

Getting In on What God Is Doing

This past Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, Bud Mitchell and I were at the 2009 Sessions of the Eastern Regional Conference of the Churches of God, which were held at the Church Camp at Doubling Gap Center. These were very busy days and evenings filled with Worship, good fellowship and food, lively preaching, and reports from the various Councils, Commissions, Committees, Corporations, and Administrators of the Conference and General Conference of the Churches of God. The overall theme of the conference was "God Is Doing Something," which was amply illustrated in the reports and testimonies shared at the meetings.

Most of you may not be aware of this, but we are very well represented in the Eastern Regional Conference. My daughter Rachel is a member of the Administrative Council and serves as Chairwoman of the Commission on Discipleship. She reported on the work of her commission and also participated in leading worship at the Conference through interpretive dance, which took me completely by surprise and made me very proud of her and grateful to the Lord. I serve as Chairman of the Renewal Commission and reported on the work of our Commission. I was also recognized and honored at Conference along with Lee Snyder, for having completed 40 years of service in pastoral ministry. They gave us a 40 year pin, a clock to mark the passing of time, and flowers for our wives for standing by us all these years. And, just in case you think this means I'm getting old, I will assure you that I started preaching when I was very young. I can't exactly remember, but I think I must have been in diapers yet when I started preaching, and I'll probably be in them again before I quit! Betty Jane is planning to retire from Nursing in a few years, but I plan to keep going in ministry until the Lord tells me or makes it clear that it is time to stop. If you think I might retire too soon to suit you, don't worry. If you are counting the days, and can't wait for a change, don't get you hopes up!

Still, being honored for 40 years of service, was a rather sobering milestone. On the one hand, I felt a great sense of gratitude. The majority of people who go into pastoral ministry don't last 40 years. On the on the other hand, I felt a great sense of urgency. I don't know how many of you know this, but Bud Mitchell used to make signs for a living. And, if you have driven out to Roaring Spring in recent years, you may have noticed the very attractive stone-encased sign or monument located on the right hand side of the road across from Bickel's Surplus. How many can remember seeing that sign? That was Bud Mitchell's last project before his retirement. Bud told me that knowing that that sign would be his last one, he especially wanted to make sure that it was a good one. He wanted that sign to be a reflection

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of his best work and work that will last for a long time. I know that my time in ministry is limited. The end of the road is in sight and my legacy for the kingdom will be written here. My ambition, God being my source and my strength, is to do my best work, and work that will last, from now until the end of my pastoral journey. Like the long distance runner who has finally come in sight of the finish line, it's time to kick--to give it every last ounce of strength I have left.

In the same service in which I was recognized for 40 years of service there were others who were being recognized for 50 years of service. Although the 40 year men weren't given the opportunity to say anything, the 50 year men were. What they shared were simple words of gratitude to the Lord, to their wives, and to the congregations they had served. These men, whom I know to be men of great integrity, spoke those words with great humility and with joy. They reminded me of what Moses or the disciples of Jesus must have looked like after being with the Lord on the mountain tops. I decided, that if the Lord should allow me 10 more years in ministry, I want to have that quality about my life. If I can just glow like they glow, I couldn't ask for anything more.

But here's the secret I want to share with you this morning. They didn't get where they are and I won't get where they are and you will not be able to finish your journey with the Lord well, without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The mandate we have as Christians to serve others, to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and to reach others for the kingdom, is a mandate too difficult for any of us to carry out in our own strength. Acts 1:4-5, say: "On one occasion, while he (Jesus) was eating with them, he gave them this command: '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.'" In response to what Jesus told them to do, Acts 1:14 says, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." In these days of wonder--in these days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday--we are reminded that we too need to watch and pray until we too are filled with and impelled by the Holy Spirit.

This was the other major theme that became evident throughout the Conference sessions. God is doing something, He invites us to be a part of what He is doing, but what He asks us to do will demand more than what we can do on our own. To try to do God's work in our own strength is a recipe for disaster, a prescription for burn-out and defeat. We absolutely need God's power to participate in God's program and in

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God's plan.

