

# Day of Pentecost

WHAT A TRIP!

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

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By Paul Jaster

## DIAGNOSIS: Running on Fumes, Tank on Empty

### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Empty*

No Spirit. No power. No go. No gas. We're running on fumes. The tank is empty. "I'm not feeling well," a young pale-faced boy said to me on his way out of worship last fall: an occasional, extended-family visitor from a Pentecostal-oriented church. "Do you have the flu?" I asked, since he had that nauseated, empty-stomach look. "No..... God is not here," he sighed sadly and then slowly walked away right past the cookie and Kool-Aid tray. Being a Spirit-sensitive kid, he sensed no presence of the Holy Spirit that Sunday and, therefore, had an empty, aching tummy. No spark. No joy. No lift. No gladness. And I knew exactly what he meant. For I was feeling rather low and burnt out myself that day after a summer on a task force trying to figure out how to unstick a stuck church—my own and many like it.

### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Stuck (in a Rut)*

The pericopes for Pentecost (Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, the Psalmist's breathtaking dismay; Paul's cringing cosmos groaning in its labor pains; Luke's listless disciples sulking in the upper room; the Fourth Evangelist's sorrow-filled mopers) all speak to this very gut-wrenching emptiness borne of a misjudgment of what really works in this world of ours. We are "wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment," says Jesus

(John 16:8). Wrong about BOTH law and gospel. Wrong about what is wrong with us. And wrong about who rocks and rules and makes things right. And it takes much more than just us conjuring up the right plans, programs, and practical techniques. It takes a people fueled with God's promised power from on high.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Going Nowhere***

A car without the right fuel goes nowhere; left long enough, it will rot, rust, and decay. Church leaders who are not continually renewed burn out (and you can always smell it when they become crispy around the edges). Children fed with saccharin substitutes for Law & Gospel (cookies & Kool-Aid) starve to death even though they are bloated with empty calories. Churches not impelled by Christ's Spirit give a false witness, fight the wrong battles, fail to adapt to new situations, become fossils, and go extinct. This reflects a world already judged wanting and condemned—by God, no less, the ultimate ruler of this world—although the world (even the church world) wants to silence or redirect us, when we speak the truth that bluntly, by its own judgments and condemnations through its more lowly rulers.

## **PROGNOSIS: Filled with a Powerful Petro, the Spirit of Truth**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Filled***

But... Holy Double Entendre! In the death and resurrection of Jesus "the ruler of this world has been condemned!" Not just Satan and his henchmen, but also God! In the person of Jesus, God bears the results of God's own incriminating judgment on us. Jesus (the true ruler of this world) is condemned to death quite deliberately...by God no less. "It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed," says God prophetically via the high priest (John 11:50). And yet, this same condemnation is overruled by this same God. The

crucified Jesus is raised and lifted up and returns to the Father in such a way that it also simultaneously results in Pentecost. The sending of the Spirit, the "Spirit of Truth." This is one (if not the) chief benefit of this great "better-for-you" sacrificial death. God the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity. The Paraclete. The Comforter. The Defense Attorney. Who enables us to hear and speak THE Truth: both about ourselves and about the God who stops at nothing to fill us with the "gas" of his grace—the powerful petro of his Spirit—and re-claim, re-fuel, and re-fire us no matter how broken, run down, and empty we become. The Spirit of God is the gift of God, given to those who receive this promised power "by faith" thanks to the gift of this same Spirit.

**Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Unstuck & Moving*  
The Spirit blows when and where it chooses. Yet Christ's own word of command and promise chooses to bind this Spirit to Word and Sacrament. The "means of grace." Word, bath, meal. Bread, wine, water, words. These are the external "vehicles" God uses ...to get the Spirit in us...so that internally we might be filled with grace and truth...and externally bear the good fruit of faith active in love...in our own spirit-led words and actions. And so, the church becomes the pipeline through which the Gospel's gas is pumped. Tough uphill work against much gravity, inertia and resistance, involving many trials and tribulations, especially when we are stuck in well-worn ruts. Risky, yet freeing and exhilarating, even in grand experiments and failures. All made much easier (the spiritual father of Crossings, "Doc" Caemmerer, often said) when we trust Christ's word of promise, pour the gas into the tank, jump into the car, and let the Gospel take us up the hill instead of trying to push the damn thing up ourselves.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Going to All Corners of the World*

The message and Spirit of Christ takes us out from our closed

confined rooms to all the corners of the world, starting with our corner of the world. We have much to re-learn from the early, mission-minded, Spirit-led church. But who can tell the glorious things that can happen much to our amazement and surprise when we attend to the Law/Gospel word and sacrament basics, pump it out, and let the Spirit do the rest. Like the visiting twenty-something (a couple of weeks later) who bounced out of worship “rosy-cheeked!” and said, “Wow, the Spirit is really alive and active in this place! You can just feel it!” She too walked right past the cookie and coffee tray. She never noticed it. Her eyes were fixed on something else. When the Spirit connects, it leaves us full and satisfied, yet hungry for still more. What a trip! Come, Spirit. Come!