

PENTECOST AND COMMUNITY FORMATION

An exposition of 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6
at West Hills San Jose on May 23, 2021

PASTORAL PRAYER: God and Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and Earth, Holy be your name. Jesus Christ Son, of God, immortal, eternal and uncreated, hallowed be your name, and at your name may all creatures in heaven and earth and under the earth bend their knees in worship. Holy Spirit, gift from the Father and the Son, you are Lord and giver of life. You speak to us through the prophets, you preserve the unity of Your church, and cultivate God's new creation in us. Holy is your name.

Lord we lift up to you the burdens and the sorrows of our world to You in hope. Across the earth, there are the many lost and the perishing who will be cut off apart from you saving them. Rise up Spirit of power and bring them to Christ for salvation. Thrust some among us in our city and from all over the world into your harvest field, to proclaim the gospel and to announce good news to those who are perishing. There are many sick and dying for lack of medical care, or sustenance, basic medicine, Spirit of God stir up your Church to help those in need. Spirit of grace, we ask on behalf of all the people and places on the earth, where the needy are denied help, where the weak are denied justice, where the poor have no defense and the orphan and the widow are forgotten, we pray that you would humble those with power and stir in all rulers a spirit of compassion and justice. You hold the heart of every ruler in your hand like streams of water, would you incline the wicked toward mercy, for the sake of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

Father, Son, Spirit, we cry out to you in hope because your arm is powerful to save. We cry out to you in hope until the nations beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. We pray for the unity of your church here in the South Bay. That all those who love your gospel, and sense the urgency of your mission, would be of one mind in Christ Jesus in fellowship with one another and in testimony to the truth. Heal the divisions that would us, and strengthen the bonds that unite us, that all mankind might see our love and know that we are your disciples. Help us Lord God, on this holy Pentecost, to recognize afresh the power and the glory of the presence of Your Spirit among us. Expand our gaze beyond the disputes of men, beyond our life experiences, beyond our comfort levels and overwhelm us again with the reality...that You, the One True and Holy Creator God...dwell in us...in Your church forever. Whether we have come from the house of feast or in famine this morning, blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen

PROBLEM: Grace and peace West Hills, I'm Josh one of the pastors and teaching elders here. This morning we are celebrating Pentecost. If you've never heard of Pentecost, it is an annual celebration in the church to commemorate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit from heaven. This happened 50 days after the last supper, when Jesus, having been crucified, raised, and ascended into heaven with His Father, poured out the Holy Spirit upon His people, establishing His covenant presence with us until the end of time. In other words, we are celebrating the day on which God began to dwell with His people in a new and permanent way again. Thus it's a celebration. A celebration of God's new covenant blessings given to us in Christ Jesus. And one

of the things I thought would be edifying to explore together this morning is what the Scripture says the Spirit has come to do.

The Spirit has come to the church, but what is on his agenda between now and when the Lord returns? Because the Holy Spirit tends to be the quietest member of the Trinity, we can often times misunderstand or even incorrectly assume we know what He is up to. And the glory of Pentecost is that it gives us an opportunity every year to stop for a Sunday, remember how amazing this gift is, and to look at what the Word says He is attempting to do—in the church — while He is here.

MAIN POINT: The Spirit is forming us for holiness and joy, so look around and rejoice!

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Please open your bibles to 1 Thess 1:4-6. This morning we will be taking a brief one week break from our expository journey through the book of Colossians to celebrate Pentecost! But before we begin unpacking our text let's take just a few minutes to set ourselves in the context of Paul's letter. The year is about 50 AD. The place is the city of Thessaloniki. About 15-20 years ago, something happened across the mediterranean that caused the earth to violently quake and the sun to go dark on the same day. The leaders of the local Synagogue claimed it was authored by the God of Israel. The local priests claimed it was a sign that the local gods were displeased about something. Whatever it was, it hadn't disrupted the extremely lucrative trade route that ran through the peninsula between Byzantium and Rome so you weren't worried at all.