One of the highlights of the conference and example of this for me came Monday evening when Pastor Dwight Lefevre shared his experience of ministering to that family in Lancaster County in 2006, whose son, husband, and father Charles Roberts had just murdered 5 Amish girls ranging in age from 6-13, in an Amish schoolhouse, and then killed himself. The Roberts family were members of the church pastor Lefevre had pastored and he was a first-responder to the Roberts home after they had heard what their loved one had done. Pastor Dwight told us how he felt completely inadequate to minister in such a terrible circumstance. What do you say? What do you do? Certainly he cried out to the Lord for help, and as he took us through his experience in the days immediately following the shooting, he told how he experienced the hand of the Lord on that community. The second person to arrive at the Robert's home was an Amish man from the community who affirmed: "We will forgive you." Dwight said he felt carried along by the Holy Spirit, as He witnessed several other acts of kindness and forgiveness emanating from the Amish people. He was an eyewitness to how God took something very evil and turned it into a positive message of reconciliation and love, an example for the whole world of what God can do. Dwight experienced the Holy Spirit ministering through him as he ministered in an otherwise impossible situation.

There is a witness that God wants us to give for Him as a church here at Fourth Street. He assigns us to make a difference in the lives of the hurting people who surround us in this community. He calls upon us to bring His comfort to those who grieve, His hope to those who are in despair, His message of forgiveness to people who feel beyond forgiveness, His freedom to those who are oppressed and enslaved by Satan and his minions. He calls us to bring the message of reconciliation to those who are estranged from God and from one another. This is a ministry for which we will certainly need the empowerment from on high. We need the Holy Spirit to fill us. We need Christ to give us strength.

And, it's not just for the exceptional and traumatic things that we need God's power. We need God's power every day to be the kind of husbands, wives, parents, grandparents, neighbors, workers, and friends we need to be. We need to be Spirit filled and Spirit led in all we do. **We can do nothing without Him.**

But, how do we get the Holy Spirit? How can we get in the stream where we will be led along by the Holy Spirit? How can we get under

the spout where the glory comes out?

Three things come to mind this morning. #1, Yield to the pressure the Holy Spirit is bringing into your life and surrender your life to God. Repent of living your life outside of God's plan and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and as a sign of your intention to live for the Lord. In Acts 2:38, Peter says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." If you've already done this but have strayed away, receive God's forgiveness and return to Him. Ask Him to restore to you the joy of your salvation and to make you aware again of the Holy Spirit living within you.

#2, pray: spend time in prayer and ask for the Holy Spirit or ask God to help you receive the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit He has already placed within you. I heard someone say recently that our problem is not a lack of the Holy Spirit but rather a lack of awareness of the Holy Spirit God has already given us. Pray for the Spirit and for a greater awareness of the Spirit. Luke 11:11-13 say, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Acts 1:14 says of the early believers, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."

Acts 4:29-31 give us another example of praying for the power of the Holy Spirit: The persecuted apostles prayed: "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." Verse 31 says, "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

I was read this week in my devotional Revelation 5:8, where it says, ". . .the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." In other words, the prayers of God's people are like sweet smelling incense, reaching up to the throne of God. Sincere, persistent prayer, especially persistent corporate prayer, reaches the nostrils and the heart of God. Would you pray with me for our church: "Father, consider the

opposition we face. Enable us to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal" "and perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. Amen."

Family of God, we need to surrender our lives to God and pray for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. #3, we need to obey the word of God. We need to obey His Word in two senses. First we need to obey the instructions of Jesus and of His apostles as given to us in the Bible. These commands and instructions are given us to position us to receive the fruit of God's promises. When we obey what God says, it opens the channel through which His grace can flow to us. When we live in rebellion of or in doubt of His written word, this blocks the flow of His Spirit into our lives. Secondly, we need to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit as He seeks to lead and guide us from the inside out. Reading and obeying the Word of God is to receive guidance from the outside in. Obeying the still small voice of God within our hearts is to receive guidance from the inside out. Acts 5:32 tells us, "**The Holy Spirit is God's gift to those who obey Him.**"

These days of wonder between Easter and Pentecost are days to seek the Holy Spirit and to open our lives to His supernatural power. We seek Him through surrendering our lives to Him and repenting of our sins. We seek Him through earnest and prevailing prayer. We seek Him by obeying His word that comes to us from the outside in and from the inside out. Let us never forget that we need His power.

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Revelation 5:1-14; Acts 1:4-8, 14

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