

“Don’t hold back!”

June 12, 2011

Text: Psalm 104:24-34, Acts 2:1-21

I.

Are you holding back in your life? Are you *settling*, as commentators sometimes say, for less than your best? All the time, people *settle* ...

- For a career choice that is not what we really want to do ...
- For a relationship that doesn’t really draw the best out of us; it’s okay, but it’s not the best ...
- For a life style and life-choices that allow us to *hold back* the best that is in us ... and we *settle* for something less.
- In Miami Heat games, at times players *settle* for shots that are not the shots they should be trying to get.
- In the Church, too, often churches *settle* for just getting by.

Charles Shultz, creator of the famous *Peanuts* comic strip, has a reputation as a theologian. In one of his cartoons, **Snoopy**, the hound of heaven, is talking about **Woodstock**, the wanna-be *bird of paradise*:

Someday, Woodstock is going to be a great eagle, Snoopy says. He’s going to soar thousands of feet above the ground.

About then, Woodstock takes off into the air, flying, soaring upward, upward ... but then, suddenly, Woodstock starts whirling around crazily, upside down, totally losing it. Seeing all this, Snoopy now has second thoughts about Woodstock’s possibilities, saying:

Well, maybe not thousands of feet; maybe hundreds of feet above the ground.

But hardly have the words come out of his mouth when Woodstock plummets to the ground and lies there, looking more than a little dazed. Whereupon Snoopy concedes:

Well, maybe he’s going to be one of those eagles that just walks around.

Schultz’ point is *how quickly we settle for something less than what is possible, something less than what we are made for.*

II.

When the Spirit poured out upon the gathered faithful in Jerusalem, in a moment, people were doing things they had no idea they could do. They were no longer *settling*; they

were reaching for something more ... opening themselves to the promptings of the Spirit, opening themselves to *more of God* ... reaching, reaching.

In the lives of Jesus' followers, these had been tough times. Doors of opportunity and promises weren't always quick to open. Drudgery often marked the day.

And then ***suddenly, from heaven, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind ... and divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them*** ... and they were filled with the power of the Spirit.

Speaking in languages they didn't even know, they were talking about dreams and visions and untold possibilities for the work of love and grace in the lives of people ... and, everywhere—suddenly—hope was in the air.

And soon Peter—who'd never preached in his life—is filled with the Spirit and is able to preach a powerful gospel message leading hundreds to become believers.

III.

One of the many lessons of Pentecost is that we should never think we cannot do what God needs us to do in life.

It's easy to sell ourselves short ... to think we can't do this or we can't do that. That's what it means to *settle*; to settle for something less than our best—

- less than what our circumstances or life-situation might allow for ... less than what we could achieve if we aimed higher ... if we didn't **hold back** in life.
- Something less than what our God-given gifts would suggest we could be doing with our lives.

Often times, we **hold back** because of anxiety and fear. We're afraid to fail ... afraid to fall short ... afraid to perhaps embarrass ourselves ... or afraid, even, to hold on to hope because the future, somehow, seems like it's too much ... too complicated ... too overwhelming ... beyond our possibilities to achieve or to realize.

Let's tell the truth: at times, the future can appear daunting and we wonder, how can we possibly measure up?

IV.

Young Douglas Mauer was 15 years old and hadn't been feeling well for days. His mother took him to a hospital in St. Louis where he was diagnosed with leukemia.

The doctors spoke to him in frank terms about his disease. They said that for the next

three years, he would have to undergo chemotherapy of some form; and they didn't sugarcoat the side effects. They told Douglas he would lose his hair and that there would be some bloating in his body. Understandably, upon hearing all of this, young Douglas was stunned, falling into a deep depression.

Wanting to lift his spirits somehow, his aunt called a floral shop to send Douglas an arrangement of flowers. She told the clerk that it was for her teenage nephew who had just learned that he had leukemia. When the flowers arrived at the hospital, they were beautiful.

