

The Spirited Church (1995)

Kenneth Korby

John 14:23–31

The Spirited Church

Greeting

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Spirit Fills the Universe, but Not the Spirit of Man

My dear brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of the Lord fills the universe. There's only one place there's not a filling, and that is in the Spirit of man.

We have a different spirit. You can see it in the people of Israel, and if you don't believe me, it's to your disadvantage. What the people of Israel are is the description of us by nature. It is the spirit of grumbling, the spirit of discontent, the spirit of sullenness and quarrelsomeness. They are not hard to find.

If you don't watch it, your children will be at each other's eyeballs, and the same is true of spouses, of parents with the children, of relatives and friends, of people you work with. You don't have to go to Sunday school to learn that spirit. There is no cultivation necessary to make it thrive. There is a lot of cultivation necessary, like pulling weeds out of the garden, like putting dams against floods, we have to train the children. We have to learn to train each other.

For there is this spirit within the heart of man. The spirit of the Lord fills the universe. There's only a vacuum in the soul of man.

Israel's Grumbling and the Overburdened Pastor

Israel's irritation with God. Israel's unwillingness to live in the wilderness, trusting God as a freed people, they spent their time wishing that they could be back in slavery, where everything was secure and nice.

And there you have the story of an overburdened pastor, weighed down, disheartened, finally arguing with God about the congregation he got. “Did I bring them into the world, or why do You lay them on my neck for me to care for them?”

Those spirits are not strangers to this congregation or to its pastors. We can all generate this spirit from within ourselves. We don’t need any help from anybody else, but we do feed it in each other, for we provoke it and we aggravate it.

The Church Is Created by the Holy Spirit

Such a spirit of grumbling, of irritation, discontent, quarrelsomeness, sullen suspicion is not what makes holy church. The church is created by another spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, God Himself, and that Spirit is given in the name of Jesus, because Jesus suffered the damnation of our unbelief and irritation and aggravation, our grumbling against God. That is what afflicted our dear Lord Jesus. It stuck Him in his head, stuck him in his hands, stuck him in his side, and he did not puke it out. He bore it, that he might kill it, and he rose from the dead.

For the will of God is that we be alive by the Holy Spirit. You are called Holy Church, not because you are all two shoes, goody two—shoes, goody gumshoes. Not because of that, but because of the Holy Spirit.

This spirit must come to us from the outside. We cannot generate it from within ourselves, even if we are religious geniuses. And this spirit we cannot generate, even if we can learn some of the tricks of charismatic wonders and try to find out ways that we can suddenly babble in non-understandable language, as if that were the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost: Preaching, Not Wild Dancing

Today we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. There was no wild dancing, no whirling dervishes, no sailing up and down.

There was preaching clearly and bravely when the Spirit was given in the face of ridicule and perplexity. What does this mean? What is going on here? Peter stood up and preached boldly, boldly words that agreed with the prophet.

He is not making up some cock—and-bull story now because he’s a religious leader. He’s preaching the words of Joel. This is what Joel means, and he’s very brave in the face of the

ridicule. So we celebrate today the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Waiting, Praying Church

Last week we heard about the waiting church. Well, that's what the church was doing.

The book of Acts says they were all gathered together in one place. There weren't some sleeping, others going hunting, others just wondering what on earth was happening. They were together in one place with one mind, and there they were praying.

They were listening to the promise that He said the Spirit will come, and they were praying, "Give us that Spirit." It's as if it's for you. You just got [unclear]. "We implore God, the Holy Ghost."

You heard the little children sing to you, "Come, Holy Spirit." The choir invite them to that. Spirit invites that spirit to us, and so today we are to be a listening, praying church, listening to preaching, not to some babble and gobbledygook that somebody has thought up, not some weird and strange stuff that, for a moment, gives us some excitement.

We are to hear what Jesus said: "If you love Me, you will keep My word, and My Father will love you, and We will come and make Our home in you." That is what you are, resident for the Holy Spirit, and it begins with clinging to Him and holding that Word. The Church is a new creation.

A New Creation, a Third Race

The only people that will survive the final judgment is Holy Church. For you are a new race, a third race, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither Greek or barbarian, neither black nor white, you are holy church.

