

The Voice of the Holy Spirit

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

[Editor's Note: the introduction to this sermon was not recorded. It begins with an illustration:]

...lying is an abomination to the Lord; it is something that destroys your life and destroys your character. You should never lie. And then she looked up and saw Mrs. Brown coming up the front path and said to John, "John, there is that Mrs. Brown. She wastes my time every afternoon. Go and tell her that I am not in." And, you know of course, John grows up following the values of his mother, not the principles that his mother shares; and she can share all the most wonderful principles with him and he can be absolutely convinced that according to her principles, lying is an abomination to the Lord. But because of her values, he'll know that it is a very present help in time of trouble.

Why we all smile at it, but a little uneasily, is we fight the same thing in our own lives, don't we? Because we are all great on principles and we all agree with the principles; they are almost self-evident and we have been brought up with them all through our lives. But we don't live by those principles; we actually live by the things we value. And we show that we value them because they are the things which govern our everyday life. And that's the problem that I present to you this morning. I mean, there is a certain principle that we have often shared over the years and I will point it out to you, it's in Matthew 6:25. It's part of the "Sermon on the Mount".

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" And we not only know that but the sheer logic of it impresses us. And if I asked you, "Don't you believe there is a God?" You would say, "Of course I believe there is a God. There must have been something -- even if you believe in evolution, there was something to start the evolutionary process. There has to be somebody who is responsible for all this that we see around us. Of course I believe there is a God."

But if I asked you, "Do you live as if God is feeding you and is clothing you? Do you live free from anxiety about your finances and free from anxiety about your job and free from anxiety about where you are going to get your clothing or your food when you retire?" You would have to admit, "No, I agree with the principle; it's obvious, it's logical, but no, I try to live like that." Oh! Try. The old try business. Well, I try to live like that, I mean, I try not to worry when my bank account goes down, I try not to worry when I lose my job, I try not to worry when I wonder where my food or my clothing is going to come from in future years, I try. But no, actually I suppose I do show what I value, and to tell you the truth, I kind of feel I am on my own here, I really do.

I think that there is a God but I don't really think he knows me personally or if he does, he hasn't time to attend to my silly little needs, or if he has time, my silly little needs aren't worth considering. Whatever reason it is, I don't really think he has time to take care of me or he wants to take care of me; I don't think it works that way. Really, I just think I am on my own here, that's it. I think I am on own, I think if I don't provide for myself nobody else will. My parents kind of encouraged me to think that and frankly, that's the way I live. I live as if my job is supplying the money that is going to provide me with the food, and the clothing, and the shelter

that I need, and that if I ever drop the ball for one second I am finished, that's really the way I live. I would ask you, "Is that not the way you probably live?" That actually those are the values that govern your life and you live by those values.

And you can talk high and mightily and we are going to all discuss very academically and theologically this principle that God is there and that he will look after us even better than he looks after the birds of the air, but most of us probably live actually -- I know we shouldn't whisper it here even, in this non-communist country but we actually live as if there is no God; we actually do. We live as if there is no God. And there is another principle, you know, that we have shared from time to time and it's especially poignant here in our American society, it's in John 12:42-43.

Jesus is talking about the Pharisees, John 12:42; "Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." And all of us recognize the principle that probably after this life is over, it looks as if there will be a judgment day of some kind. It doesn't matter how liberal you are in your interpretation of the scripture, somehow or other you are driven to that; there is going to be a settling out time because there is a settling out time in this life and there has to be in the next life.

And so, we know fine well that it is important to please God; and actually, we know deep down too that our only praise finally will come from God. And if we are honest with ourselves we realize that our husbands or wives may be dead before we are. Certainly our fathers or our mothers will probably be. And certainly all the significant others in our lives will be; and our bosses, and all the other people, and the hordes of people who are our peers they may either be dead or not around when we die. And so, we all are pretty sure that there is going to come a time when we are going to have to face God and if he doesn't approve of us at that time what will it matter if the whole world voted us President? If he doesn't approve of us, it doesn't make any difference. So, we actually know that deep down.

