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SUBJECT: "THE MORNING IT RAINED FIRE"

God, we don't believe in him no more. Mark Conally who wrote the delightful folk concept of the rural, southern interpretation of the scripture, "Green Pastures" accounted one occasion when God had become so involved with the affairs of heaven, that for a time he had neglected his creation here on earth. So, musing to himself one day, suddenly he called Gabriel into his office and he said, "Gabriel, I want you take over here for awhile, I'm going down to earth and check on my children there and see how they are getting along." So with that God stepped out of heaven and came back to earth. And what he saw, he couldn't believe. These couldn't have been the same children who loved him and adored him so much in the past. There was no evidence anywhere of any awareness of God. It was the sabbath day - and no evidence of worship, no one caught up in quietness and meditation. It was almost as though a carnival was going at full blast. Everywhere he went people were involved, caught-up in frivolous things, no one resting for a moment to access their spiritual needs. He came upon a couple making love and tapping them on the shoulder and said "What do you think your doing? Why aren't you at church?" And the young man straightened to his full height and said "What are you an old preacher man, anyway, we don't go to church no more." And God taken aback by this attitude recovering himself, said, "Well, what about God, aren't you afraid he'll punish you for this kind of living." And with that this lanky fellow looked at his girl and back at God and laughed. "God we don't believe in him no more."

A lot of people don't believe in God no more. We always had atheists, those who by some level of intellect have come to the conclusion that God does not exist. They've always been in the minority and somehow we can respect them for their views, simply because they are open and frank about their concepts. Though no one has yet come up with any amount of reasoning that would set them apart as intellectually capable of dismissing the reality of God. And then there are the diests who say that God did exist in the beginning to create the world, to put it all into action and once that was done he stepped apart and left the world to itself. So in that sense God is not in communication with his creatures and therefore, doesn't exist as far as our needs are concerned. There are the recent radicalists that say that God just up and died. He was but he ain't no more. And then there's that vast multitude who don't give it a thought. God, we don't care.

But never has there been a need for God greater than the need today. For some spiritual and eternal interpretation of the affiars that has so torn us apart, ripped us into small groups, polarized us into entities apart from one anothers. Never has there been a need to see the wholeness in all of the vast fiscures of social, political and economic life as we have in the world today. Somehow if we could erect an image of God that men could look upon today and see and realize that there would be that cementing idealism and stature that could embrace all men together into the one world we so desperately need. We're failing on this account simply because we don't know how to talk to God. We live as though he doesn't exist.

Theologian, Licka Castarki said when Christianity removes the reality of the holy spirit from itself, it degenerates it degenerates into a futile humanistic search for goodness. John Wesleyan's entire experience and concept of the church was built upon the holy spirit, present, evident in the lives of everyone who embraces it. He spoke of that conversation with God that took place within the depth of a person's being. That evidence and reality that no man can deny because of a comprehension that is uniquely his own, an experience that cannot be matched outside himself. Wesley put it so simply in these words, 'the spirit of God has borne witness with our spirit.' There is the encounter of God with man, through the holy spirit.

We're afraid of the holy spirit. Not because of what we fear the holy spirit might do. But, primarily because of the connotations that have been put upon the holy spirit in times past. Splinter religious groups usually begin with a claim that they have a unique relationship with the holy spirit. And it finds such outlets as talking in tongues, the handling of snakes, the drinking of poisons and the walking over live coals without any physical effect. Our fathers in rural areas of this country going to revival meetings oftentimes would shout under experienced feelings of joy that were not attributable to anything that they've experienced before and they would always claim that they were caught up in the rapture of the holy spirit. Because of this one connotation that many of us have put upon the holy spirit, many of us shove it off into a dark corner, dreading that someone might resurrect it and make us feel just a little uncomfortable and for what it stands for. Yet we fail to realize that the holy spirit and what it stands for can be as intellectually assuring as emotionally. There's evidence of the reality of God as expressed by the holy spirit throughout all scripture. It's implicit in the old testament.

The Bible begins easily by saying that while there was void in all that the spirit of God hovered above. Men set apart from prophecy would address the masses of people who came to hear them speak and to credence to what they were about to say, they would recount and the spirit of God came upon them.

There's an understanding of the spirit of God in the Old Testament that somehow eludes us, we're not quite sure what this spirit was yet we do know that the writer comprehended the nature of God in this way that they expressed over and over again. But if the Holy Spirit is implicit in the Old Testament, it's explicit in the New. There's no question but that the entire concept of man's relationship with God is built around the presence of God as we have expressed it through the Holy Spirit. It surrounded the work of Christ, it undergirded the work of all the apostles. Jesus spoke frequently about it. And the concept of the Trinity that is embraced by all major denominations is built upon this understanding of the nature of God that we have let to fall in this use in so much of our spiritual experience.

