

## **FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Mark 1:4-11

Ads tell men of the advantages of taking supplements which can restore former levels of hormones in their bodies. This is supposed to help older men lose weight, gain more energy, and feel younger.

I have often told people that I wished I could find a way to harness the energy in their children and transfer it to their parents. That way the children could calm down a little and the parents get a needed boost in energy.

Something happens to Jesus when He is baptized. He is given the special strength to do the ministry He is sent to do. Jesus already knows He is the Messiah. He is still fully the Son of God, but He refrains from using that power as God almighty. That is why He has performed no miracles. Then He is baptized. He begins His public ministry and starts to do miracles beginning with turning water into wine. This is followed by healing people from diseases, giving sight to the blind, driving out demons, calming a storm, feeding the 5,000, walking on water, and raising the dead. Something has happened to Jesus. He has received the Holy Spirit!

The same Holy Spirit gave the disciples like Peter and the apostles like Paul. They healed the sick and drove out demons. The Holy Spirit in the books of Acts prevented Paul from continuing missions in modern day Turkey and directed him to Europe. Many other stories are told of Christians doing miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit---But do we feel that power?

Today we have our science and learning which leads us to believe that so many things that were supposed to be miraculous can be explained. When explorers first saw great ancient ruins, they thought that supernatural powers helped to build them. But today researchers experiment until they find ways to show how those things could have been done. Great stone buildings in Egypt were built without cranes by filling the inside of the buildings with sand. Then they could place the stone beams on the posts. Finally they dug out the sand. The great rocks used to build Herod's temple in Jerusalem were first cut into cylinders. Then they rolled them into place and squared off the edges to turn the cylinders into giant bricks. On Easter Island in the isolated Eastern Pacific the giant statues there could have been moved from inland quarries to sites along the coast by rocking the stones back and forth and literally making them "walk."

Scholars also believe they can explain the plagues in Exodus. The water of the Nile River turning into blood could have been a great amount of red clay soil being washed into the river. The water polluted with the clay could have caused frogs and gnats to leave the river. The bodies of the dead frogs could have brought the flies. Those flies in turn could have caused disease. Hail and locust are natural events. Darkness could have been caused by an eclipse.

Also scientists tell us that so many of the so-called diseases that people suffer are psychosomatic—made up in their heads. When they were cured from demons or diseases could they just have been given a psychological boost to cure them of their imaginary illness? We know that people with a positive outlook are far more likely to survive cancer than those who don't. So if we had seen someone healed by Jesus, would we have seen it as a miracle or simply a change in that person's attitude?

Consider what we think of people who claim to have the power to heal or to do miracles? Are we likely to see them as miracle workers or as imposters who fool people into believing what is not true? Often our reaction to someone who says that they have the "power" of the Holy Spirit is to doubt, to think, "It must be something else."

Yet, we are told that in Baptism we receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that a person must be born again of water and the Spirit to have eternal life. Jesus is speaking of baptism. But do we "feel" that power? So many people have been baptized, then grow up to have little or no relationship with Jesus. What kind of "power" is that?

If we look at the Church, those who trust in Jesus, we can see the work and power of the Holy Spirit, not so much in individuals, but in what Christians do together. Work through an individual can focus attention on that individual. But work through a group points to what the group represents. In the case of the Church, what we do together points to the one we represent—Christ Jesus, since we are Christians!

In our world today the Church is blamed for so much. Some of that is justified. People see Christians sinning just as much as other people. They also see the Church as an organization like the Roman Catholic church or the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, not as people forgiven by Jesus. But if we look at the people who follow Jesus, people led by the Holy Spirit, what can we see?

Education—Up until the last 175 years most schools in this country were run by churches. It was Christians who held on to ancient learning while the barbarians invaded Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. The university, like Iowa State, was developed by Christians in Europe. Throughout many parts of the world the first exposure to formal education for all people came through churches. Translations of the Bible formed that basis for modern languages like English and have been the basis for developing writing for many languages. Today in places like Ethiopia, developing countries look to churches to set up schools.

Social welfare—Hospitals were started by Christians. Go to Des Moines and notice the names of the hospitals—Methodist, Lutheran, Mercy—which were started by Irish Catholic nuns. Orphanages and adoption agencies were begun by Christians. Before that society, unless you were rich or important, just discarded the sick and unwanted children.

Slavery—It is estimated that 1/3 of the population of the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus was enslaved. 350 years later when Christianity had become the official religion of the

empire, that slavery was gone. The leading voices in the abolitionist movement in Great Britain and the United States in the 1800's were Christians. And Christians are in the forefront of efforts to end slavery today.

Without the power of the Holy Spirit working through Christians how would we view individuals? Before Christianity individuals did not count. They were sacrificed for the group. The idea of the sanctity of life, of each human being is the basis for our understanding of human rights—that came from Christians!

It is the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's community that is still very much alive today. I had the blessing to see that in Ethiopia as the people of the churches there are reaching out to help with the whole of peoples' lives, not only telling them the Gospel of Jesus, but also giving people jobs, food, better agricultural practices, and schools. The Holy Spirit is alive among students we see here who give of their time to teach our children in Sunday School. The Spirit is seen among the groups that serve Advent and Lenten soup suppers, those who volunteer to teach English and partner with an International. The Spirit is seen among Christians like you and me who get involved in the world as mentors for school children, athletic coaches, hospital volunteers, or whatever we do because we follow Jesus. No, the Spirit doesn't come like a magic pill to give us energy to do what we want to do. The Spirit comes when we work with other Christians to follow the example of Jesus in loving others.

That Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who came to Jesus at His baptism and led Him is in you and me. We know that for certain because of our baptisms. So each day as God's people, as His Church, we can "power-up" and let the Spirit work through us, not so much as individuals, but as Jesus' Church!