

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, May 11, 2008  
Rev. John Tapscott

**"THE ENABLING SPIRIT"**

Acts 2:1-4

Dr. James Dobson, head of the Focus on the Family organization writes that he learned effective discipline from his mother. James' father often travelled when he growing up, so his mother was the main disciplinarian. James often got in trouble at school, and his mother was running out of ways to keep him in line. One day, after another visit to the principal's office, she told James that the next time she got a call from the principal, she would become his shadow, going to school with him, attending his classes, walking with him through the halls, participating in his activities and talking with his friends. This brilliant threat resulted in an immediate change in James' behaviour and he became a model student.

Most of us can identify with young James. At a certain age, having our mother following us around would be sheer humiliation. But as we grow older, we realize that our mothers' influence does follow us wherever we go. And our mothers' influence was not only our first but probably one of our best. Thank God for mothers!

Now today is Mother's Day and Christian family Sunday. It is also Pentecost Sunday on which we thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit. "When the day of Pentecost had come (ten days after Jesus' ascension to heaven), they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven, there came a sound like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...." (Acts 2:1-4a) We celebrate Pentecost, because the Holy Spirit was also given for us.

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God's way of being with us now, of shadowing us, if you will. God the Father is in heaven with the Son seated at his right hand, and the Holy Spirit is God's way of being present with his people and his creation. The Holy Spirit is God himself dwelling with us and in the hearts of all who receive Christ as Saviour. The Holy Spirit makes God the Father and Jesus the Son real for us. The Holy Spirit is not restricted. He goes to the farthest corners of the earth and to all kinds of people. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will move in and among the land of Burma, opening doors for

suffering people there to receive aid and relief. The Spirit finds a way into places that nothing and no one else can. Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God with us and in us now.

The Holy Spirit is not only God's presence; the Holy Spirit does something. The Holy Spirit comes in power and causes things to happen. Verse 4 "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them." The Holy Spirit is an enabling Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables certain things in our midst just as he enabled them in the early Church.

***First, the Holy Spirit enables communication.*** Verses 4-6 "Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared...and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them... And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in their own native language."

The tongues of fire transformed the tongues of the disciples so that everyone could hear the Gospel in their own language. Peter lifted up his voice and told the great crowd that this event fulfilled prophecy. Peter spoke of Jesus, the mighty signs that God did through him, and how he was crucified. He said that God raised this Jesus up and made him both Lord and Christ. Peter forthrightly told his listeners that they too bore responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion. The people were cut to the heart and cried out, "What should we do?" Peter told them to repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Then they too would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Three thousand people responded to the word and were baptized and joined the new church that very day. The Holy Spirit had given power and clarity to Peter's words. The Holy Spirit opened peoples' hearts and minds to the message. The Holy Spirit enabled communication of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit enables communication. I can preach the word of God to you. I can tell you how much God loves you and desires not your perishing or separation but that you belong to God and his family for all eternity. I can tell you how he sent Christ to live and die for your sins and rise again so that this can happen for you through faith in Christ. I can tell you that Jesus is now Lord of all, the hope and the light and the coming judge of the world. I can tell you all this, but it is the Holy Spirit who wings these words to your mind and opens your heart to respond. No matter how eloquent or learned a preacher may be, he or she depends on the Holy Spirit to enable communication of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit enable communication in the church, and also in the home.

A popular cartoon in the paper is "Zits." It was recommended to me by a fellow clergy who is also the father of a teenager. What makes the cartoon funny is that the adults and teenagers are speaking almost in different languages. They have a communication problem. If you have teenagers in the home now or if you've had them, you can relate.

Now we can always learn good communication techniques. Pastor Ed Young in his book, "Romancing the Home" gives husbands two techniques for listening to their wives; the "hold the bucket" technique and the "mirror" technique. We men are fixers. We men want to offer solutions to problems and often quickly. But women generally want talk about their feelings first. They don't want a solution as much as they want understanding. The best thing for a husband to do when his wife has a problem is just to "hold the bucket"; let her express her feelings without offering advice or judgement. Or he can use the mirror technique, reflecting his wife's feelings back to her, restating whatever she says in his own words. This helps her know that she is being heard and understood and respected.

I think we can use this in all our relationships for good communication. Of course, if your child is about to jump off the roof, you need a more direct form of communication. But ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who enables good communication in the church and in our homes. So we pray, ""Come Holy Spirit, come and help us."

***The Holy Spirit also enables community.*** In Acts 2:44-47 we read, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions... and distributed them as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts." The Holy Spirit enabled these early believers to say "Jesus is Lord" and brought them together around the name and person of Jesus. The Holy Spirit enabled community.

The same Holy Spirit enables community today among Christians. We sometimes disagree with one another on issues, but let me tell you that there is real fellowship and warmth where people share the confession, "Jesus is Lord." And that community very quickly disintegrates when people do not share that fundamental faith.

God himself is a community of three persons, bound together in love - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And God intends for us to live in community - in relationship with God and with one another. The Holy Spirit enables us to love one another. God's Holy Spirit helps us to seek one another's highest good. As we turn to Christ in faith God's Holy Spirit enters our lives and our homes,

our churches and brings Christ's teachings alive for us. And Jesus' teachings are God's basic truths for living together in community.

A youth pastor named Les Christie decided that the youth group of his church needed to paint the youth room. They couldn't decide on a colour, so Les let them paint each of the four walls a different colour. But he had forgotten that some senior members of the church also used the room for Bible study. They were furious with Les and the youth group. But the Holy Spirit gave Les an inspiration which helped to turn the situation around. He told the senior members that he was proud of the teens' spiritual insight. They had painted one wall blue to represent heaven. The black wall represented the power of sin. The red wall stood for Jesus' blood. And the white wall represented Jesus' cleansing power. His explanation brought peace immediately. Les notes, "The church left those colours in that room for the next fourteen years, because nobody would paint over the blood of Christ." The Holy Spirit enables community.

***Finally, the Holy Spirit enables cooperation.*** The Holy Spirit lifted the disciples out of the room where they were obediently waiting and sent them into action. They cooperated with one another and with the Lord's purposes. And God used them in his great work of spreading the Gospel of redemption, which eventually became a world-wide mission as Jesus intended.

The Holy Spirit enables us to cooperate with God's purposes. The Spirit lifts us from our comfortable pews to take our part in God's work, spreading God's love and the Name of Jesus Christ in our community and around the world. The Holy Spirit moves us to cooperate with one another in the church. By working together, we glorify God in our worship, we put on fellowship and fund-raising events, we teach our young people God's truths, we beautify our church property inside and out, we do mission and outreach work, we build a welcoming church which brings people into God's family through baptism and faith. Through cooperation we accomplish much for God's Kingdom.

My favourite movie is Apollo 13, starring Tom Hanks. It's the true and uplifting story of how the crippled space capsule made it safely back to earth against all odds. It happened because of extraordinary cooperation between the astronauts themselves and between the astronauts and the mission control team on earth. People accomplish great things through cooperation and it's certainly true for the church.

To build up our church and our families we need the Spirit of the living God. That's why we pray constantly "Come Holy Spirit, come and help us." For the Holy Spirit enables three essential elements - communication, community and cooperation.