And there probably isn't one of us here this morning who doesn't believe that; that the praise of God is obviously far more vital and essential than the praise of men. We abide, we accept that principle. But do you live by it? And you know we don't. We live by our values, the things we value. And we value what our peers think of us. We value what the commercials say will make us popular. We value what our bosses think of us. We are such slaves to what people think of us, that we value even what some little person thinks of us who doesn't have any power over our lives at all. At times, you know, we almost make ourselves sick. We look so like little performing monkeys that will do anything to get a smile, do anything to get somebody approving of us.

And we know that most of us live not by the principle of the praise of God but actually we live, to be frank, as if there is no God. And we kind of feel, "Listen, there are four and a half billion of us here, I am only one miserable little creature. The only way I am going to get any attention is, by getting somebody to notice me, and somebody to approve of me, and somebody to praise me" and so we all do the same thing.

Why are we so fascinated by the Gallup polls? Because we live Gallup polls ourselves, we have our own little Gallup polls, our whole lives are built up on little Gallup polls. So-and-so likes me, so-and-so doesn't like me, my boss likes me, my mother doesn't like me. We live our lives devoted to trying to get people to like us. Because we have the idea that this is a pretty big world and I

don't see how I am going to be noticed unless I get somebody to notice me and so we work on getting people to notice us. In fact in family situations we can become tyrants because we are absolutely delighted if they think we are the top of the totem pole, and we do everything to get to that position.

And from time to time reality breaks in upon us and we see ourselves as petty little tyrants that are just so determined to get people to attend to us and respect us and notice us. And there are moments of sanity when we realize this is ridiculous. "I am not important really, I am not really important to them." But we keep on playing the game and they keep on playing the game. And we really live not by this great principle that we agree with. The praise of God is more important than the praise of men but we actually live by what we value. And what we value is present approval from other temporal human beings who will probably die before we do.

Now loved ones, that, it seems to me, is the kind of "Catch 22" that I would dare to say most of us are in this morning whether we are saintly or think we are saintly or whether we are Christians or think we are Christians or whether we are churchgoers or whatever we think we are, probably you would agree that most of us are caught in that position. We have principles that we agree with in our heads and we approve of and we teach our children but we have values down here at the gut level and they determine our day-by-day activity. Now that is why the most important part of the whole message of Jesus Christ, and the most important factor in that message is what Pope John Paul talked about, in that encyclical, that one that was published in the New York Times last week. He said that the most important factor and the most vital factor in Christianity, the one that sets it apart from Hinduism, Buddhism, self-help systems, power of positive thinking, spiritualism, the one that sets it apart from Transcendental Meditation, from all the strategies and tricks that we produce to try to deliver ourselves, the one factor is what John Paul called the hidden God. The only one that can deliver you from the domination of your values, which prevents you living by your principles, is the Holy Spirit, that's right.

I mean, you may say to me "No, no, Pastor it's because Jesus died for me, that's what delivers me." I know it sounds like heresy but that isn't so. No work could be done by the Holy Spirit if Jesus had not died for us but you know how long you have known about Jesus dying for you. You know how long even many of you've known that you have died with Jesus. You know how long we have shared with each other that those desires that you have for the praise of men, those desires that we have for our own security that make us worry and anxious when our finances are in trouble or our jobs are in trouble, those desires are connected with an old self that looks to the world instead of God and that old self has been crucified with Christ and is destroyed in him; and you could be free from it this moment if you believe that. You know how often you have heard that. And you know that you could almost preach that to me, you know it so well.

But do you see loved ones that you can't bring that about in yourself. I agree with you completely. The little fearful self that is inside you, that is scared if the boss frowns at you, the little anxious self inside you that worries the moment the bank account begins to totter, that worries, immediately you begin feel you will lose your job, that little part of you inside has been destroyed in Jesus. And it's been done away with forever and it actually does not exist in spiritual reality anymore and you can turn from it this very moment, that is right. But the only way that that can be made real in you is that the Holy Sprit makes it real; see, that's it. And that's what Jesus said. The disciples were all downcast and depressed when he said that he was going to leave them, and then I will point you again to what we looked at a few weeks ago, it's John 16:7; and they were cast down, they felt "no, we can't do anything without you, Lord" and he explained to them that he was

