

Treasure in a Jar

Before beginning today's message, I would like to take a moment to thank everyone who helped make last Sunday's "celebrating our future" worship such a success. I personally received so much encouragement from your energy, joy, and togetherness. I am humbled and privileged to be able to serve God together with you here at First UMC.

Today, we are going to continue with our sermon series, "Devotional Classics," and we will look into the Charismatic Tradition, a Spirit-Empowered Life.

When Pastor Richard introduced this book and asked me to preach on the Charismatic Tradition, my first reaction was, "Do I need to make everyone speak in tongues?" Somehow the very first image that came to my mind when I heard the word "Charismatic," was the speaking in tongues and the seeking of supernatural miracles. That does not mean I do not appreciate the Charismatic Movement. Actually, I have a fond memory.

During my seminary years, I visited charismatic worship services at the "Vineyard" church in New York City. I was impressed by their praises and heart-felt worship services. I also noticed that many people spoke in tongues during the public worship service. They even sang together in tongues. It was such an extraordinary worship experience.

The Charismatic Movement believes the power of the Holy Spirit should be the same whether it is the first century or the twenty-first century. As early Christians experienced the power of the Holy Spirit through miracles, supernatural healing, prophecies, and speaking in tongues, that power should be the same for modern Christians.

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Personally, I am very open to the Charismatic Movement. I long to experience more power from the Holy Spirit in my life. But I also understand why some Christians are uncomfortable when they hear the word “Charismatic.”

Some Charismatic Christians believe that speaking in tongues is proof of the Holy Spirit, while on the flip side of this, they treat those who do not speak in tongues as if they have not received the Holy Spirit.

Other Charismatic Christians believe in God’s power to heal the sick. Some go as far as condemning people who rely on modern medication and doctors as having a lack of faith.

I am sure we all have preconceived ideas of what “Charismatic” faith is. So I was curious what books “Devotional Classics” would introduce about the Charismatic Tradition.

After I read all seven excerpts about the Charismatic Tradition from “Devotional Classics,” I found all of them very refreshing. None of the seven books emphasized speaking in tongues or miracles.

Instead, the focus was on the Holy Spirit and a personal heart-to-heart experience with God.

It is humbling to hear the words from Catherine of Genoa. *“I became so consumed with God’s love that as I stood contemplating this work within me, I felt that even if I were cast into hell, hell itself would have appeared to me all love and consolation.”*

I am so amazed by her expression. *“Even if I were cast into hell, hell itself would have appeared to me all love and consolation.”* Where did that strength come

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from? It seems she was protected by love and consolation, and that hell did not have any power over her.

As I read about her faith, the Bible passage *2 Corinthians 4:7-9* came into my heart. It is the passage we read earlier:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Here Paul talks about a treasure in jars of clay. Clay jars are very fragile and break easily. Paul used the metaphor of a clay jar to describe our human condition. Our human minds and bodies can be broken so easily. But this jar made of clay is holding something incredible, a treasure.

Christians are not protected from the dangers in life. I wish we were. I wish I could say that “If you are a Christian, God will keep you from all danger and troubles. If you’re a Christian, you’ll never have a physical illness; troubles will evaporate and never come to you.” But that that is not true, Christians suffer human difficulties. We do get ill, face financial problems, suffer persecution, and problems of every kind, too many to list. In spite of all the good works we do and no matter how close to the Lord we walk, we may face difficulties. The difference between Christians and people without faith is we have God’s promise to give us the strength to overcome these hardships. The promised treasure: *We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

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So, what is that treasure? In my opinion, that treasure is the Holy Spirit, God's gift to us.

On the night before he was crucified, with less than 24 hours left, Jesus spoke these words:

John 14:16 - *Then I will ask My Father and He will give you another **Helper**. He will be with you forever. He is the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot receive Him. It does not see Him or know Him. You know Him because **He lives with you and will be in you.***

Receiving the Helper was very important for Jesus. So much so he repeated this when he first appeared to his disciples after His resurrection. The Bible said the disciples were hidden behind a locked door. There in the midst of them Jesus appeared and said, "**Peace be with you!**" Then he showed them his hands and His side as if He wanted to show them proof that He was their Master who just died on the cross. Then Jesus repeated, "**Peace be with you!**" And then he said, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**"

Then just before He ascended into heaven He again reminded His followers one last time,

Acts 1:4-8, *"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. ... You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

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Jesus could not emphasize more how important it is for us to receive the Holy Spirit.

As if Jesus wanted us to have this treasure and reminded us over and over again!

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is not an “it”. The Holy Spirit is a Person. The Bible says that he is not something, but someone, He is God. There are three persons in the trinity of God. God the Father the creator, God the Son the redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit the sustainer!

Then what does the Holy Spirit do? Of course, he sustains us.

What does “sustain” mean? Strengthen and support mentally and physically.

1) Dwells in us.

1 Corinthians 6:19 *Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?*

2) Comforts us when we are hurting.

John 14: 27 *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

3) Helps us recall the things we've learned about God.

John 14: 26 *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.*

4) Guides us by convicting us of sin

John 16:7-8 *I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*

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And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment...

5) Prays for us.

Roman 8:26 *The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

6) Gives us power and spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10 *To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

7) Produces the fruit of Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 *By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.*

The Holy Spirit is the treasure God has put out in jars of clay like us; when we hold that treasure, we receive the power to overcome the world. *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

Our biggest challenge is, whether or not we are able to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. Thomas Kelly one of the notable figures in Charismatic Tradition says that we all have a secret place in our hearts, the inner sanctuary where the Holy Spirit dwells.

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“Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself....”

The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening. The secret places of the heart cease to be our noisy workshop. They become a holy sanctuary of adoration and of self-oblation, where we are kept in perfect peace if our minds be stayed on Him who has found us in the inward springs of our life.”

Are you able to find that inner sanctuary of the soul? Are you able to listen to that voice speaking within you?

I am convinced that you all have experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit. We all are here because we have responded to the invitation to come to the Lord. However, not many of us are aware of how closely the Holy Spirit is interacting in our lives 24 hours 7 days a week. I am convinced that the more we open our eyes to witness the work of the Holy Spirit, the more our lives will become empowered.

I have shared this once before, but I would like to share this with you again. Years ago, I lost two very close friends on the same day. I received the call that my one friend passed into glory in the morning in hospice care, and another one passed away suddenly in her nursing home. I was devastated. Next morning, as I walked into my church office, I found myself dragging my feet. Then I sensed a strong power within my body shouting, “This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Then, suddenly, a surge of power swept through me, and I was in a perfect peace.

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Through the years, God became my old best friend. I am familiar with his presence and when I close my eyes, I can center myself in my inner sanctuary and find myself immediately connected to the Lord, whether in my church office, on the street, or in a hospital room. Right here!!! That inner sanctuary always travels with me.

Before leaving this earthly place, Our Lord Jesus Christ left us a beautiful treasure. The helper who lives right here inside you! The sustainer!! He will sustain you with amazing grace wherever your life journey takes you. Amen!