

Acts 2:36-42
(Isaiah 61:1-4; John 20:19-23)
“When the Spirit Comes”

Introduction

This coming week, on July Fourth, we will celebrate the independence of our nation with music and feasting and fireworks. Too easily forgotten will be the obvious fact that our independence was won through the costly and concerted effort of those who did not count their lives too precious a sacrifice to make so that others might be free.

Today we are an individualistic culture that seems to understand less and less how bound together our lives are and that our insistence on living only for ourselves puts all of our freedoms at stake. The same kind of thinking infects the church, so that the freedom we have in the gospel – freedom from the power of sin and death, freedom from the consequences of our rebellion against God – is placed in jeopardy by our refusal to follow Jesus, whenever we seek to claim the grace of forgiveness without the grace of repentance, and the inheritance of a child of God without the life of a child of God.

So we have been asking these past few weeks, as we have studied the opening two chapters of the book of Acts, what we should expect to see happen if God’s Spirit were to begin to move in the life of an individual, in the life of a church and in the life of a community. Our text this morning answers that three-fold question by giving us three marks of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of an individual believer, three marks of the Spirit at work in the life of a congregation of Christ-followers, and three marks of the Spirit impacting and beginning to transform the community surrounding that congregation.

Let’s recognize from the outset that our life in Christ cannot be lived in isolation from one another any more than the parts of our bodies can function in isolation from one another. Note in our text the connections that the Spirit established between people once alienated from God and from one another, but in Christ brought back into the intimate friendship for which we were created. In the same way, the Spirit would work deep reconciliation in our lives, reconciling us to God in Christ and reconciling us to those from whom we are alienated by selfishness and a refusal to forgive.

I hope that for some of us this week will be, not just a celebration of our political freedom as Americans, but a celebration of a deeper, greater, eternal freedom, won by Jesus Christ in his victory over the power of sin and death, and brought to us by his Spirit, poured out upon his people at Pentecost.

Body

1. Three marks of the Holy Spirit's presence in a person (2:36-41):

We respond to the gospel in heart-felt repentance.

We identify visibly and publically with Christ's people through baptism.

We begin to experience new life from the Holy Spirit.

2. Three marks of the Holy Spirit's presence in a congregation (2:42):

We are committed to studying the apostle's teaching together.

We are committed to sharing our lives with one another: time, resources, etc.

We are committed to worshipping together.

3. Three marks of the Holy Spirit's presence in a community (2:43-47).

The community takes note of God's power to heal the broken.

The community takes note of the joyful generosity of God's people.

The community takes note of the daily transformation of lives.

Conclusion

Where are you in this picture of renewal? Have you known anything of this deep work of the Holy Spirit calling you, moving you, into heart-felt repentance from the years spent in self-centered living, desiring the good things of God without knowing a living relationship with God? Have you publicly identified yourself as his, and are you experiencing something of the new life – new affections of the heart, new dreams and desires – worked in you by his Spirit? Are you becoming more truly and deeply connected to the body of Christ by devoting yourself to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers? Are we together impacting the surrounding community? Do people see this congregation as a place where lives are being transformed by the power of God's grace?

This is what God wants to do here in Knoxville and wherever his people go, bearing the great good news that life can begin again and people living in bondage and fear can be set free by the power of the living God. That is the message and the life entrusted to us, the children of God. How desperately the world needs for us to be the people Christ redeemed us to be! May God's Spirit work in us and through us the glorious effects of the gospel of grace!