
Receive The Holy Spirit!

A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
The Second Sunday of Easter

"Receive the Holy Ghost!" I heard it last night on the television set! I read it right there on the Internet!

Do you realize the amount of outright crazy stuff that is on the Internet? I looked further this week.

"Receive the Holy Ghost!" it read. "Do you have the Bible proof that you have been baptized in the Holy Ghost? Have you received the Holy Spirit according to the Bible pattern? The original Bible pattern has believers speaking in tongues. God wants you to have this and nothing less than this. Until you have the Bible proof, you are not baptized."

Listen, I know this stuff is true. I read it in a little brochure! I read it on the Internet!

It amazes me what people will believe. It amazes me how some so-called reporters will twist facts in order to make a prejudiced point. It happens in families. It happens in politics; it happens in the Church.

But let's be like St. Thomas today. You all remember St. Thomas, don't you? When the disciples told Thomas that they had seen the risen Jesus, Thomas had not been present at that first appearance. He had missed the meeting. But ever since then, he has been given a particular title, hasn't he? He is not just Saint Thomas. He is...Doubting Thomas, isn't he?

But look at the scriptures again. Thomas was no more a doubter than the other disciples. After all, they had already seen the risen Christ, and Jesus had already shown them his hands and his side. Thomas had missed the meeting. If anything, the lesson of Thomas is that: Don't miss the meeting!

Jesus showed up twice in one week to the disciples, and he said the same thing both times. Receive the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you. Put your finger here and see my hands. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Friends, let me present to you this morning the real Bible pattern for receiving the Holy Ghost! There is indeed a Bible pattern for receiving the Holy Spirit, but it is not the one I just quoted from the Internet.

No, it's the one I just quoted from John, chapter twenty. In John, chapter twenty, Jesus says very clearly "Receive the Holy Spirit." And he breathes on them; that breath, that wind, is the spirit. The disciples do receive the Spirit. And there are three signs that accompany the breath of Jesus; there are three other things that Jesus says in John, chapter twenty.

Speaking in tongues is not one of them. Now, I am actually one Episcopalian who is not opposed to speaking in tongues. It can be a great and powerful experience. But it is definitely not the sole sign of being in the Spirit.

What are the signs of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be a Christian?

These three things: Jesus said, "Peace be with you." Jesus showed them his wounded hands. Jesus said "Forgive sins." Peace, wounds, and forgiveness. These are the signs of the Holy Spirit. Let's take a closer look.

Number One: "Peace be with you." People of the spirit are for peace. One sign of being in the Holy Spirit of God is speaking peace. This sounds easy, but it is not, It's not easy in our families, in our churches, in our businesses - much more in our world. It is not easy when our so-called friends grow belligerent, bullying, and bellicose. "I am for peace; but when I speak of it, they are for war," said the psalmist (Psalm 120.7).

Many of us want peace. Many of us, when we are a contestant in the Miss America beauty show, will say, "All I want is world peace!"

But fewer of us will say what Jesus said. What did Jesus say? He did not say, "I want peace in the world." He actually delivered peace. He said, "Peace be with you."

What if those were the words on our lips during our next altercation, our next dispute. "You know, brother, we are having a dispute. Thomas, brother, you do not believe as I believe, but before we go any further, let the first thing out of my mouth be, "Peace be with you."

It's one thing to say, "Give me peace!" It is another to say, "Peace be with you." Maybe the sign of the Spirit is to speak in tongues, to speak in the tongues that make for peace. If our tongue speaks peace, well, that is a sign of the Spirit.

The second thing that Jesus said in John, chapter twenty: Wounds. People of the spirit are not immune to scars and wounds. People of the Spirit are not afraid of scars and wounds. The spirit always has flesh. In fact, the Spirit of God is not disembodied. It is earthy and real.

Resurrection is a messy event. On the screen, many of us saw how messy and bloody awful the crucifixion was. That is rather easy to show on the screen.

But you know what? I think the resurrection is messier. And it is much harder to show on the screen. The resurrection is messier because it is always a wounded body that is resurrected. We do suffer. When Jesus rises from the grave, he still has holes in his hands, and holes in his feet. And yet, yet, he is also delivering hopeful power.

The sure sign of the Spirit today is a body who knows what it is like to endure pain and suffering. Do not despair, then, when you go through tribulation -when people speak ill of you""when you are persecuted. It is in those very wounds that God's power will be made manifest. Our Lord told St. Paul, "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

The third thing that Jesus said in John, chapter twenty: Forgiveness. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

Forgiveness. This is the mark not only of the Spirit; it is the mark of Christianity.

There is a spiritual pattern of the world, and there is a spiritual pattern of Christianity. The world's pattern is bondage. Christianity's pattern is forgiveness. The Internet message I read is partly right: there is a Bible pattern to receiving the Holy Spirit. It is the power to forgive sins.

Who are you going to believe today? Whatever some stranger tells you? Whatever the latest telemarketer says? Whatever the latest Internet spam or virus or scam is? They are certainly there.

Or will you believe the Holy Spirit of Jesus? The signs of the Holy Spirit are not the speaking in tongues that leads to gibberish and confusion and exclusion. The signs of the Holy Spirit are tongues speaking peace. The signs of the Holy Spirit are tongues saying, "Touch me. Touch my hands and feet. Touch my wounds. Let us be healed and resurrected together." Finally, thirdly, the signs of the Holy Spirit are tongues saying, "I forgive you."

Oh, do not be swayed by the false prophets of gloom, belligerence, and separation. The truth of scripture is something else.

The truth of Christianity is something else.

Christianity needs people who genuinely seek this truth. It needs people like Thomas. Please show me. I will not believe just because I read it on the internet, just because some newspaper editorial said it such and such a way. I want to speak peace. I want to touch wounds. I want to forgive people. I want to be a person who has truly received this spirit of truth.

Where there is peace, where there is the courage to touch wounds, where there is forgiveness of sins, there is the Holy Spirit. There is the resurrected Jesus. There is the good news of the Christian Church.

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