

Sunday Sermon 010724 Genesis 1:1-5, Mark 1:4-11, Acts 19:1-7

"Start with the Holy Spirit!"

On the first day of 1982, forty-two years ago in New York State, after we had married but had no child yet, Euni and I went into our church carrying a blanket and pillows. At the time, we were a newlywed lay couple and wanted to fast and pray for 24 hours because we hoped to dedicate our first day of the new year to God.

New York The Korean UMC was located in the city of Hampstead, 30 minutes away from New York City. The church was bought, which was rare at the time for Korean-American immigrant churches. But there was no heating because of cost-cutting.

We stayed in the bridal waiting room on the second floor of the church. It was carpeted, but it was so cold that the toilet water was frozen solid. We prayed in the sanctuary until late at night but had to come back to the room because we were freezing.

On the chilly second day of the year, Euni and I took a walk along the snowy street. We were walking along the street when we were passing by a restaurant, and the smell of hot clam chowder filled our nostrils. We were very hungry, but the smell was so good, and we were even grateful for it.

Today is the first Sunday of 2024, and it is called Epiphany Sunday in the church calendar. In Western Christianity, Epiphany Sunday typically commemorates the journey of the three wise men in search of the savior, the birth of Jesus, and his physical manifestation.

I am struck by the magnetism and charisma of the Holy Spirit in today's scriptures. He existed from the very beginning, when there was nothing. He has had a hand in every single work of God, such as the birth, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

However, He is a spirit, formless; therefore, he appears as a dove or flame of fire. I am sure that when Jesus comes again to earth, riding on a cloud, the Holy Spirit will be there as the base of the cloud that Jesus stands upon.

Let's look at today's scripture as it introduces the works of the Holy Spirit's spiritual instruction.

In verse 2, "the wind from God" might be interpreted as "the Spirit of God." What was the Spirit when God created the universe? In the midst of the formlessness, desolation, and darkness, the Spirit of God was moving over the water. This description reveals the dynamic nature of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

When God commanded, "Let there be light," light appeared. And God was pleased with the light. Here we see that the Holy Spirit is at work in the commandments of God and that light has come into being. The Spirit gave pleasure to God through the accomplishment and fulfillment of the will of the Father God.

Let's look at the works of the Spirit through the proclamation of John the Baptist from the gospel of Mark. John preached the baptism of repentance. He prepared the people to welcome the Messiah through repentance and forgiveness of their sins.

However, Jesus baptized people with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we accept Jesus as our personal savior, the Holy Spirit baptizes us, and the Spirit of God comes and dwells in us and rules our lives.

When Jesus was baptized and came out of the water, a voice came from heaven: "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you." At that time, the Spirit delivered the message from God quickly from heaven down to Jesus on earth. He cooperated with Jesus in order to have Jesus start his life in public with joy and encouragement.

Let's also look at the work of the Spirit introduced in the book of Acts. We see that the prophecy of John the Baptist described in the gospel of Mark was accomplished in the book of Acts. Apostle Paul baptized those believers in Ephesus in the name of Jesus Christ, and when He placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. They spoke in strange tongues and prophesied.

However, it doesn't mean that speaking in tongues and prophesying are the only evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But such a

spiritual event shows us an example of experiencing the spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 introduces the nine gifts from the Holy Spirit; they are: the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, the gift of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

I believe the reason that the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying appeared in Ephesus was because those gifts were specifically necessary in that situation at that place and at that time.

The Holy Spirit Revival Movement boomed in Korea from the 1960s to the '80s. The Pentecostal movement was spreading nationwide, and numerous Christians experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, miracles, etc.

At the ripe old age of 14, I fervently began to pray for the gift of speaking in tongues at a spiritual revival meeting at my church. Sometimes, I spent all night in prayer vigils and praise with the adult group. The hymn that we sang a lot at that time was "The Comforter has Come!"

Much to my regret, this hymn isn't included in our current hymn book.

"Oh, spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found, wherever human hearts and human woes abound; let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound; The Comforter has come! The Comforter has come! The Holy Ghost from Heav'n, the Father's promise, given! Oh, spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found: The Comforter has come!"

However, I didn't experience the gift of tongues for many years, even though some of my friends who didn't participate in the prayer vigil did. How ironic, right? But after 10 years of vigilant praying, I finally experienced my first intonations of tongues while I was praying alone in the morning at the church sanctuary.

Looking back, during my all-night prayer vigil and praising 10 years ago, the Holy Spirit had already come to me. But I misunderstood at that time that I had to receive the gift of the Spirit in order to be baptized by the Spirit. I misunderstood that if I hadn't received the gift of the Holy Spirit, I hadn't received the Holy Spirit himself.

However, through receiving the gift of speaking in tongues, I met and experienced the living and generous God. Nowadays, some Christians believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer granted to people in the modern era, while others experience and practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Whether it is receiving baptism or gifts from the Holy Spirit, the result is what is more important and what affects us. Those Christian believers in Ephesus who experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul were able to have conviction in their faith. They became brave and didn't fear persecution. Moreover, all the people who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord through them (v. 10).

Since Euni and I started the year by fasting and praying, did everything in the year prosper? I can't even remember the good and bad times of my life in 1982. Was Esther born on January 6 of the following year an answer to prayer? no. We hadn't prayed for a baby yet during that fasting prayer.

But even now, something is clear to us. The fact is that our God, through His Spirit, still hears our prayers then and now and grants the desires of our hearts. Today we can entrust the beginning of the year to that God. And the Almighty wants to take charge of our year from start to finish for us.

Although the new year, 2024, has arrived, the outlook for this year may not be as bright as expected. How are you preparing to navigate through this year of potential chaos? Allow the King of Salvation to take full charge of your body and soul.

Two thousand years ago, wise men led by the Holy Spirit visited the baby Jesus and worshipped Him. Today, the King of Salvation, Jesus, is reaching out to you, knocking on the door of your heart daily through the Holy Spirit.

Today, as the gospel of Jesus spreads across the globe, the Holy Spirit is at work in every Christian individual and community, accomplishing countless works of God across time and space.

Church, I want you to entrust the start of your new year wholly to Him and become His friend. Let the Holy Spirit help and guide you. He is God, who transcends time and space. He is not limited by our frailty and conditions. As such, He can dwell in us, He rejoices in helping us, and He accomplishes His good works through us today.

May you live a life of joyful victory in 2024, with the Holy Spirit by your side to help you walk with the Lord.

****Reflection and Application for Today's Sermon:**

- 1) As you approach the first Sunday of 2024, what is the first thing you thank God for? How will that gratitude affect your faith throughout the year?
- 2) Who will you pray for intensively throughout 2024? What does he need? Let's confess and pray Philippians 4:6-7 every day.
- 3) What is a bad habit you want to try to break or a good habit you want to tame in order to walk with the Holy Spirit daily?