This spirited church is created by that spirit. She has a mouth; she preaches. She has an ear; she listens, and that's how she sees, for that is how she believed.

"If Anyone Loves Me, He Will Keep My Word"

Now Judas, one of the 12 disciples, not the one that betrayed Jesus, said to the Lord, "Well, how are you going to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus' answer is among the most simple and beautiful descriptions of you as Holy Church. He said, "If anyone loves me, he

will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

There you have, in a simple sentence, the mystery, the wonder, the miracle, the endurance, the holiness, the shape of the church. There it is. “He who does not love Me does not keep My words, and the word which you hear is not Mine, but it is the Father’s who sent Me.” This is where the one three-person God wills to be known.

So we listen carefully to these words of Jesus. That is, we listen to keep them. We hug them, embrace them, learn them by heart, repeat them, sing them, teach them, and suck on them as if they were the sweetest of a honeycomb.

Israel Revives the Spirit of Slavery

Israel had suffered the great liberation of God. Egypt’s slave grip on Israel had been broken with mighty wonders, God led Israel out of Egypt and out of slavery, and He fed them on the way. He gave them water, He gave them shade for the overheating, and He gave them fire for the terrors of the darkness.

They very soon, with just a few troubled perplexities, revived that spirit of slavery. The grumbling at God led quickly to their irritation and quarrelsomeness with each other, and the pastor that God gave them very soon was overwhelmed. The whole continuing load of that quarreling, that grumbling, that turning away from God’s word got to be a load on the pastor, on Moses, that he was unable to carry; he was ready to capitulate. He wanted to throw in the towel, and he said, “If you really like me, God, kill me. I’ve had enough of that people.”

Israel began to give attention to other words. They began to keep their own words. “Oh, if we could have fish and cucumbers and onions in Egypt!” And they kept their own words. They preached their own words to themselves until that spirit just inflamed itself.

They were not keeping the words of Yahweh when Yahweh said, “I will take care of you. I will feed you. I will bring you to the land I promised you.”

So, in the midst of their not keeping His words, but stuffing themselves full of the sawdust of their own words, Yahweh snorted at them, says, “I’ll give you meat, all right. I’m going to give you so much meat, it’ll come out of your pores, ears, and nostrils. You will gag on it, but meat you will have.”

And yet Moses couldn't trust that. "How are you going to do that? There's 680,000 people here. You want me to kill all the flocks? You want me to drain all the fish out of the sea?" Then Yahweh says, "Do you think my arms are as short as yours?"

Keeping His Words, Not Our Own

So, my beloved, let us learn. Listen, the spirit of weariness, the life in the wilderness, is not always a party.

And the spirit of weariness and grumbling, the spirit of discontent and irritation. That is not what is [unclear] by keeping the words of Jesus. What we do is we repeat our own words and hold unto them. But the words of Jesus are greater and higher and mightier.

The Spirit Gathers the Church

So God said to Moses, "Bring your men together." And at the assembly, God took some of the spirit of Moses and put it on the 70 who were assembled, very much like we're going to do today in the service. We're going to put into office the officers in this congregation who have been elected to help carry on the work.

So the Holy Spirit still gathers. It is the Spirit that makes the church. We don't.

It's not our like-minded convictions and our like-minded needs that bring us together, although they are there. But it is the Spirit who makes the church. He gathers it here and everywhere on earth in that story of the works of God in Jesus.

For Jesus says, "These words that I'm talking to you are not Mine. They are God's." He is the Word of God to you, for you, about you, and it is His Spirit that is poured out.

This is not an imaginary fairy tale. It is death that sets us free from slavery to sin and death. Even though we are sinners and die, we are free. For the church is created by that new word of Jesus.

The Father Loves You

So the Father loves you. "Hold My word." The Father loves it when you hold the word of Jesus. For Jesus is God's word for you.

He loves it [unclear] that They come and indwell you. They live in you.

Clinging to Our Own Words

Are you willing to listen to that word of Jesus, or do you prefer your own words, your words about “Oh, that isn’t necessary. What do I need with absolution, with bread and wine, or water? What do I need worshiping with the people? Yeah, you know, I’d rather spend some time with my kids today.”

