

## Pentecost

I wonder if there is anyone here this morning who is absolutely satisfied with everything you've accomplished, everything you have, and everything you are as a person. Probably not. I read recently that **only** one-half of all women and **only** one-third of all men rate themselves as being satisfied and happy with their life. The truth is that many of us find ourselves dissatisfied with our lives or even sometimes with our very selves. For that reason, a philosopher once compared human beings to Bulldog Ants. If you cut a Bulldog Ant in half, the front and rear segments will stay alive for a while, and during that time they will fight each other tooth and nail. Well, that's the way many of us seem to be. One part of us wants success and recognition. The other part wants to sit on the porch and watch the world go by. One part wants to serve God. The other part says, "I have more than enough to do. Let someone else take their turn." There's a battle going on within many of us. And because of that battle, far too few of us know what it is to be content and at peace with what we've accomplished, what we have, and who we are.

But when Jesus left his disciples, he told them that he was leaving them with a gift. And that gift was supposed to be peace of mind and contentment of heart! Peace of mind and contentment of heart. What a promise! Jesus said that when God is the center of our lives, that is God's gift to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. But how? How is that peace of mind and contentment of heart made manifest to us? Well, let me suggest some ways that I have thought about over the years.

FIRST, THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US A HEALTHY SENSE OF WHO WE ARE.

Oliver Wendell Holmes was said to have been walking down the street one day when a little girl joined him. When the girl started to turn back home, Mr. Holmes said, "When your mother asks you where you've been, tell her you've been walking with Oliver Wendell Holmes." To which the little girl replied confidently, "And when your folks ask where you've been, tell them you were walking with Mary Susanna Brown." Now that was a little girl with a healthy sense of self! A healthy self-identity is one of the most valuable gifts we can give our children. But first, we need that gift ourselves. And what Jesus says is that for that sense of identity, we should look to God.

One of the most consistent messages throughout scripture is that God tells us we are somebody. God tells us that we are beloved. God tells us we are each individually more precious to God than anything on earth. The early disciples faced all kinds of opposition and persecution, but they knew they were important and loved. Because in Christ, God had given them a new identity. Through Christ, God had told the disciples—and today tells us—that we are each worthy of God's love. Those whom the world rejects, God welcomes. Those whom the world beats down, God builds up. Those whom the world considers disposable, God considers more valuable than pure gold. By teaching the disciples this, Jesus had given them an inner peace that the world could not take away. A peace that is still available to us today through the gift of God's Spirit. A peace that comes from knowing that you matter . . . not because of what you have or have not accomplished, but just because you are who you are.

BUT MORE THAN PEACE, GOD ALSO GIVES US THE CONTENTMENT OF SPIRIT THAT IS FOUND IN HAVING A PURPOSE. Jesus did not tell the disciples to just go on about their lives being happy that someone loved them. Jesus charged the disciples to go out into the world and make new disciples -- to

spread the Gospel in word and action. To bear the message of God's love as they had come to know it in the person of Jesus Christ and to bring that message to those who needed it most. That's a big enough purpose for anybody. Because it's a purpose bigger than what you do for a living or what positions you hold or even what roles you play in other people's lives. What is the grand purpose of your life? In the "big picture," what is the great opportunity you have been given to do something with this life? It is to share with others the gifts that God has given to you. I believe that if we are to be effective and successful and happy people, we need to be driven by something bigger than ourselves. A purpose greater than our own satisfaction. Companies today write out their mission statements. What is the mission statement for your life? How about, "To enrich someone else's life." Or, "To make a significant contribution to the world in which I live." Or even, "To leave as little of a footprint on the earth as I can – to preserve the earth as the gift it is and to pass it on to others." These are just a few examples of personal mission statements that are worthy of the followers of Jesus. Every one of us can be guided by a great purpose, no matter the size or scope of our work. Even the jobs of CEOs who run businesses only matter if their efforts somehow manage to touch the lives of individual

people. We all have something we can do to make the world a better place. And the real issue for our lives is our commitment to that purpose.

AND FINALLY, BECAUSE TODAY WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH, I would be remiss if I did not point out the work of God's Spirit through us both individually and as a community specifically empowered by the Spirit of God.

There are those who will tell you that all you have to do is believe in yourself and you can have everything you want. There are others who say you can move mountains if you are driven by a great purpose. Both are partially right. But a healthy sense of identity and a driving purpose are not enough in and of themselves. Because I believe that the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in us is what empowers us to do things that we would not have been able to do otherwise.

Back in 1983, when I was in college, there was a story in the New York Times about an Air Canada flight that ran into trouble due to a metric conversion error. On that flight, passengers were enjoying a movie when

the jet's massive engines abruptly stopped. The pilot announced that they would be making an emergency landing. Sixty-nine people were trapped in an agonizingly slow but inescapable descent. For several minutes, a desperate silence hung over the cabin. Then fear gave way to screams as the landing neared. What had happened was that the electronic digital fuel gauge was out of order, so the flight crew had to depend on figures given by the refueling crew before takeoff. The problem was, someone on the refueling crew confused pounds for kilograms. Thus, eight hundred miles short of its destination, the jet simply ran out of fuel. Fortunately, the pilot and the co-pilot were able to glide some one hundred miles to a former military air field. A dramatic crash landing heavily damaged the jet's landing gear, but, amazingly, no one on board was hurt.

A sophisticated aircraft “headed in the right direction,” but with not enough fuel. That scenario is happening to a lot of people today. We have a high sense of self-esteem. We are motivated by a sense of purpose. But one day we wake up disillusioned and disheartened. Our fuel has all been spent. And where does the fuel we need for life come from? It comes from God's.

The gift of the Holy Spirit was the most important gift that God bestowed upon those first disciples of Jesus'. And this is the most important gift God bestows on us today. Because the gift of the Holy Spirit empowers us individually and it binds us together as the Church – the Body of Christ in the world. And being part of that Body makes a difference for us in our own lives and it makes a difference for the world because of what we are able to do together.

So yes, it's important to have a healthy sense of who you are. Yes, it's good to have a great driving purpose in your life. Indeed, God will supply you with those things if you ask. But the greatest gift God can give you is God's self. God's presence in our life in the person of Jesus Christ. Today, on Pentecost Sunday, let us give thanks for that gift. Because then, we will truly know God's peace in our minds and in our hearts.

Amen.