

“The Other Six Days”

May 31, 2009

Acts 2:1-7; 14-18

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A couple of weeks ago after the worship service, a visitor from out of town who was visiting a member here said to me as she went out the door, “You know, I like what you do in the sermon when you tell stories and give examples from real life. I thanked her for that and as she was going out I thought, “What else would I do? Our faith is about real life.” Just last week one of our members told me that she was in Dillard’s and saw something that made her think of me. She said, “You know how in your sermons or when you write something in the church paper, you will share something you’ve seen that happens here in Tulsa? Well, I thought of you when I was in Dillard’s. They were giving away free samples of a perfume. The perfume was called ‘True Religion.’” You can make up your own stories on true religion; probably preach a sermon on that.

I’ve shared with some of you before that I have a checklist of twenty things I go through as I prepare for sermons. For example,

1. What does the sermon tell us about God? That’s a question I ask myself as I prepare the sermon each week. Every good sermon should tell us something about God.

2. What does the sermon tell us about ourselves?

One of the things on the list is the word, “Michelin.” It reminds me to talk about something in the sermon that happens where the rubber meets the road.

Michelin—something from real life.

In almost 40 years of ministry, this is the first sermon I have preached that is all a Michelin-type sermon. It’s a sermon about where the rubber meets the road. Your faith has made a difference in the way you have lived your life today because you are here this morning. That’s at least a part of the reason we have come to worship; because of our faith. But what difference will your faith make during the other six days of this week. If your faith doesn’t make a difference the other six days, is it worth very much? What does our faith say to us about how we live our lives the other six days, not just on Sunday?

It might seem strange that I have chosen a subject such as Pentecost to address the other six days. Think about this; there are a few things in our life that we consider life-changing events. Just this past week, I was driving down the road and saw a vehicle driven by a high school person. They had taken shoe polish and written on the back window of the vehicle:

Class of 09. Thank God I finally “graduated.”

How many times in the past few weeks do you suppose a commencement speaker in his or her address said something about this being a milestone and maybe a life-changing moment? We think about other days; the day we got married, the birth of a child, a job that was important to us or maybe if we got fired from a job, when we joined or were released from the military, or the death of a loved one: life-changing events.

In the history of the world there have been a few life-changing events. Think about some of the inventions that have been made that changed the course of history, discoveries such as penicillin. Penicillin was here all along but it took someone brilliant to discover penicillin and how to use penicillin in a positive way. Wars are life-changing events. In the course of human history war can change lives.

As Christians we say the birth of Christ was a life-changing event, not only for us, but for the entire world. In the church, although we don't celebrate Pentecost the way we do Christmas and Easter, we say Pentecost for the church was a life-changing event. It marked the birth of the church and for those of us who are in the church; it is a life-changing moment. There probably would not have been a church without Pentecost.

We're not sure what exactly happened; it was mysterious. There was a sound, maybe like the sound of a freight train after a tornado; remember those people in the shattered houses usually say, "It sounded like a freight train coming through." Maybe that was the sound on Pentecost. A violent wind, then tongues of fire. We don't know for sure what happened, but something positive happened.

Peter got up and preached the first Christian sermon. Remember, the same guy who only a few days earlier had denied that he even knew Jesus, Peter quoted the prophet Joel and said, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." How sad in the church that almost 10 years into the 21st century, much of the church has still not gotten into the 20th century. Did you know that in many churches women would not be allowed to go into the pulpit to speak? "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Young, old, even slaves; men and women.

We are a little uncomfortable with matters of the spirit. In our tradition, we have taken a reasonable, rational approach to the faith. We are a little wary of anything that seems "weird." There might be something else involved, also. The actions of a few have given the Spirit a bad name. "I've got the Spirit," someone says, with the not so subtle implication that they have the Spirit and you don't. There are tests of faith with rules: if you don't

do this, you don't have the Spirit. If you do do this, you have the Spirit, if you can't do this, you don't have the Spirit. You know what the true test of faith is for a spiritual person? What kind of spouse are you? What kind of parent are you? What kind of employee are you? What kind of employer are you? What kind of friend are you? Paul said the true test of spirituality is love, joy, patience, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Those are tests of faith.

In Matthew 25, Jesus talked about a test of faith. It had nothing to do with attending church or praying or reading the Bible; nothing "spiritual." The test of faith was this, how do you treat the very least of these—the hungry, the poor, the prisoner? How do you treat the least of these? That is, Jesus said, a true test of spirituality.

So often in the church we have fallen short. There is some kind of disconnect between what happens on Sunday and what happens the rest of the week. Maybe the problem is we call Sunday the Lord's Day, as if the rest of the days belong to us. All days belong to God. All days are the Lord's days.