Are they sufficient? Is this enough? Or do you prefer to cling to your own words, wishing, “Oh, I wish it would be like it used to. We could only be back to fish and the [unclear] and the cucumbers,” or grumbling, “Yeah, I’ve been trusting Him, and nothing has happened anyway. Maybe there’s no value in it.”

We pump ourselves up with our hot air of our own words, as if it were better for us to wallow in our own misery, or to have the security of our own slavery, than it is to wait for the spirit to be poured out on you, so that you can, when people don’t know its meaning, and when people think you may be drunk, that you can, with simplicity, and with courage, and with bravery, proclaim the wonders of what God has done.

Afraid to Be Free

It is very dangerous to live in freedom. We are all so scared to be free.

Thus, Jesus has to say at the end, “Don’t be afraid. What I give you in the Spirit is peace. Don’t be afraid,” because He knows what treacherous hearts we have.

Like Israel, we can see the splendor of his victory, and in a few days start wishing we could be slaves again. He knows, and so he talks and teaches.

The Spirit Is Sent, Not Summoned

We do not get this Holy Spirit by self-will. “Let’s all gather together now and get somebody to lay his hands on us, and we’ll get the Spirit.” We do not, by our religious zeal or our religious boredom, apply a lever to God to pry open that lid, so the Spirit will be poured out.

The Holy Spirit is sent, and He is sent in the name of Jesus. “When the Counselor, the one who gives you consolation, comes, whom the Father will send in My name...” We are the recipients, not the causes.

It is the Father's will to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask. The issue then is whether our will is in union with His. We're taught to pray that Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Is that what we want? Do we want that spirit? God tells us, pray for. Wait. Listen to my word. Wait.

And if we say, "Yes, that is what we want. That is what we pray," then we are going to be—

Are we going to be like Moses, a little bit suspicious, and say, "Well, look at all these people. Look at all these problems. Look at all these issues. Look at all this weakness. Are you sure you can do that? How do you expect that to get done?"

The consoling and the counseling companion is sent from the Father in Jesus' name; you do not make Him come. He is sent to you. Do you want that?

You are taught to pray for that and wait for that spirit.

The Holy Spirit, Teacher and Remembrancer

When that Spirit comes, said Jesus, "He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Those words say clearly and bluntly: The Holy Spirit is teacher and remembrancer.

Now there are many words to describe the Holy Spirit. Today we are going to restrict ourselves to these two of the texts. The Holy Spirit is teacher. He will teach you all things that I have said to you, and bring to your remembrance my words to you.

Well, if that's what the spirit does, then let me ask you: Are you learners? Are you disciples? Are you students? Are you scholars?

Or are you the proud, self-satisfied? You know it all. After all, I went to parochial school, high school. I've been catechized. I've been confirmed. There really isn't anything else I don't know.

So you know so much that not even the Holy Spirit can teach you anything. There's no need to learn. You know it all.

Do you, like Israel, wish that what you could do is go back to the quiet security of slavery, where you could have your fish and your onions and cucumbers.

A Learning Church

But if the Holy Spirit is teacher and remembrancer, Holy Church is learner, disciple, scholar. I don't mean some academic degree where everybody reads esoteric footnotes. Talking about this learning, this learning from the Spirit to love and hold on to Jesus.

Many, both pastors and teachers, and members of the congregation are quite unwilling to be learners. There is a high interest in fish security. What can I do to sell myself? What can we do to make things interesting? What can we do to get more money? How can we make ourselves have more clout?

An enormous amount of pursuit of that. The printing presses are going mad, and you have to keep reading because every two years the fad goes out of fashion. The security for fish and cucumbers is deep, but it is the Holy Spirit who makes the church a scholar, disciple, learner.

For the Holy Spirit is the teacher, and the Holy Spirit is the remembrancer. He is the one who teaches you in your heart when you hear the words of Jesus. "Do this in remembrance of Me." He is the one who persuades you to remember that you are clean and free and safe in Him, even if things are out of control, unknown, and perplexing, because He causes you to remember.

