



Sermon, Sunday January 19, 2025 "True Change through the Holy Spirit"

SCRIPTURE: Acts 8:14-17 ¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit ¹⁶ (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). ¹⁷ Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Introduction: Characteristics of the Book of Acts

Today is the second Sunday after the Epiphany. Today's text is the Acts of the Apostles. The Acts of the Apostles is the story of the activities of the apostles as the gospel of Jesus Christ began in Jerusalem, traveled through the Gentile regions of Asia Minor and Greece, and reached Rome.

The characteristics of the Book of Acts can be summarized into two points. **One is that the person who plays a leading role in this story is Paul.** The activities of other disciples of Jesus, such as Peter and John, also appear in the Acts of the Apostles, but most of them are those of Paul. **Second, the Holy Spirit leads the missionary activities of the apostles.** Acts 1:8 says: **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles continues and reports the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples and a large group of people gathered in the upper room of John Mark's house on the day of Pentecost. Also, the Acts of the Apostles emphasizes that Paul's missionary work was accomplished through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Today's text is one of many stories about the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. The apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had also received the **'Word of God.'** A Samaritan is neither a pure Jew nor a pure Gentile. These are people who fall somewhere in between. The fact that they received the word of God means that the path to missionary work to Gentiles has now begun to open.

The apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to Samaria. Peter and John prayed for the believers in Samaria to receive the Holy Spirit. This is because the believers in Samaria did not receive the Holy Spirit but were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. According to today's text, when Peter and John laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit.

However, we cannot understand what it means that the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit just from the content of today's text. What is the difference between receiving water baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit?

Body: Water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism

Baptism is a ceremony in which a person who has decided to live as a Christian publicly confesses his or her decision in front of the church congregation. To be baptized in today's church, we must attend worship and receive education for a certain period.

However, just being baptized does not guarantee that we are true Christians. To understand this, let's think about a marathon. Being baptized is like starting at the starting line of a marathon. Just because we start



at the starting line of a marathon does not guarantee that we will finish the race. There may be situations where we are unable to complete the race to the finish line due to various reasons.

In fact, many people are baptized and become members of the church community, but there is no guarantee that all of them will finish their lives as Christians. It is not easy for us to live until we meet the Lord while maintaining true Christian spirituality as baptized people. **The spirituality of Christ that I am talking about means the sense of spirit that believes in, recognizes, and experiences the presence of the Trinity God, and the way of life based on this.** What makes this possible in our lives is being filled with the Holy Spirit.

However, the world we live in prevents us from focusing on the spirituality of Christ. The world we live in baptizes people with secular values and dominates people's lives, just as the church baptizes Christian believers. At the very center of these worldly values is material worship. Through these values, the world makes us increasingly obsessed with private property and tells us that the realization of our desires is the standard for happiness.

How should Christians live in a world like this? The specific ways to practice the spirituality of Christ may vary from person to person. However, the direction Christians must take is clear. That is, Christians should not stop at receiving baptism as a religious ritual but should live in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. To put it simply, we must not live as formal Christians, but as people filled with the 'Spirit of Life', which is the original meaning of the Holy Spirit.

Today's text, acts 8:17, says that when Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans, they received the Holy Spirit. However, since the Holy Spirit is not a visible entity, it is not easy to confirm whether we have received the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 2:4, speaking in tongues is evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. Also, acts 19:6 says that speaking in tongues and prophesying are evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Apostle Paul mentions the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

We clearly know what baptism is, but it is difficult to understand what today's text refers to: receiving the Holy Spirit. This is because the references to the Holy Spirit described in the Bible seem vague to us. The Bible mentions speaking in tongues as evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, but this cannot be conclusive evidence that we have received the Holy Spirit. We must think about this issue through the entire Bible.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of creation, and the Spirit of the end. The Greek word '**Πνευμα**' (**πνεῦμα**) translated as 'spirit' is like wind. The wind is invisible to our eyes. Winds appear and disappear with great force, like tornadoes. Also, the wind passes by us very gently and calmly. We cannot own the wind, but we can feel it even if we cannot see it with our eyes. The Holy Spirit is like this. We can feel the Holy Spirit, but we cannot possess it.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This means that we can experience the Holy Spirit at the level of experiencing God, and we can experience the Holy Spirit at the level of experiencing Jesus Christ. What does this mean?

This means that when we experience God and Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit. Therefore, experiencing the Holy Spirit is not simply the psychological and emotional ecstasy one feels when attending a music concert. These can be experienced in any number of regular show programs in our lives. However, no matter how intense these experiences are, they cannot change our lives themselves.

Therefore, the fact that we have received the Holy Spirit means that our lives have been transformed to a new level through Jesus Christ. This means a transition from a formal Christian to a practical Christian. The Gospel refers to this change as conversion (**metanoia/μετάνοια**).



Sometimes we may not even notice these changes. This is because Christians seem to be no different from ordinary people in real life. So, people in the world consider the Christian faith to be empty. This is because changes in life through the experience of the Holy Spirit cannot be confirmed numerically like test scores. Just as we cannot put love in numbers.

Conclusion: True change through the Holy Spirit

Now let's summarize today's message. If you want to know more specifically about what life is renewed through the Holy Spirit, please read and meditate on the last sentence of the Gospel of Matthew. **“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)** The end of the age in this verse is not only the end of the earth and the universe, but also personal death and a despairing situation like death. What could be more powerful than having Jesus, Emmanuel, by your side in moments like these?

Acknowledging this and enjoying the abundance in it is true change through the Holy Spirit. Our problem is that we are not intimate with Jesus Christ.

We can leave the Christian faith or lead a dull religious life. On the other hand, we can live with freedom and gratitude by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Today's text tells us not to stay only in the form of baptism, but to 'receive the Holy Spirit', which is the content of baptism. I hope the fullness of the Holy Spirit overflows in all our lives. **Amen!**

