to God's presence in our lives. The Holy Spirit wants us and this whole world to be reconnected, reunited to God the Father and God the Son. And the Spirit will not rest until it accomplishes just that.

On this Pentecost, I pray that you can sense the violent wind
rushing through this place as the Spirit goes about its work
in and through us. God is here in our midst.

God's passionate love is calling us to himself and calling us to embrace
the people and this world that he so loves.

May the Spirit swell your hearts and inspire all that you say and do.

And may the Spirit allow you to rest in God

so that you can see God around you and hear his voice.