going to be crucified and was going to be taken from the earth, John 16:7. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.” And then Jesus goes on to explain what the Counselor, “the Holy Spirit”, will do in verse 13.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” And you remember we have mentioned before that the word “declare” in Greek means “share” or “impart” not just declare in the sense of speak. So that verse really runs, “He will glorify me for He will take what is mine and impart it to you.” That's what we need. We need the very character and nature of Jesus imparted to us. We need his freedom from worry and anxiety. We need his complete trust in his father. We need his complete respect for the praise of God rather than men. We need that imparted to us supernaturally. That's what the Holy Spirit does; the Holy Spirit does that in you. That's why on the Day of Pentecost you remember Peter preached. He declared that Jesus was God's son and why he had died, and then the people all said “What shall we do?” And he said, “Be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Because he knew that just the knowledge that Jesus had died, without the gift of the Holy Spirit, would simply drive men to despair. That's where most of us are.

Most of us are in despair here in what we call Christian America because we know it all. We know it all, it drives us crazy. We know it all in our dumb heads. We know all these principles. We have far more knowledge than any other people on the earth. We understand the gospel -- it's hard not to understand the gospel, you hear it all day on the radio. Even if you hate God you can't get away from hearing the gospel. So all of us know it, we know it, but it's there, it's in our heads. It's not real in our lives because we haven't given any respect to the person that Jesus specifically told us would be his successor. And so we do not respect the Holy Spirit. We make all kinds of circuses out of him; we make all kinds of games, spiritual games out of him. We talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit in crude coarse ways. We argue back and forward about tongues, or gifts, we do all kinds of ridiculous things that we dumb human beings are specialized in. But we do not respect and honor the dear Holy Spirit and that, loved ones, is why we live down here and talk up there. Why we preach up here and practice down there. Why our faith has no works to prove it. It's why the bulk of America is so religious and yet has almost more murders than any other country in the world. It is why we are making such a mockery of Christianity in the eyes of the world, because we ourselves, you and I, do not really honor and listen to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will change your life. Jesus is now at God's right hand. He is interceding for you before God. He is controlling the whole universe from his position, he is himself not here, the Holy Spirit is here. It's the Holy Spirit who even got you to church this morning however you managed it. He worked it so that you came here. If you've ever had one good thought in your life it's because the Holy Spirit prompted it inside you. The Holy Spirit is already someone whose influences you have known over the years; you have often felt a desire to do something good, the Holy Spirit is there. But if you do not begin to honor him and acknowledge him and yes, even pray to him, and ask him to begin to deliver you from this false value system that you have and begin to bring you into the place where you practice your principles and where you live your principles, unless you do that you will continue to be like John's mother, you will. You will continue to say, “Oh, lying is wrong, lying is wrong. It is a terrible thing to do, dishonesty is wrong, dishonesty is wrong it is a terrible thing to do. Fear of men is wrong, fear of men is wrong.” But you will continue to do them until you lose all respect for yourself, and you lose all hope of changing your life at all.

Loved ones, the Holy Spirit is able to change you. I will just show you two of the things that he does. If you look at Acts 7:54 you will see a man really in death throes. It's the story of a man's death. It's Act 7:54. "Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. (This was Stephen.) But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, (as they were actually stoning him) Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice (even as they were stoning), 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

How could you do that? I mean you know what stoning was, it wasn't little stones, it was boulders. They got you on the ground and they dumped these things on you until they actually crushed you to death; and just before he reached that point, he knelt down as they were throwing the things on top of him and prayed that God would forgive them. The Holy Spirit takes away hostility; he takes out of your heart hostility against people; he takes from your heart hatred; he takes from your heart resentment.

