

Words on the Wall: God has Poured out His Spirit

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

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Acts.2:29-47, Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 54

So maybe you've realized by now that we are doing two things here today. Today is Stewardship Sunday. Today we remind ourselves about God's call to bless others with our resources, to give of our time, talent and treasure in service of the Kingdom. Today is also a really important point in our Words on the Wall Catechism series. We've been working through the Catechism's treatment of the creed, and today we start the final section of the creed. Today we focus on the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity. Today, with the church of all ages, we proclaim those words that have a prominent place on our wall, "I believe in the Holy Spirit!" I'm not going to lie. I was always planning to preach on the Holy Spirit. This Catechism series has been planned for months and it's exciting for me. Stewardship Sunday on the other hand - I probably should feel excited about preaching about the call to share our gifts and to invite you to make a pledge to our church - but truthfully, a sermon on the person and work of the Holy Spirit sounds way more fun to me than asking for money. So when I realized I'd scheduled my Spirit sermon for stewardship Sunday, I thought I was in deep trouble, but God, by his Holy Spirit, (how's that for irony), showed me that Stewardship Sunday and the Holy Spirit were not so far apart at all. In fact they are intimately connected, and the connection is all in the pouring. More on that later, for now let's set the scene for our Bible reading. We are at the end of one of the most important days in the history of God's people. It's Pentecost Sunday, and the Holy Spirit of God has just been poured out on the church. God is pouring himself on us. It's not God's blessing that is being poured out, it's not a portion of God's strength or wisdom that is being poured out, as the catechism makes clear, the Holy Spirit not a gift of God; the Holy Spirit is Eternal God. God himself takes residence in us. Here's how Peter describes it in his Pentecost sermon. Using the book of Joel and Psalm 16, he talks about how the prophets anticipated this great day.

So here's how Peter describes Jesus sending the Holy Spirit in verse 33. "Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." I want you to see that the pouring out of the Spirit described in this verse is not just a one-time description of how of the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost; it is part of a pattern. When we see God outpoured in this passage, it is absolutely typical of the way the river of God's power and grace flows throughout this book. And to explain how that's so let me do something a little different, let me go over here (At the communion table there are 4 glass pitchers). This is a good place to see the pattern of God's pouring. This is a good place to see how the river of God's power and grace flows. The flow always starts from a position of uplifted strength, and leads to outpouring.

So in the beginning you have God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the eternal three in one. He is full of power and glory. He is full of love. God needs nothing. God is high and uplifted. But then from his high and uplifted position, what does God do? Does he simply enjoy his Holy perfection? No. God pours himself out by making a world. God doesn't need to make us, but he does, even though he must have known that we would bring him pain. God pours himself out in creation and we are brought into existence (pour out water into cup 2). It doesn't take long for that to change, we sin and we fall. So what does God do he pours himself out even further. God

sends his one and only Son to save the world. He pours himself out in Jesus (pour more into cup 2).

So Jesus comes to the world. And he starts with uplifted strength. He is full of grace and truth. Full of the Father's power. He can do miracles, he can calm seas, and he can command legions of fiery angels. What does he do with that power? Does he set up a throne in Jerusalem? Does he ride to conquer Rome? No. He pours himself out in service and love. He touches lepers and kneels at his disciple's feet to wash them. Finally, at the last supper he pours out the wine and says: 'this my blood, the cup of the new covenant, poured out for you.' He empties himself all the way to death on a cross (pour into cup 3).

After Jesus gives his life, God raises Jesus from the dead. Jesus is raised to a place of uplifted strength. Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father! God gives him the name that is above all names that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2) (lift up the cup). And now that Jesus is in His lofty state, what happens next? Does he put up his feet in the heavenly throne room, and enjoy his hard work? No. Verse 33: "Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." There's the pattern again! Jesus is uplifted in the resurrection and the ascension, and he pours out the Holy Spirit into us (pour into cup 4).

Now we have been lifted up! Saved from our sin. Filled with new life. All those benefits that the catechism talks about come upon us. We share in Christ and all his benefits. We are comforted in our troubles, and we are given eternal roots. As Ephesians 2 puts it, we are raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms. In Christ part of us is already uploaded into the heavenly realms (lift up the cup). And now that the Spirit has been poured on us, and we in this position of uplifted strength, now that we share in Christ in all his benefits, what do you think comes next for us? Do we bask in our status as chosen people? No. That's not the pattern. We pour ourselves out for others. We take our time and our talent and our treasure and our personal energy and we pour it out for each other and for the world.