But then something far stranger happened. Two men had come down by the way of Phillipi, Amphipoli and Apollonia bearing the bruises and wounds of one's recently punished for a crime. But rather than shrinking from view like normal criminals, the men walked upright with purpose and with fire in their eyes. Here is what happened next from Acts 17:1–9

[1] Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. [2] And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [3] explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." [4] And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. [5] But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. [6] And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, [7] and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." [8] And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. [9] And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go." About 3-6 months later, Paul had received news in Corinth about how things were going in Thessaloniki, and penned the following to the brand new community. Here the Word of the Lord

READING: Paul Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. [4] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, [7] so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thess 1:1-6)

PRAYER: Come Holy Spirit, and seal these dynamic realities upon our souls, for the glory of Jesus. Amen.

ROAD MAP: So I read verses 1-6 but we are going to focus specifically on verses 4, 5 and 6 for Pentecost this morning. Today we are going to look at 3 things: 1.) what happens when the Spirit comes, 2.) what happens when the Spirit stays, and 3.) practical reflections for life in the Spirit.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE SPIRIT COMES?

1. One of the really cool things about this text that is kind of easy to miss, is that it shows that the coming of the Spirit was a profound identity forming event for the Christians in Thessalonica.
2. In verse 4, Paul says we KNOW three things about you, BECAUSE the gospel came to you in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. In other words, because the Holy Spirit empowered our proclamation of the gospel among you who received it...we know that certain things are true of you, that were not obvious prior to then Spirit coming in power upon you believers. What are those four things in verse 4
3. You are brothers, loved by God, and chosen by God. Wait isn't that three things? The fourth thing is hidden in the first thing. You are brothers PLURAL...
 1. The Spirit came and created a community. Whatever you are, you are part of a plural. If the Spirit has come upon you in power, it was to incorporate you into a community with other believers. In my main point this morning I said the Spirit is FORMING US for holiness and joy. NOT YOU the individual...even though that is also true, He is forming you the individual as part of the community.
 2. This is one of the reasons I think it's really important to enfold into the whole church, not just into relationship with one or two people here. If your central way of relating to the whole church is just one on one discipleship with one person here, you are missing out on the richness of everything the Spirit is doing. If you only do the one on one thing, you probably tend to focus on what God is doing in you, and in the person you meet with. But if you engage in a community group, or one of the prayer meetings, or in one of the many ways to serve here, you get to watch and hear about what God is doing in all kinds of people. The Spirit has saved you into a plural, into a body, into the whole church.
4. Second you are a brotherhood verse 4. For we know brothers. Or brothers and sisters. The word can mean both brothers only AS WELL AS brothers and sisters. But that's not really

the point, the point here is that Paul is calling them a family. When the Spirit comes in power upon God's people, he doesn't form us into a vague association of individuals he forms us into a family.

1. In the ancient world, there was not a stronger bond than the ties between brothers and sisters. I don't really have time to unpack that this morning, I probably will some time soon. But quickly, Paul lived in a world where everyone's primary sense of relational obligation was to their patrilineal blood lines. To father blood. The father's bloodline passed down (in their thinking) to the sons of the house. And the sons family was considered part of the Patrilineal blood line, but the sisters children were not. They were considered part of her husbands patrilineal bloodline. The sister was still considered part of your house, but her children were part of the house of her husband.
2. And this way of thinking about things created a social atmosphere where everyone's primary family loyalty was to siblings and especially to their brothers. There are a number of examples during this time, where you actually saw famous women, side with their brothers OVER their husbands in the midst of military conflicts between families. Again, it's not my purpose to unpack that this morning.
3. What I'm trying to say is: for Paul to show up and say YOU ARE BROTHERS is actually claiming far more than you probably have assumed. We are an actual family. We are to actually commit to and love one another like a family. WHY: because the Spirit has come and made us a family.
4. Can you try and feel that for a moment. What makes us in this body a family, is not the name on the sign outside, it's not this building, it's not me as your pastor, it's not the deacons or the website....it's the actual, present Spirit of the living God. Hallowed be His name.
5. But the Spirit doesn't just make us family to one another, He makes us beloved of the Lord verse 4. For we know brothers, loved by God. When the Spirit of God comes he applies the redemption accomplished by the cross of Christ. When Christ Jesus died for sin, He accomplished the forgiveness of sin for the whole church, for all time, by the sacrifice of Himself. When He offered up Himself, when He entered once for all into the holy places Heb 9:12 not with the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, He "secured an eternal redemption."
 1. When Christ died, He redeemed all of His people. But it's not until the Spirit comes, and fills our life, and brings us into relationship with God, that we begin to experience the benefits and blessings of that redemption. And the central benefit of your redemption, the central blessing that you receive through the redemption of Christ is not the forgiveness of your sins, it's the love of God.
 2. Your sins are forgiven as a means to an end...so that you would enter into steadfast love of the Lord forever and ever. Do you know what that means? That means that your sins, and your weaknesses, and your shortcomings, and your failures don't define who you are. The love of God does.
 3. When I was growing up the way you were discouraged from doing foolish things is that whenever someone did something foolish, they were given a nickname for like a decade to remind them of the stupid thing you did. People renamed you according to your folly.

