

June 18, 2017

IT IS THE SPIRIT THAT GIVES LIFE

John 6:62-63

"It is the Spirit that gives life!" Every mother knows the wonderful, miraculous feeling of the first moment of movement within them of the tiny baby beginning to be active. It is called the "quickenings." It happens around sixteen to twenty weeks of pregnancy. Men cannot know the feeling in any other than a spiritual sense. It would be like trying to describe the taste of a pickle without ever eating one. But a man, everyone, can understand the *idea* of carrying life within. It might not be easy, but everyone can, by using their imagination, discern the truth of an awakening of some kind, deep within. The KJV says, in John 6:63, *"It is the Spirit that quickens!"* It gives life in the mind, awareness, understanding, grace! Faith! By faith, we are enlivened...born anew!

"The flesh counts for nothing!" Experience in this mortal, fleshly body is only a sample or a symbol of what is yet to come. To be born anew is to awaken to a whole new world, almost as if we find ourselves in a wonderful new country. To experience salvation is like knowing what it's like to be rescued from drowning, to be found after being lost, to be cleaned after becoming filthy, to be brought back to life after being dead. It is like being healed when you've been wounded or freed after being bound. Saving grace can be described in all these ways, and we can understand it spiritually.

There are dozens of exercises that can help us in our spiritual lives. They often have to do with using the imagination. Imagine...being chained and shackled in an immovable chair. You face a wall in a cave opposite the cave's opening, where the light comes through. Before you, on the wall, you see shadows projected as figures pass behind you before the light. For all you know, the shadows are the real thing. You know nothing about the light, only the wall. Everything you know about life is what has been projected on the wall.

Now imagine being freed from your chains, rising from your immovable chair, and turning around. At first, you don't understand what you see, you are blinded by the brilliance of the wonderful light coming through the opening to your cave. It shocks you. You aren't sure what is real anymore. You recognize the figures in the light, but, at first, you have to squint, they are blurry; and yet they are far more real than the shadows you had seen before.

Your spiritual journey takes time. Your eyes begin to adjust. You see more clearly the figures that, before, you only recognized as shadows. The light in which the figures move is now glorious to you. You feel free, awakened. It's a whole new world. Now, imagine walking out of the cave into the light...and seeing the sun!

Plato's allegory of the cave works for me. I love it. Likewise, John's report of Jesus' proclamation about how it is the Spirit that gives us life, or, *quickens* us works for me. And I hope it can work for you. Just as Plato would say that seeing the light gave new life to the person in the cave, Jesus says that the Spirit gives life to us....believers. The flesh is only a shadow.

The bodily Ascension of Christ into heaven's spiritual realm is like a sign to the people that body and spirit are both relevant realities. Jesus' Body would not have ascended if it weren't for the fact that He was filled with the Holy Spirit. What do we think will rise into eternity of ourselves? Certainly not our flesh! The spiritual reality, however, is the more life-enriching. It gives us life...abundant. Therefore, what we need to feed ourselves should be spiritual food as well as earthly food. Jesus said that *"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life!"* (v. 63b)

I can't emphasize enough, for the sake of your spiritual lives, and for the life of this church, the importance of what Jesus said when He tells Satan, as He was tempting Him to turn stones into bread,

"We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God!" (Matthew 4:4)
Our spiritual growth and our spiritual enrichment depends on the proper feeding of our souls. We nurture and sustain our bodies often, very intentionally, even with elaborate meals that give us not only nourishment, but great pleasure. Some even consider themselves to be connoisseurs, experts of the palate! We need to focus, likewise, on nurturing and sustaining our spirits as well, because it is the spirit that gives life!

Last week, I talked about worship, and how there is a spiritual fire that can be ignited by our true worship. That same spiritual fire is what I'm talking about today. The spirit gives life, it quickens us, makes us more alive. Sets us on fire. That is what I hope for in the Church...that people would seek the Lord in such a way that they would want to feast *"on every word that comes from the mouth of God!"* Feed the fire! Just realize that the world is holding buckets of water!

In a workshop on worship about 7 years ago, the speaker gave another allegory. He imagined with us a person deciding to forgo brushing his teeth every day and that, once a week, on Sunday, he would brush for sixty minutes in order to give his teeth the real cleaning they would need. Of course, he then imagined with us what it would actually do to the man's gums and enamel to brush for 60 minutes, and, what the effect might be to ignore his teeth for six days at a time. But, he said, that's exactly what we do with respect to our spiritual lives. Now, if someone was to say that they would commit themselves to more spiritual feeding, if only they had the time. I would say to them, if you make the commitment, you will find the time!

We wouldn't feed our bodies for only one hour a week, and yet *"the body counts for nothing!"* It is the spirit that gives life! Feed it! Grow! Find life abundant! Jesus tells us in John 10:10, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly!"*

Yes? Amen.