

You Can Be God's Message

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We're in the season of Pentecost. Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to his throne. But then he descended in the form of Spirit. Jesus went up and the Spirit came down. He went up to his throne. He came down into his people. The bodily Jesus could be with some people in a place but not inside all people in all places the way the Spirit Jesus could.

The Holy Spirit does two things – he moves people inwardly to God and he moves people outwardly for God.

In marriage one person moves decisively toward another in a once-for-all fashion on the wedding day and then moves toward that same other person in a daily way ever after. So the Holy Spirit does with us – he helps a person move decisively toward God in a once-for-all way and then he helps a person move toward God in daily way ever after.

But when a couple gets married, in the wedding ceremony there is a line in the prayer that says, 'May they know such fullness in their love that they reach out to others in love.'¹ So the Holy Spirit does with us. Realizing we are love by God, we expand to love others for God.

One writer of yesteryear, Elizabeth O'Conner, titled one of her books, *Inward Journey, Outward Journey*. That's it. That's the God, Bible, Christian movement.

¹ Exactly, it is, "Give them such fulfillment of their mutual Love that they may reach out in concern for others."

The ebb and flow of the ocean. In and out. The Christian life ... in to God to be loved, out with him to love.

We're going to read in Acts today, the book of the Holy Spirit, and, yes, Jesus goes up, the Spirit comes down, the disciples move out. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall be my witnesses ... share and tell and show my life and love ... in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

See the love-in and the love-out dynamic in these beautiful verses of Acts 2:42-47.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. [43] Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. [44] All the believers were together and had everything in common. [45] Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. [46] Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Conversion begets closeness and worship – deepening. People are added – expanding. In and out.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John are the biographies of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament is the story of God's love expanding through us ... missionary journeys, letters to churches dotting the ancient world here and there,

the stories about them, the letters to them, preserved in what makes up the rest of the New Testament.

The ones who wrote those letters, do you know what they thought they were doing when they were writing those letters? They thought they were writing letters. That's it. They were communicating and connecting and trying to help Jesus and his church. They were not thinking they were writing scripture. They weren't thinking they were doing something extraordinary. They were doing something plain, writing a letter.

I remember Manuel when he retired from the church staff in San Antonio. He told me that I had changed his life. "Really?" I thought. We haven't done that much together so how could this be? Then he explained that one day he saw me getting some food out of the kitchen for a homeless guy and heard me say to someone, "Anyone of us could very possibly be one move of misfortune away from being homeless ourselves." Manuel hearing that knew that was his situation and was grateful for a church that was sensitive to people's needs. It rejuvenated his work knowing that he was in a great ministry.

Have you ever done something that just seemed like something but it became bigger in God's plan?

God didn't just communicate out of thin air to people like the Philippians or the Corinthians or the Ephesians, though he could have. He used a person, Paul, who was acting ordinary. The people in Philippi didn't get a booming voice out of the skies, they got Paul, who wrote to them. Manuel didn't get a message out of thin air but he got it from me.

And guess what? Because God used Paul and God used me, that means God can use you. You.

Between my freshman and sophomore year of high school my family moved from Puerto Rico to Norfolk, VA. To get out of the way for that summer move I got to go on a trip to San Diego where we had lived prior to Puerto Rico. I stayed with family friends for six weeks and, the first night there, some teens from that church, Jim and Trudy, and one of their pastors did a very Acts of the Apostles kind of thing. It made a tremendous; I would even say possibly, a life-changing difference to me. I can still see it in my mind's eye.

There was a bus door; Jim and Trudy were just outside it. They said, "Hi, Jeff. The Wahrenbrock's (the people I was staying with) said you'd be arriving and here for the summer. We're going to a watermelon social. Would you come? We'd really like it if you did." Their eyes were full of genuineness. And over their shoulder, Pastor Jerry had his hand on the bus door handle with a great and loving smile. It was like they were "velcroed" to this great tree of God and love, and they undid the Velcro, opened it, and invited me in. Their love and God's love made a very big difference in my life from that time forward.

The point of me telling you this is that a visit, an invitation, a letter like Paul's were simple, concrete actions the Holy Spirit used and Jim, Trudy, and Jerry's visit, invitation, and smile were simple, concrete actions that the Holy Spirit used.

If God used ordinary people and means back then, if God doesn't have his love just materialize out of thin air but uses people and means, he's going to do the same today and just like he used Jim, Trudy, and Jerry and an invite and a smile in my life, he can use you and your service for him in another person's life.

You may say that your life is less than perfect. Thinking that this disqualifies you. But God is not stymied by our imperfections.

Consider Paul. Half the letters he wrote from prison. That's not a very ideal or glamorous circumstance. When I was in college I volunteered at DuPage County Detention Center and later at Bastrop Prison in Texas. I can still hear the locks locking behind me as I made my way in. Not very glamorous or ideal. And yet Paul simply reached out and communicated out of interest in people he knew, out of respect for the mission of his Jesus Christ. And God used that reaching out. So 2000 years later we're still being blessed by his words like "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain" and "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice."

So if Paul can be used by God to reach out in love to another, even from prison, then you and I can, with our imperfections and hard circumstances (or not hard), be messengers of love.

Here's a letter we received this past week. It's from a former member who's quite elderly. Listen to what she writes. "You and your church are a blessing in my life. Stay pure in your faith, cherish the moments you are all together in God's house and in God's plan. Love you all, see you in heaven, In Christian Love, Peggy." ... Isn't that encouraging? Her comments lifted many this week. There it is, a simple ministry. You, too, can in literal and other ways be God's letter writer.

Is there a person you can invite to something the way Jeff and Trudy invited me? Is there literally a letter or email you can send encouraging someone today? You can be God's message.

I preach to you today in front of this table where Jesus invites you in to strengthen and love you that he might in that strength and love send you out ... giving that strength and love to others.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. pastorjeffwood@gmail.com www.welovefirst.org
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