

Comfort and Contrast at Pentecost

Would I have responded like that 7-year-old? The question burned in me after recently hearing of a family forced to flee their homeland upon becoming Christians. A friend of mine who often assists persecuted believers was helping the family pick up the pieces of their lives in a foreign country—all because of their faith.

After making Jesus their Lord and Savior, certain members of the family had been attacked and jailed. One day a group of men barged into the family's home and threatened them once again if they didn't renounce Jesus. Amid the exchange, one of the twin 7-year-old sons looked the men in the eyes and boldly declared that he was a follower of Jesus. He was kidnapped and, within days, his body was delivered to the mother—chopped into three pieces.

Such twisted evil is almost incomprehensible. But equally as staggering is the way God shows up as light in such utterly dark moments as this. When my friend met the mother and remaining twin son, they'd just been reunited with the rest of the family after weeks in hiding. The shock and pain on their faces was a look he'll never forget. Yet somehow, despite their seemingly insurmountable grief, God's comforting presence could still be found.

Before Jesus left this earth, He promised that "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name ... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). Some translations of that verse use the word *Counselor*, while others opt for *Comforter*. In situations like this family's, He is certainly all of the above. No matter how long my friend stayed to comfort those wailing parents and children, no matter what words he offered,

nothing could compare to the helping, healing, comforting *presence* of the Holy Spirit.

I imagine many of those in the upper room on the day of Pentecost felt the same way. Acts 2:1 records that “they were all with one accord in one place,” yet given the situation, their hope was probably mixed with a sense of sorrow. Though they’d seen a risen Jesus and heard His promises of the Comforter to come, still, the man who had transformed every facet of their lives was no longer with them. They’d watched the supernatural way He left, even talked with angels who assured them Jesus would return in the same fashion (1:11)—and I’m sure they believed this. But it’s likely many of them were still recovering from the emotional roller coaster of the previous two months and thinking: *I wish we could return to the good ol’ days of simply following Jesus in the countryside.*

Amid their unprecedented blend of grief, joy, hope and anxiety, they needed a Comforter whose mere presence could calm their minds, hearts and souls. Isn’t it typical of God, then, that this peace and stillness came via a Holy Spirit red-carpet arrival draped in anything but serenity: the massive sound, flames of fire and seemingly drunk followers making lots of noise with their brand-new vocabularies.

What fits the description of a rock concert was instead the welcome party for the Holy Spirit’s dwelling on Earth—now taking place *within* believers! Indeed, there’s no greater contrast than when the Holy Spirit silences the noise of our sin-stormed souls, only to reside there.

Yet it’s because of the power of this indwelling, which we mark this month on Pentecost Sunday, that is the true miracle. Not only is it the power that can lift the faces of the family my friend met amid utter darkness and pain, it’s also the same power that gave Jesus’ grieving followers the boldness to emerge from tragedy and preach a miracle-filled gospel in the

face of opposition.

That 7-year-old boy had this Holy Spirit power. I can only hope I'd do what he did if put in a similar situation. And I pray that as we celebrate Pentecost this year, we'll be reminded of the true miracle that is the Holy Spirit's presence in us.

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