And in fact, look at our story and you will see that's just what the early church does. The early church understand how the river of God's power and grace flows! What's the first thing the early church does? The day after they've received the Holy Spirit and raised up out of their sin, what's the very next thing they do? They give. They form this community of radical generosity. With glad and sincere hearts they met together every day, they shared all things in common, they sold possessions. The early church didn't need a stewardship Sunday, they gave with glad and cheerful hearts because they understood how the river of God flows. They knew that after you are uplifted you let yourself be outpoured.

Can you see how this story might be the perfect story for Stewardship Sunday? I could stand up here and challenge you to give by telling you about all the fabulous ministries of this church and how important they are. Our missions programs are so important! We have 30 missionaries all over the world working on the front lines! They need your help! Our children's programs are so important. We have 250 children in our youth programs, and they need to be disciplined as they face this challenging world! We need your help! I could say all those things and they would all be true. I could call you to stewardship by blasting you with Biblical commands. The first fruit of your harvest belongs to the Lord! You shall give a tithe of all you own! Everything you have belongs to the Lord and not to you! It is given to you as a trust from Him! Those commands are in the Bible and their call is real. But I think what I want to do today is invite you to give yourself to the river of God's power and grace, to immerse yourself in this

beautiful river with a glad and sincere heart. I want you to know yourself as a person who sins have been washed away by the Holy Spirit, a person who participates in Christ and all his benefits, a person who has been uplifted in Christ to the heavenly places. And knowing that you are uplifted I invite you to pour yourself out. I invite you to be part of the fellowship of those who gather with glad and sincere hearts and share their time talent and treasure, who pour themselves out for each other and for the world, and who do it, not because they've been ordered, but because they've been caught up in the glorious river of God's grace, the river that flows from this table, the river that flows from that font, the river that leads to eternal life.

When you know that you are in that river, you can stand in the driest places, and still flow out to others. John Timmer was my colleague and mentor when I started out in ministry. He tells the story of one of the first times he felt the Spirits flow in his life. It was in Holland during World War Two. It's 1940 and John is about 12 years old and the Timmer family is living through a very stressful time. The Germans are invading Holland and as they invade they are broadcasting threats on the Radio. Holland must surrender immediately, and if they do not, the Germans would rain down bombs on five major Dutch cities. One of those five cities would be Haarlem, the city where John and his family lived. As you can imagine, everyone was on edge. After a few nights of these threats, John and his family were sitting at the kitchen table eating dinner when the air raid sirens started going off. The Germans were coming. John said he remembers that his mouth went dry and in his 12 year old brain all he could think was, "This is it! I'm done! My life is over! I'm done!!" "Maybe we should go and stand in the hallway," his father said, "That's supposed to be the safest place." So the Timmer family went into the hallway. They crouched there for a while listening to the siren's wail. His father said, "Why don't we pray, there's nothing else we can do," so they started to pray. John said he couldn't remember much about that prayer except for one line. In the middle of the prayer his father said, "Lord, We seek refuge in the shadow of your wings until danger passes." It was a little bit of Psalm 57, Psalm 57:1.

As John describes it, as his father prayed those words "it was like the dark hallway in which we stood was lit up. These words wrapped themselves around me. I realized that even when every house in the city is exposed to death there is a hiding place. If I am under God's wings even in this place, what can bombs do to me?"

There in his fear and emptiness, in that dark place, the Spirit flowed into the life of John Timmer. I'm sure he would never have articulated it in terms of the catechism, especially in that moment, but all the things that the catechism talks about were being poured into his heart. Christ and all his benefits, his Holy comfort, the eternal promises. The sirens were wailing, but the river was also flowing and John could sense in his 12 year old heart that the river was stronger than the sirens. And he spent the rest of his life pouring himself out in ministry.

In the middle of your dark hallway – whatever that might be, I declare to you that the Holy Spirit is here. The Spirit is flowing to you right now, full of grace and truth. I invite you with glad and sincere hearts, to immerse yourself in this river. Open your hearts to grace of this river, and then, when it has filled you and lifted you up, through your time and talent and treasure, let yourself be outpoured.

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