- Douglas read the card from his aunt without emotion.
- Then he noticed a second card. It said:

Douglas, I took your order. I work at Brix Florist. I had leukemia when I was seven years old. I'm 22 years old now and am fine. Good luck. My heart goes out to you. Hang in there! You can make it through. Sincerely, Laura Bradley

Wow, in an instant, his face lit up and his whole demeanor changed.

When the Spirit comes! When LOVE doesn't hold back ... when a young woman clerk in a flower shop has compassion on a fellow traveler in this life and reaches out, following her heart.

When it comes to LOVE and acts of compassion and caring, friends, ***don't hold back.***

V.

Pentecost is a strange happening, riddled with all kinds of mystery. Who can understand it? We don't pretend to understand the Spirit. We hear about it. We tend to think of it in positive terms. We believe it comes from God, part of God's presence in the world.

When the Spirit comes! O what a day! When the life-giving power of God comes and touches our lives. What is it? It's a presence, a feeling, a hope, a possibility ... it's all this wrapped into one and more. It is LOVE ...

In Peter's first sermon that day, he reminded people what the prophet **Joel** had said:

*In the last days it will be, God declares,
That I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ...
And your sons and daughters shall prophesy ...
And your young men shall see visions ...
And your old men shall dream dreams ...*

*And I will pour out my Spirit ... and everyone shall prophesy ...
And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Pentecost is a powerful sense of God's presence. More than anything, it is love turned loose. It is love, run wild and radical ...

- shaking the foundations of the earth ...
- stirring us in the depths of our humanity to get outside our human skins and to give ourselves to the Spirit, to this life-force running through us that our words cannot explain but that—unmistakably—we feel.

VI.

Pentecostalism, as a religious expression, is the fastest growing form of Christianity in the world, particularly in third world nations in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Pentecostals believe in a direct experience of God through the Spirit ...

The appeal of Pentecostalism does not rest on the intellect or rational powers. It's tenaciously experiential. It's the best of the Sermon on the Mount condensed into an experience of the holy, of God, and of the Spirit.

It's a time for opening up the mind-blowing, heart-warming, life-changing power of God. When let loose, this power can invade the body, inflate the mind, swell the soul, lift the Spirit and make us all more than we ever imagined.

It'll make you young when you feel old ... it'll make you alive when you feel tired and with no energy.

When the Spirit comes, the whole face of planet earth is renewed ... and amazing things happen:

CHECK IT OUT!

Just like that, as if out of nowhere, barriers are broken ...
Communities are formed ...
Adversaries are reconciled ... unity is established ...
Disease is cured, addiction is broken ...
Cities are renewed ... races are brought together ...
Hope is raised ... optimism is lifted up ...

When the spirit comes, you will not be able to hold back ...

Discouraged folks cheer up ... sour folks sweeten up ...
Closed folks open up ... gossipers shut up ...
conflicted folks make up ...
Sleeping folks wake up ... apathetic folks fire up ...
Dry bones shake up ...

VII.

The poet William Blake wrote a poem about Pentecost. Part of the poem says:

**Unless the eye catch fire, God will not be seen.
Unless the ear catch fire, God will not be heard.**

Unless the tongue catch fire, God will not be named.

**Unless the heart catch fire, God will not be loved.
Unless the mind catch fire, God will not be known.**

And so, friends, what's it all about? It's about **not holding back**. It's about opening ourselves to the presence of the Spirit in our lives. Opening ourselves to spontaneous acts of love and kindness. It's about getting outside of the box in the life of our faith ... opening ourselves to change and to newness that's bursting to break through.

Don't hold back! Let the Spirit come. And let it lift all human kind to the spiritual high ground where there is no nation against nation ... religion against religion ... political party against political party ... ideology against ideology ... group against group. ***Don't hold back!***

And Peter, moved by the Spirit, stood up, raised his voice and addressed the multitudes:

People of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to what I say. For this is what was spoken through the prophet:

*In the last days it will be, God declares,
That I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh ...*

*And your sons and daughters shall prophesy ... and your young people shall see visions
and your old people shall dream dreams.*

*And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below ...
Then every one who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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