

## **They Received the Holy Spirit Just As We Have**

That first Scripture we heard this morning, from Acts 10, happens at the house of Cornelius. The significant thing about Cornelius is that he was a Roman Centurion – in other words a Gentile – and Peter goes to visit him at his home. There was deep prejudice in those days between Gentiles and Jews. Peter was a Jew. He was an old fisherman on the Sea of Galilee before Jesus called him to be a disciple.

Peter and the other followers of Jesus didn't really think the Gospel applied to the Gentiles at this point. So God had to speak to Peter in a vision before Peter was ready to go and talk with Cornelius. And, from the few short verses we heard this morning, Peter is just as surprised as the rest to find out that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on Cornelius and the other Gentiles gathered in his house. He even states, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have," (Acts 10:47). God does amazing things. Sometimes what He does even surprises His most faithful followers.

As modern-day followers of Jesus Christ, we should pay close attention to what the Bible tells us. This morning we're going to be looking at a passage in the Gospel of John, and if your version has Jesus' words in red letters, you'll see that everything we're reading are words that He spoke. If you have a Bible, or Bible app handy, turn with me to John 15:9-17. I'm reading from the New International Version this morning.  
**Read John 15:9-17.**

## **Being Lost**

Today's Gospel lesson picks up right at the end of the reading from last week. Last week, we heard that Jesus is the Vine, and we're the branches. And sometimes we need pruned. Sometimes we need to cut junk out of our lives so we're able to bear good fruit to bring glory to God and draw people closer to Christ. In today's reading, Jesus focuses on themes of love, friendship, and sacrifice. He gives us valuable insights of what genuine love looks like, what true friendship looks like, and the sacrificial commitment He expects from His disciples.

Have you ever been lost? I was. When I was four or five years old, we had gone to Rink's – an old department store that used to be where Kroger is currently – I had wandered down the toy aisle because I was focused on the Matchbox and Hot Wheel cars. I found a nice, shiny red semi truck, picked it up to show Mom – and she wasn't there.

I panicked. I started yelling. Through the tears, I made my way up to the service desk to ask for help finding Mom. Eventually, in what seemed like an eternity, Mom

came around a corner and grabbed my hand and continued shopping. I'd learned a valuable lesson – not to wander off and to stick close to my parents in stores.

You know, we could also look at being lost through a spiritual lens. We've all been spiritually lost at some point. We run the risk of being lost spiritually, if we don't stay plugged into Jesus. He tells us, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love," (John 15:9). We have a lot of sisters and brothers, some even here in our church family, who have unplugged from Jesus. In some cases they've not been here in months – and life has gotten so busy that gathering together with the community of faith has taken a back seat.

### **Love is the Foundation of Jesus' Relationship with the Father**

When you look at ancient church history, it was the laity that kept things moving along. Paul would go into a town and preach and teach, and then he'd move on, and one of the "locals" would step up to the plate to host the church in their home, and would lead prayer and worship. The Church originally was a very grass-roots organization – and it needs to get back to being that way, in my opinion. The 2020 General Conference finished their work this week – things are moving along.

Sometimes we don't always agree with every decision, but if we're staying close on the heels of Jesus, we ought to be able to love people, and work for the greater glory of God with them despite disagreements, which don't really account for much, in the eternal scheme of things. If we're following Jesus, then we see love is the foundation of His relationship with His disciples. And He draws a parallel between His love for them, and the love between Him and the Father. Think about the Father's love for Jesus for just a moment. It is unconditional, unwavering, boundless, and goes beyond our ability to understand. By telling His followers to "remain," or some translations say "abide," in His love, Jesus is inviting them to experience intimacy with Him, rooted in a mutual exchange of affection and devotion.

Look what Jesus says next. "If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love," (verse 10). We show love to God the same way Jesus did – by being obedient. Look at the example of obedience Jesus gives us in the Holy Scriptures. In Mark's Gospel, the writer records that even on the night He was betrayed, Jesus said, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will," (14:36). Jesus was wrestling with having to go through the crucifixion – but even in knowing what He was facing, He submitted in obedience to the will of God.