I've realized lots of cultures have ways of remembering when someone does something evil, or foolish, or unflattering. I was called old man Camacho for like 3 years for confusing a cell phone with a tv remote.

4. But Paul comes to this group of brothers and sisters and doesn't just define them in relationship to one another, you are brothers, he defines them in relationship to God! You are brothers loved by God. When the Spirit of God comes, He draws you into something older, and deeper and wider than anything else in the world, He offers you something eternal, immortal and invincible. Listen to me, in this life, people will fail you. Family will fail you. Friends will fail you, institutions will fail you. Beautiful mountains can fade, ancient redwood trees can burn down, but you know what never fails? The Love of God.
5. The love of God has steeled men and women for martyrdom. The love of God has sustained and healed broken relationships of every kind. The love of God has broken the pride of men, and has exalted the humility of the lowly, has thrust safe people into violent places and rich people into poor communities. And brothers and sisters YOU ARE LOVED by God if you are in Christ Jesus. Maybe today you are sensing the fragility of the people and the things around you...maybe you are coming to terms with the fact that nothing is quite as stable as it once seemed. I'm here to tell you in the name of Christ, that the love of God in Christ Jesus is a solid rock upon which you can stand. If you want to know more about this, please come speak with me after service.
6. But coming back to our text, when the Spirit comes it is an identity forming event. You are established into a community, and not just any community a brotherhood, a family, and not just any family, it's a family of those loved by God. And not only loved by God, but also chosen by Him.
 1. Whenever this topic comes up, it naturally leads to questions and debates about what the bible doesn't say. If you will allow me to simply beg your pardon to glory in what this does say. Brother, sister, if you are in Christ Jesus, if the Spirit of God is in you through faith in Jesus Christ...God has chosen you.
 2. Paul is able to go to Thessaloniki preach the gospel, see some people give their lives to Christ and endure affliction as a result, and be filled with confidence that from eternity past, these are some of the people whom God had chosen for Himself. Praise be to God. It's not that we were smarter or more ethical or better at anything, God says to Israel in Deuteronomy 7, I didn't choose you because you were a big nation, or a great nation, I chose you because I love you and because of the oath I swore to your Fathers.
 3. Similarly to the church, God didn't choose you for any other reason than the fact that he loved you and you have been sealed in covenant to Him by the death of the Son, and the coming of the Spirit.
7. Brothers, sisters, loved by God and chose by Him this is what the Spirit has made you to be. His coming to us has formed us, the Christians gathered here into the same kind of community. This is what the Spirit does when he comes in verse 5, his coming is a community forming event. Let's now transition to what the Spirit does when He stays.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE SPIRIT STAYS?

