

From Phillips Brooks

A Whitsunday Sermon, in a collection of his work published in 1893

Every cleric who stands in a pulpit to face a congregation on a Sunday morning hopes to connect the people assembled there more wonderfully with God, and to send them out more fit and eager to do God's will in their day. Clergy almost never know whether, or to what degree that hope is fulfilled. Consequently, we spend some part of our ministries wondering, "What if a really famous preacher said these things to them? What if a preacher from an historical Episcopal flagship parish preached these things? What if one of the greatest bishops of our church, and of this diocese brought this message to these people? Would they listen? Would they believe? Would they act on these convictions?"

To that end, I want to share with you some substantial excerpts of a sermon preached on Pentecost Sunday—probably in the 1880s--by The Rt. Rev. Dr. Phillips Brooks, rector of Trinity Church in Copley Square, former bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts. I trust what he says. I pray that you, might, too.

"I suppose a man--and it is not all a supposition, the specimens are all around us--who believes the Christian truths. That there is a God who made and governs everything, that this God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, that He has lived and taught among men, and that at last He died for men in all the torture of the cross, and rose out of the grave in all the inherent power of His immortality,--this they believe. And all that God requires, all that Christ commanded, they accept. The duties of a good life... they acknowledge. They try to do these duties. Perhaps ... you know that you are such a man yourself. You know that Christ is the great Master. His truth and His commandments you receive.

***But all the time you know that something is lacking,--a vividness, a life, a spring, a hopefulness and courage*** which you hear of other people having, which you sometimes see suggested in the things you do, ... but, for the lack of which you are forever conscious of a certain dryness in your belief and a certain shallowness in your duty. What is it that you lack? This lack ... I take to be precisely the Holy Spirit. I do not know any other way in which (God) can become so real to a true, earnest man, as in the realization of just this want."

Brooks cites the moment, in Paul's missionary journeys, when those already baptized in the Church at Ephesus tell Paul, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost."

P. 224 "We are then very often where these Ephesians were. What came to them and saved them was the Holy Spirit. What must come to us and save us is the same Holy Spirit. There they were holding certain truths ***about*** God and Jesus, holding them drearily and coldly, with no life and spirit in their faith. Paul came to them and said, "These truths are true, but they are divine truths. ***You can really see them only as you are sharers in divinity yourself, and look at them with eyes enlightened by the intelligence of God. God must come into you and change you.***

***His Spirit must come into you and occupy you; and then, looking with His Spirit, you shall see the spirit of the truths you look at; full of the Holy Ghost, the ghost, the heart, the soul of these great verities shall open itself in all its holiness to you. You shall see Jesus.***

And so if you can be filled with God, will not the soul of God's truth of every sort, as you stand face to face with it, open to you deeper and deeper depths, changing your belief into a more and more profound and spiritual thing?

Do you insist on knowing in exact statement how God entered into these people? Ah, if you ask that, you must ask in vain. If you insist upon not receiving God *until you know how* His life comes to your life, you must go on godless forever.”

Brooks comments on the mystery of this reception of God’s Spirit.

“Only one thing I think we can know about this filling of man by God, this communication of the Holy Spirit, that it is natural and not unnatural, that it is *a restoral* of communication...

that it is a **reenthronement** of God where He belongs, that the prayer which invokes the Holy Ghost is the breaking down of an artificial barrier, and the *letting in of the flood of divine life to flow where it belongs*, in channels that were made for it.

(Following from p. 226)

“ (Pentecost) was the coming back of God into man.

(Following from p. 227)

“And what that first Whitsunday was to all the world, one certain day becomes to any man, *the day when the Holy Spirit comes to him*. God enters into him and he sees all things with God's vision. Truths which were dead spring into life and are as real to him as they are to God. He is filled with the Spirit and straightway he believes; not as he used to, coldly holding the outsides of things. He has looked right into their hearts. His belief in Jesus is all afire with love. His belief in immortality is eager with anticipation. Can any day in all his life compare with that day? If it were to break forth into flames of fire and tremble with sudden and mysterious wind, would it seem strange to him -- the day when he first knew *how near God was*, and how true truth was, and how deep Christ was?

O have we known that day? O, careless, easy, cold believers! if one should come and ask you, "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?" dare you, could you, answer him, "Yes"?

Brooks next addresses how God’s Holy Spirit lifts us above a listless, dull observance of the laws of God, just because they are our assigned duties.

... When (The Holy Spirit) enters into a soul, He not merely gives clearness to truth, but *gives delight and enthusiastic impulse to duty*.

(Let us look at) that verse of the Savior's in which He described what the Holy Spirit's work should be. "*He shall take of mine and shall show it unto you*," Jesus had said. The work of the Spirit was to make Jesus vividly real to men. ... This was the change which the Holy Spirit made

in Duty. He filled it with Christ, so that every laborer had the strength, the courage, the incitement to fidelity which comes *from working for one whom the worker knows and loves.*

From p. 229

I find a Christian who has really "received the Holy Ghost," and what is it that strikes and delights me in him? *It is the intense and intimate reality of Christ. Christ is evidently to him the clearest person in the universe. He talks to Christ. He dreads to offend Christ. He delights to please Christ. His whole life is light and elastic with this buoyant desire of doing everything for Jesus, just as Jesus would wish it done.*

So simple, but so powerful! So childlike, but so heroic! Duty has been *transfigured*. The weariness, the drudgery, the whole task-nature, has been taken away. Love has poured like a new life-blood along the dry veins, and the soul that used to toil and groan and struggle goes now singing along its way, "The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God *who loved me and gave Himself for me.*"

O my dear friends, have you received the Holy (Spirit) since you believed? Since you began to do your duty has any revelation come to you of Him who is the Lord of duty? Have you caught any sight of Christ, and begun to know what it is to do it all for Him?

Has the love with which He lived and died for you been so brought home to you that you are longing only to thank Him by a grateful and obedient life?

Have you so made Him yours that He has made you His?

If so, the life of heaven has begun for you. ... It stretches out and is lost beyond where you can see; but it all stretches in the one direction in which your face is set; deepening knowledge, bringing deeper love, forever opening into more and more faithful service. Go on into the richest developments of that life, led by the power of the Holy (Spirit).

Both in belief and in duty then, *this is the work of the Holy Spirit; to make belief profound by showing us the hearts of the things that we believe in; and to make duty delightful by setting us to doing it for Christ.*

O, in this world of shallow believers and weary, dreary workers, how we need that Holy Spirit! ... There is so much... that He might do for us if we would only open our hearts and ask Him to come into them.

Remember, He is God, and God is love. And no man ever asks God to come into his heart and holds his heart open to God, without God's entering. Children, on this (*Pentecost Sunday*) pray the dear God, the blessed Holy Spirit, to come and live in your heart and show you Jesus, and make you love to do what is right for His sake. Old men, aspire to taste *already here* what is to be the life and joy of your eternity. Men and women in the thick of life, do not go helpless when there is such help at hand; do not go on by yourselves, struggling for truth and toiling at your

work, when the Holy Spirit is waiting to show you Christ, and to give you in Him the profoundness of faith and the delightfulness of duty.

Let us come to Christ's Communion Table and celebrate our union with Him and with one another, putting all fear and selfishness aside, and praying Him to show us there *how rich a thing it is to believe in Him... and how sweet a thing it is to serve Him by His Holy Spirit.*”

Thank you, Mister Brooks. Thank you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.