### **Love Each Other**

Obedience isn't just adhering to the rules – it's a manifestation of love. In the same way that Jesus obediently followed the Father's will out of love, He expects His disciples to obey His commands as an expression of our love for Him. Our obedience

to Christ, becomes a tangible, visible demonstration of our commitment to being in relationship, “remaining” with Him. Continuing in His talk to the disciples, Jesus shares His desire for us to experience joy. “I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete,” (John 15:11).

The joy Jesus promises isn’t temporary or dependent on external circumstances. It stems from a deep, abiding connection with Him. It’s a joy rooted in the assurance of salvation, the fellowship of believers – we’ll experience that in a few minutes when we go back to eat lunch – and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Through communion with Christ and one another, we find fulfillment and completeness. The result is we have joy that surpasses understanding.

The next thing He gives in our passage is what amounts to a revolutionary commandment in His day, and depending on who you are, in our day as well. He says, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,” (verses 12-13). By laying down His life for all people, Jesus shows the ultimate act of love. He is an exemplary model for His disciples in every age to follow. True love is characterized by willingness to sacrifice for the well-being of others – even to the point of laying down one’s life.

### **Friends and Children – Not Servants**

Jesus then refers to His disciples in a new way. He says, “You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his Master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you,” (verses 14-15). Jesus goes beyond the master-servant relationship here, and invites His followers in every age to be drawn into a deep, personal friendship characterized by intimacy, trust, and shared understanding. As His friends, we are privileged.

Paul writes in Romans that we are children of God. “If we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory,” (8:17). That’s really significant. Through Jesus, we’re adopted as God’s own children.

So what are we to do with this deep, abiding friendship with Jesus Christ? Jesus tells us, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in My name the Father will give you,” (John 15:16). So often we get caught up in the idea that we chose to follow Jesus. We made the choice to turn our lives around. But friends, God does all the work. His Holy Spirit, working through the prevenient grace which He pours out on all people, gradually works on us – within us – making us realize that there’s something greater beyond our own selves. And then His justifying grace makes us realize that we need a Savior because we’re so messed up.

God does all the work – we reap the benefits. No one ever realized they needed Jesus as their Savior just from having the idea pop in their head. They heard it somewhere. Someone read the Bible, or preached to them, and they realize how messed up they are. We're all messed up and need a Savior. So, when we come to that realization, and yield control over to Him, He expects us to bear fruit.

## **We Love One Another**

We talked about the fruit last week. He's given us a mission of bearing fruit. The fruitfulness includes not just spreading the Gospel, but also cultivating virtues like love, joy, peace, patience, compassion. When we decide we're going to yield ourselves completely over to the reign of God through us, our fruit-bearing endeavors brings glory to God and we fulfill the purpose for which He planted us here.

He planted you here, New Hope, for a purpose. And as individuals, He planted you here, church, for a purpose. To bear good fruit. We won't bear fruit, if we aren't plugged in, and operate on the assumption that someone else will step up and do something that we ought to be doing.

Today's passage closes with a restatement of Jesus' command: "This is My command: Love each other," (verse 17). Love, the way Jesus describes it, remains the central theme of His message. It's not a suggestion – He says it's His command. It's of the utmost importance in the life of anyone who says they follow Jesus Christ. By loving one another unconditionally and sacrificially, we bear witness to the transformative power of the love of God, and fulfill Christ's greatest commandment: "Love God, and love neighbor," (Mark 12:30-31, paraphrased).

Through those red letter words of Jesus, we're called into a deep, life-changing relationship with Him that's characterized by love, obedience, and joy. As His friends, we're entrusted with the mission of bearing fruit and spreading His love to every corner of the globe. In a world marked by turmoil and upheaval, Jesus offers us the blueprint for building a community rooted in love. He gives us directions on making a place where sacrificial service and genuine fellowship reign together, for the glory of God.

**Prayer:** Faithful God, make our hearts bold with love for one another. Pour out Your Spirit upon all people, that we may live Your justice and sing in praise the new song of Your marvelous victory. Amen.