1. Paul says we know all of this because our gospel came to you not only in Word but also in power and the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. But what happened after that? The Spirit does two things, he creates a community of patterns and of joy. Let's look first at what it means to be a community of patterns.
2. Paul says coming back to verse 5, you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit so that YOU ALSO became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
 1. Paul says he and other godly men came and lived among the church there and that they were tested and proved for the church's sake in order to image Christ to the believers in Thessalonica. And as a result the church was able to NOT ONLY SEE but also IMITATE Paul and his companions as they imitated the Lord.
 2. I feel like the second half of verse 5 could be it's own sermon. Lord why are all these difficult things happening to me? Maybe God is proving you for the sake of others, so that they might have a model to imitate when the time comes for them to take up their cross and follow Christ into trial.
 3. What's remarkable about this is that Paul seems to indicate that He walks in the example of the Lord, so that the church would learn to walk in the example of Paul and by implication of the Lord and now as a consequence the church has become an example to other church's. It's a community of patterns. People embracing a christian way of life and that has been modeled to them by others.
3. And the thing about patterns is that they can be helpful or unhelpful. They can be biblical or unbiblical, they can be holy or unholy. And it's incumbent on every generation not to feel the need to reinvent the wheel of Christian community, but to be sensitive and thoughtful to which community patterns reflect the teaching of Scripture and the ones that don't.
 1. When I was doing my seminary training, I was told by different people, that as a pastor, I should not be too transparent about my sin. They will turn and use it against you. No one wants to hear you air your dirty laundry. Don't talk about yourself. I was always confused by why that was the counsel given to me. Paul is open about his past. The Scripture teaches us to confess our sins to one another. It never encourages us to do it in private. Where did that pattern come from? If you've been at this church for any length of time you know I didn't take that advice.
 2. We are not called to reinvent the wheel, but we are called to be sensitive and thoughtful about what is and isn't biblical. And besides most of the patterns you find in a faithful, gospel preaching church are going to be helpful. They are going to show you what it means to walk with God, and if you look around and pay attention, you will probably be challenged in ways you wouldn't have expected.
4. And since we are talking about examples, I'm going to take a minute and make a few people slightly uncomfortable.
 1. When I first showed up in San Jose, I had been a Christian for like a year. I had been married for like a week, and I was full of zeal but brand new to the faith. And God put me in a community group with a quiet, godly dude, named Kyle Haughey. And in that community group I would often get super emotional and passionate about some passage

in our biblical text. And about once a month, Kyle would quietly and very gently, say, you know, I think it may be saying this slightly different thing. And what's funny is I don't even have a specific example of any one thing...but over the first couple years of my time here, Kyle Haughy in his very patient, gentle and kind way, demonstrated for me, that I should be more careful and patient in how I reach my conclusions about the meaning of biblical texts.

2. A few years later, I'm still very new in the faith and new in marriage, and I found myself over at the Mills house and complaining to Bernie about how frustrating it is that Jeanine and I felt so differently about whether or not you should pair and ball socks.
 1. And Bernie was like Josh, if you were an enemy and Christ demonstrated His love for you by dying for you, why would you not just willingly demonstrate your love for her by dying to yourself in this issue. He then told me a story about how he recently done some laundry and had folded it up in the basket, and he was going to put it somewhere where Vivian would see it...but then He was like, who am I doing this for. And He went and demonstrated love by putting it away.
 2. That story has done a lot to shape my marriage and shape the way I counsel you men in your marriages. And you know what Bernie told me, He didn't come up with that because he's smarter than the rest of us, he saw that pattern demonstrated in his home as a child, his father towards his mother and his mother towards his father. The Spirit is forming a community of patterns.
5. The Spirit has surrounded you with people who are following Jesus, and their obedience is a pattern, they are tested for YOUR SAKE...to give you an example to follow.
6. A few years back Jason and I had just finished teaching the women's hermeneutic's and shepherding class and Monica Song offered to give the concluding prayer. And in her prayer, I don't think I've ever told her this, she prayed for Jason and my purity before the Lord. And I'm going to be totally honest, it had never occurred to me, that we weren't fighting that battle by ourselves. That our sisters were for us in the power of prayer, and she prayed that prayer in the hearing of the other women. Giving a pattern for others to follow.
7. What am I trying to say, I'm saying that when the Spirit stays, He begins to establish patterns of godliness. Modeled for us by people seeking to follow the Lord.
8. **And second, he doesn't just form us into a community of patterns, the Spirit is forming us into a fountain of joy.** Verse 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.
 1. What does this verse say about Christian joy in Thessalonica? It says first that this joy is connected to receiving the word, the gospel. So it's a gospel joy. Second it's a joy experienced in the context of much affliction. Remember the wicked formed a mob and attacked the house of Jason. So it's a gospel joy but it's also a durable joy. It's a joy that isn't easily quenched by discouraging circumstances. And what does this say third...it's a joy authored by the Holy Spirit, it's a supernatural joy.
9. Are you looking to grow in joy? How does the Spirit create joy or happiness in your life? Well first and foremost He does it through the good news that you have been reconciled to God, adopted into His family, the way is opened to you for prayer and you have access to Him whenever and wherever you are. The Spirit increases your joy by drawing you to God