So the Holy Spirit creates a learning church, and again, I do not mean an academic munching on fish and cucumbers, but I mean the hungry, the poor, the poor spirit, the spirit that's languishing, longing to hear, longing to be told of the love of Jesus, longing to be consoled by the victory of Jesus. Such poverty is to love Jesus. The poor in spirit receive the kingdom of God. That spirit clings to Jesus and waits and prays for Him to give the spirit. That is holy church.

The Delight of God

Such lowliness is the delight of God. He goes around heaven slapping on His leg and says, "Did you see that? Well, you look at that people down there!" For He relishes those who cling to His word.

"What Does This Mean?" Drunk with the Spirit

Jesus is the word he has given, and so the world is very uneasy about the church. There's a big noise going on, and the crowd gathers. There'll always be a crowd where there's big noise, and

they wonder what is going on.

For when they get there, what do they hear? But they hear some people preaching. The oddity is that the preaching is so they can understand it. You can hear, you can tell what they're talking about.

And so they say, "What does this mean?" They're all confused.

And then there are a few wags who say they are drunk because there is a way to be drunk with the Holy Spirit, to be inebriated, not with what comes out of the wine bottle, but what is poured out in the blood and body of Jesus, is to have courage, like some sad drunk who stands up and tells his wife off, not going to be told off by her anymore, or he tells his boss he wants a raise, or he gets up in the bar and he thinks he might be a spindly stick, or he thinks he can beat up anybody in the bar because he's drunk. Well, there is a way in which there is courage, but this is not the courage of the wine bottle.

Peter says, "Oh, pshaw! You can't get that drunk by nine o'clock in the morning. Now you guys are wrong."

But then, with courage, passion, and power, he continues to preach. He doesn't shut up and say, "Well, maybe we've got to get a different message. Folks don't seem to like this."

He didn't spend much time arguing about drinking too much wine. What he did spend time on was saying, "You are now watching the inebriation of the church as God pours out the new wine of His forgiveness and His love, that new peace in the blood of Jesus, the peace that the world cannot give and does not know, because the world must first get rid of its troubles if it wants peace."

The Peace the World Cannot Give

This peace rules in the midst of troubles, for this peace is the work of the Spirit in the hearts of the believers. It is that conviction, that persuasion, that your sins, big as they are, have been laid into the wounds of Jesus, and there they have been lapped up, licked up, and buried, and you are free to live even in the wilderness, trusting that man to deliver you, to care for you, to feed you when you can't even figure out how to do it.

"My arm," He says, "is not so short," and it is the Spirit that persuades you, moves you to trust and quietly to live in that peace. It is a peace where you and God are not grumbling at each

other, fighting with each other. You trying to go your own way, and God saying, “No, I want you to go my way.”

That peace is the certainty of the mercy of God at work in your heart. That His Word is your truth, your life, your hope, your resting place in the love of God.

You Are the Place Where He Lives

You are a wonderful creature that God has made His holy church. You are the place He lives in the world. If anybody is looking for God, they’ll come looking for you.

When they come looking for you, don’t be frightened when they say, “What does this mean?” And don’t be bamboozled when they say, “Oh, you guys are drunk.” When they come, having been taught by the Spirit, you open your mouth and speak the word about Him. For the Spirit is that teacher who gives you hearts of courage.

And together, when we worship, we practice this. We open our mouths to sing to each other. Soon you will be saying again the words, “Blessed is He who comes here to us. Hosanna! Please save us. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

You have learned that because your mouth was opened to be fed, your ears have been opened to be taught. “When the Spirit comes, He will teach you all things and call to your remembrance all that I have told you.”

May it please God to make us a learning church, for that is the church of the Spirit, who is the teaching Spirit.

“Come, Holy Spirit”

If you can remember what the children sang, say it with me, Gregory and Zachary. You may have to help the congregation again. Are you ready? Let’s say it.

Alleluia, alleluia. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful people, and kindle in them the fire of Your love. Alleluia.

Peace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you.

SOURCE

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Transcribed from an audio recording of a sermon by Kenneth F. Korby (CTSFW Media). [unclear] marks words that could not be made out.