The Holy Spirit is a sweet fragrant spirit of life that is in the world; actually you have seen that at times. If you have ever seen a little one-year-old Yorkshire terrier waking up in the morning, you have seen the Holy Spirit, it's the sweetest thing. And if you have ever seen a little baby with tiny little fingers, you have seen the Holy Spirit. You have seen evidence, that there is a sweet spirit that you see at times in the world. If you see Mother Teresa, bending over a person in the streets of Calcutta who is about to die of some dreadful leprosy, you have seen the Holy Spirit; you have seen. There is a sweet spirit that you have seen from time to time in the world. That Holy Spirit is able to come into you and is able to free you from hostility and give you love for people. He is.

He is able to give you the love that Jesus has, that's what the Bible says. The Holy Spirit is the one who creates love. I don't know if you have tried to love or if you have tried to overcome some hatred that you have for someone or some resentment that you have against somebody. Or for years if you have had a hostile strife between yourself and another person and you have tried to overcome it and you have tried and tried and you can't. That's because you cannot create love in yourself. I will show you where it says that, it's Romans 5:5. "And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." See, God's love -- that's what you need. You don't need your own poor attempt, you need God's love -- and that's poured into your heart through the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will create loving.

I don't know about your lives, but it's surprising how many lives are chaotic these days. It's surprising how many lives are fragmented. How many of us can hardly tell whether we're coming or going? It's surprising how many of us -- if our general lives are not chaotic we come into situations which do become chaotic. It's surprising how many of us struggle, "I must get order, if I could only get order into my life, if I could just get some kind of order", and we're for ever running around trying to get order, and we are no better than we were years ago, and we are constantly coming into situations where disorder breaks out in our family or our home or our business. And we can't understand how to get this thing together, and the more we try to bring it together by our own power, it seems the more disorder works underneath and is created.

Look at the first verse almost of the Bible. It's back in Genesis Chapter 1. It's actually the second verse. Genesis 1:2. "The earth was without form and void." The Hebrew word is "tohu" and means absolutely formless, there was no shape to it, it was just formless matter, an empty void; there was a great void. "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Then of course, the rest of the chapter is the order that the Holy Spirit brought. The Holy Spirit can bring order into your life. The Holy Spirit is able to work things according to the counsel of God's will. I hate to use the word, but it's the word that conveys it most, to most of us. It's like magic; that's all you can say, it's like magic. It is magic because magic is man's attempt to use the old Anglo-Saxon word mastry or mastery to manipulate the elemental spirits of the universe.

So, it's not magic but it works like magic; it's like magic. If you begin to honor the Holy Spirit in your life and you begin to respect him and you begin to do the things that he impresses upon you to do, your life will certainly begin to come into order; it's a miracle. You will find that all things begin to work together for good, you just have to do it, it's a miracle. But if you respect and honor the Holy Spirit, he will begin to manifest in reality in your life, the freedom from hostility, the love and the order that he brings wherever he is respected. So really, I have done my part. If you don't know what to do now, well I can't help you. It's obvious what to do, you know that. But I tell you that's the truth; and that's the way to begin to live by your principles and it's the way to have your values made the same as your principles -- the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray. Holy Spirit, we bow before you now, and first, we repent of the times when we have ignored you completely and then we repent of the worst times where we have suspected it was you but have attributed it to our own good thoughts and, therefore, have postponed obeying you. And we recognize now that you don't give us information before we need it. You give us information exactly at the time when we are to obey it and follow out your directions. So Holy Spirit, we repent of the times when we have ignored you explicitly or ignored you implicitly; the times when we have sensed it was your voice and have run the risk of blaspheming you by saying, it isn't your voice; it's my own voice, or it's just a good idea I had.

Holy Spirit, we ask you to forgive us and we come to you now in this position where we know so much but do not live it. We ask you Holy Spirit to begin to bring into our lives the character of Jesus and his nature and begin to give us his love for people and begin to bring into our lives the order that you brought into the world at the very creation. And then Lord Jesus, we know the Holy Spirit will not glorify himself, we know he will always bear witness to you and Lord, we thank you that you told us very plainly that the reason you were leaving the earth was so that the Holy Spirit would come to us, and that he is someone that you can trust and we can trust. And so, we thank you for him and we thank you for this dear gift and we receive him now as a gift from you. And Holy Spirit, we are going to look to you, not only as our counselor but as our master and our God from this day forward. And now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.