Perhaps we have misunderstood the purpose of worship. "I come to church because I get just enough to get me through the rest of the week." If you read closely you won't find that saying anywhere in the Bible. It has nothing to do with the purpose of worship. The purpose of worship is to thank God and to praise God. It's not about me or you. The purpose of worship is larger than any of us individually.

Does worship equip us? Hopefully it does, but surely there is more than this. It's like the Christmas and Easter crowd. Some ministers think they are wonderful preachers because some people come on Easter and then don't come again until Christmas. They think, "Man, those people thought the sermon was so good it will last them until Christmas." In the church, is there a disconnect between Sunday and the other six days? Have we missed the point in what it means to be spiritual persons?

An author by the name of Sam Keen has written about burnout and rustout. We all know about burnout, don't we? It's an excess of fire. "Someone is burning the candle at both ends; works all the time, never rests." When someone is doing this, they get burned out. Keen says in the church the danger we face is not burnout, but rustout, not an excess of fire, but a deficiency of passion for our faith for serving God and for serving each other.

Several years ago, I heard a minister by the name of Lloyd John Ogilvie preach. Something he said in the sermon that night changed my life. I will never forget what he said. Ogilvie, speaking to a group of ministers said,

“What are you attempting in your ministry that you could not do without the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?” I think we can take Ogilvie’s question, which is a wonderful one for ministers, but apply it to the other six days.

“What are you attempting in your lives that you could not do without God’s help?”

How can we invite the spirit into our lives? We prayed the Lord’s Prayer in our lives as a part of our worship service, but did you hear the line, “Give us this day our daily bread.” That’s a prayer that is to be prayed every-day of our lives. How would you like it if someone who said they loved you came to you only once a week, spoke to you only once a week, listened to you only once a week?

This past week here in town I pulled up behind a vehicle at a stop light. The vehicle was driven by a City of Tulsa employee. The license plate was white with black letters, city government. There was a bumper sticker on the rear bumper of this car. The words on the bumper sticker were “Tulsa Spirit.” Now, this was last week; remember, I’m thinking about the spirit in our lives and how the spirit works in our lives, and here’s a bumper sticker that says “Tulsa Spirit.” We’re comfortable with “Tulsa Spirit,” we’re comfortable with the “Christmas Spirit,” the “Spirit of ’76,” “School Spirit,” and “Team Spirit.” How comfortable are we the other six days with the “Spirit of God” in our lives? “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.”

Do you remember the name, Sara Jane Moore? If you are a student of recent history, you might remember that name. Sara Jane Moore is the woman who, over 35 years ago, tried to assassinate Gerald Ford. Remember, Gerald Ford was out in San Francisco; he was about to get into his limousine at a hotel, when a shot rang out. Thank goodness the bullet didn’t hit President Ford or anyone else, but the police arrested Sara Jane Moore. For the past 32 ½ years since that happened, Sara Jane Moore has been in prison.

This past week, Matt Lauer interviewed her on *The Today Show*. I was surprised; I expected to see some kind of nut case, some kind of crazy woman who would try to assassinate a president, but here was this intelligent, articulate woman who told her story of being imprisoned and how she realized now what she did was wrong. It was a fascinating interview.

Later, there was another segment on the show about three young women, 20 or 21 years old, who were triplets. When they were two or three years old, there was a house fire. Their mother was killed in the fire and all three of them were seriously burned. They had scars on their arms and faces.

Just within the past year, they learned about a doctor who has come up

with a new kind of laser surgery to help people who have been burned and have scars from their burns. They had gone to this doctor and received treatments; it was like a new lease on life. They were able to smile and it was hard to tell that they even had any kind of scars.

On that same show, Chris and Adam were also guests. Some of you will already know who I'm talking about; I don't know their last names. Chris and Adam were the two finalists on "American Idol." They were going to be singing outdoors that day. When they started to sing, the usual crowd was there; tourists, and a bunch of teenage girls shrieking like idiots when Chris and Adam sang. Off to the side, though, I noticed the triplets. They had come out from the studio and had joined the crowd. In front of the triplets, close to the rope, as close as she could get to the stage, was Sara Jane Moore. It was a surreal scene, this mixture of humanity.

I saw something good about it; something about pouring out my spirit upon all flesh. I see the same thing on Sunday morning down in fellowship hall when I see that group of people eating breakfast. I saw the same thing here this morning in the chancel area when all of the children came up to listen to Beverly. "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh."

I imagine the only thing that might be better is one day when Sara Jane Moore and Gerald Ford stand by each other; and Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth stand next to each other; and Martin Luther King and James Earle Ray stand next to each other; and we stand next to someone to whom we have said words that made them wish they were dead. We all stand side by side with each other and hear a heavenly chorus singing, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh."

On this Pentecost, may it be so for each of us this day and all of the other six days of our lives. Amen.