through the Word and through the Sacraments, that you might taste and see that the Lord is good, that He is for you, with You, in love. That though your sins are many His mercy is more. He is looking to increase your joy by sending His messengers out into the streets and the neighborhoods to proclaim the good news of Jesus, that all who are weary, and tired, weighed down by the sorrows of this life, can come to Him and find rest for your souls. That is the first way the Spirit brings joy, by the word we receive.

10. But the second way is not obvious in this text but it is clear in the rest of Scripture that He creates joy through reflection upon and faith in, the many precious promises of God. The Holy Spirit creates supernatural fruit in your life despite affliction when you read James 1:2
 1. "Count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." This trial I'm going through is producing something in me. My circumstances are not an accident and they are not pointless.
 2. 1 Peter 1:6 In this (resurrection hope) you rejoice though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." God is forming in me something more precious than gold.
 3. Rom 5:3 We rejoice not only in our hope but in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
 4. Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.
 5. 1 Peter 5:10 After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.
 6. Psalm 30:5 Weeping may tarry for the night but joy comes with the morning.
 7. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is there strength of my heart and my portion forever, and from Him flows streams of life and in His light do we see light, at His right hand are pleasures forevermore.
11. How does the Holy Spirit create joy in your life, by working in your heart to believe the words I just read more and more, every day, until you see God's face.
12. So what have we seen, we have seen that when the Spirit comes, it is an identity forming event. We become a family of God's children, loved and chosen by Him. But as the Spirit remains, He begins to form us into a community of patterns and joy. And we simply need to look around, to pay attention and to believe the Word that we have received in the gospel to partake of that glory.

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

1. Step one is to take seriously what the Spirit is trying to do in you. He is trying to knit you into a community loved by God. If you resist engrafting yourself into an actual community of Christ' followers you are resisting the Spirit.
2. Look to the Spirit's power for joy. If the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy, that means the evidence of His presence somewhere is you find a more loving and joyful person. In other words He is working to create this fruit in you. Work with Him and alongside Him, not against Him. Fill your mind with encouraging, God-glorifying things. Share in His gifts in God-glorifying ways.
3. Look around. Look to the way the Spirit has shaped the people around you. The testimony of Jesus is both in the pages of the New Testament and in the life of His saints. If I said, open mic time, come up and share a way that God has demonstrated His loving faithfulness to you in your life...we would have a line that went out the back door. There are glorious things to be learned from one another, whether young or old, rich or poor, quiet or loud...this is a gift of the Spirit's work among us, and one of the many rich blessings of Pentecost.

The Spirit is forming us for holiness and joy, so look around and rejoice!

COMMUNION: This table is a table of joy. The root word for eucharist means thanksgiving. This is a place for the giving of thanks in a way that gladdens the heart. Here we are invited to consider our sins, to repent of them, and to recognize that the broken body and shed blood of the Lord is an open invitation to all of you who are weary and heavy laden to come to Jesus and find rest for your souls. To find strength for your fight against sin, to find mercy for your struggles against it. To find encouragement to run with endurance...to find love and faithfulness in a world marked by sin and the curse. At this table...there is nothing but blessing, compassion and love.