



NEWCHURCHES

MULTIPLY THE MISSION.

THE GOD OF CEREAL AISLES: PRACTICING AN EVERYDAY PENTECOST

By: A.J. Swoboda and the V3 Church Planting Movement

As Paul crafts the first known letter to the Corinthian church, it becomes clear he is addressing a great swirl of problems within the community. A group of church members, for one, have begun to elevate their experience of the Holy Spirit above others' experience; what Ronald Knox once called "enthusiasts." In chapters twelve through fourteen, one can clearly hear Paul's heart wrenched over the matter.

No matter one's experience of the Spirit, Paul will argue, love trumps all.

Missional vs. Holy Spirit?

The issues of the early church are perennial issues arising again and again in church history. There is a true missional problem with a kind of attitude pie-in-the-sky, Holy Spirit, head in the clouds vision of the church: we neglect the world. The German theologian Ernst Kasemann once described these enthusiasts and their negative influence on the church:

The truth of the gospel, however, binds the Kingdom of God to Jesus' passion here on earth...There is nothing wrong with seeing the heaven's open and the Holy Spirit coming upon their congregation, exercising free reign within it. But everything depends upon whether or not the open heavens still display the image of the Crucified or only the fulfillment of our own dreams; whether the Spirit remains that the power that gives us the

Nazarene as our Lord or whether it simply alienates us from everyday life...

Kasemann's words are pointed—many in our churches who have had powerful, real, empowering experiences of the Spirit are going to be inclined, over time, to begin to slowly ascend to the heavens in their heads, hearts, and lives. Spirit-filled people, with their heart and love for God, can easily live in the clouds.

Embracing the Spirit AND Everyday Life

How can we embrace a practice of the life of the Spirit that does not “alienate us from everyday life,” as Kasemann would put it?

I remember so vividly the very first time I saw one of my teachers outside of the context of our classroom. It was there, in the cereal aisle at the local Safeway grocery store, that I first caught a surprising glimpse of my second-grade teacher picking out what appeared to be a box of Grape Nuts from the selection at the breakfast aisle. Frankly, the experience couldn't have been more shocking.

I guess I'd always imagined, in my youthful ignorance, that my teachers had no life outside of school or that they lived every waking hour in the classroom waiting for us to show up to learn from them. She might as well have slept in the coat closet at night, for all I knew. But she had a life, apparently. She was normal, everyday; she ate cereal so there I stood, face-to-face with the one who taught me to add and subtract, looking up and down selecting her favorite morning treat. For the first time in my young education, I came to realize that my teachers didn't live at the school and that they didn't live and die for my education.

Teachers have lives.

And so does the Spirit. God's sovereign work and ministry of drawing the world unto Himself in the grace and mercy of Jesus is anything but a work relegated to the strict boundaries of church services or Sunday mornings; to put it more succinctly, God doesn't live in the church.

God has a life

God does not sleep in the parish hall awaiting his people to show up once again on Sunday morning so he finally can do some stuff in someone's life. Quite the contrary: God is alive, dynamic, and goes shopping in all the cereal aisles of the world. Appreciating a fresh understanding of this truth about God in our world, undoubtedly, is a critical issue for the ministry and mission of the contemporary church. In his *Bible and Mission*, Richard Bauckham has made a critical point regarding the everydayness of mission as it pertains to the witness of the church:

The image the Bible itself often suggests for the way its truth is to be claimed is that of witness. This is an extremely valuable image with which to meet the postmodern suspicion of all metanarratives as oppressive. Witness is non-coercive. It has no power but the convincingness of the truth to which it witnesses. Witnesses are not expected, like lawyers, to persuade by the rhetorical power of their speeches, but simply to testify to the truth for which they are qualified to give evidence. To be adequate witnesses to the truth of God and the world, a witness must be a lived witness involving the whole of life and even death.

Bauckham's point simply cannot be stressed enough: the work of witness is a task to be undertaken in all of life, the "whole of life and even death," and not to be isolated to this or that time or place.

I believe we need a kind of blue-collar Pentecost—a Pentecost for the everyday, for the practical, for the days in-between church services, for our lives outside of the times the church has gathered to worship.

The Spirit and Everyday Mission

I'd like to offer three insights to how we might live the life of the Spirit of Pentecost in everyday terms for everyday mission.

1. Prayer is like breathing for Christian mission—without it, we die

I used to believe that all the pastoral and missionary gurus of the ancient past who said that every revival happened when a group started to pray were just saying that to be contrarian. I have come to believe they were on to something. Prayer is the breathing of everyday mission. Without it, we die.

2. Don't forget that the miracles of the New Testament happened on the street, not in the synagogue

The book of Acts records a number of miracles, healings, and power moves of the Spirit. Few of these happen in the context of religious services such as synagogue or early church communion services. They happened on the street. We must embrace a view of the Spirit that is alive around us and in us at all times. The Spirit's got a life.

3. Incarnate Pneumatological Surprise

Peter, the one who denies Jesus, stands up at Pentecost and preaches the first gospel sermon of the Spirit-anointed church. Why is this important? I would imagine no one could have believed that he could have made such a change in his life. But he has. And everyone would have been surprised.

Our witness to the world is our willingness to constantly surprise the world with our openness to being changed. Repentance is our sermon. And when we are loud, and proud, and glory in the repentance we have

before the Lord, the crowd below (and the church upstairs) will be willing to listen.

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