Most of us believe in God. We can't help but believe in God if we were not brought into a spiritual relationship with him simply by an apprehension of all creation. That the rain falls and the sun shines and out of the earth comes life. And with each season in its regularity comes the fruit and then the death of winter and then the renewal of spring. We understand some intellect back of our universe to bring such a man into

being and to endow him with the power that we exhibit in our day by day living. Who can account for any of this, except from God. We believe in Christ. We're just coming out of the season of Easter Tide when we celebrated his life, his resurrection and then his ascension. Every year at Christmas time we we proclaim with the glad angels of old, peace on earth, good, will to man because of the birth of the son of God. How we repeat in our hearts in the time of loneliness when we feel that the world has forgotten us and we stand all alone, with such power and feeling come the words, 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.' He's an historical figure. Erase any other connotations from Christ and you cannot doubt that he lived. Though there may be various interpretations of the role that Christ played, we believe in Christ. But the Holy Spirit, then we get uncomfortable. We become fearful that demands are going to be made upon us here that we don't want to face up to. We'd rather it just be forgotten, and go on our way. But here's the link. Here is where Christ with a promise. When the days of his earthly ministry were coming to an end he brought his disciples together and he said, "It is necessary that I leave you now, I can't be with you any longer, but be assured of this a comforter will come and he will empower you with power. He will bring fulfillment and meaning to everything that is left unattended and unfinished." And the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit was the culmination of everything that had been desired in Christ and left unfulfilled because of the abruptness of the close of his ministry. And then the disciples were left after Christ had dismissed himself from them. _____ when there for a moment he was and then no longer was there. They remembered the words with which he had charged them, "Remain here in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes." And so they did. If we could follow these experiences day by day and hour by hour we would find a group that was still looking for some way to go, some direction. They were just waiting. They weren't about to do much at all. Possibly remembering to one another some of the experience that they had had with Christ but there was no moving out, no attempting to bring into play any of the things that Christ had asked them to do. They were just waiting. Something was missing in their lives. They had known Christ. They had loved Christ. But they were without purpose. They were without power, without understanding.

Now Jerusalem was all aflutter again like it was on Passover when Jesus had been arrested and crucified, pilgrims had converged once again upon the city of Jerusalem, because now it was the festival of Pentecost. It was to be the feast of the first fruits and all the Jews came back to their city to celebrate this great holy day of their church. And then suddenly fire rained out from heaven. That's the way Luke described it. A wind blew and tongues of fire seemed to be suspended over their heads and suddenly with one great swoop there was the power and the understanding that Jesus had promised. And each one rose to his full height spiritually on that day. To be celebrated on this day and centuries to come as the day of Pentecost when God opened the very parment of heaven and poured down the very power of his presence, at Pentecost. And the Holy Spirit, says the scriptures, came upon them.

Paul has an awfully lot to say about the Holy Spirit. But he said when the Holy Spirit is present there are certain fruits to be detected in a persons life, who embraces the Holy Spirit. Jesus talked a lot about trees and the fruit that they bore. He said a bad tree could not produce good fruit and a good tree could not produce bad fruit. That the fruit reflected the kind of tree that it was. And so Paul took that same

concept of life and he said that when a tree is filled with the holy spirit then there are fruits that come to a form that can be experienced and be identified. The first of these he said is love.

No subject perhaps has been written about, talked about, sung about in recent days and years more than love. If we are to understand any of our youthful demonstrators against the kind of society that we have today it is their attempt to bring love into the experience of the community. But the real meaning of love is not so often that which can be easily interpreted by song and by the writing of a pen, but love is much deeper than that. Nothing begins to reach the understanding of high love than what Paul wrote in the 13 chapter of Corinthians. Anyone who can measure up to that understanding of love has very left in his life to be desired. Here is life that is most unselfish at its best. And this is the kind of love that is promised by the holy spirit. So many lost today in a society that does not accept them. If we are to believe modern physiochologist and social workers, those teeming cities of the lost caught up in drugs and crime, are simply carrying banners that read, 'Accept me' 'love me', 'take me'. How it breaks our hearts to read about young people who leave their homes and go to live in communities where they hope to be accepted because they couldn't find it at home.

Manson and his followers who went from place to place committing gross crimes. He was able to do that, he was able to bring them into his own presence and to do things that were alien to their nature because they found in him acceptance and love and they desperately needed it and they didn't want to give it up. By their own admission it because of their love for him. One of the noted opera stars in her years as a struggling young student, left without a husband and two small children to care for, poverty struck at her home, she wasn't able to care for her children as she wanted. It looked as though all the dreams of her life were to be denied. Finally the day came when she broke mentally and she thought she couldn't go any longer. She took her two children and went down to a nearby railroad track, knowing that a train was soon to come by. She laid down across the tracks and held one child in each arm, waiting to take the three of their lives together. The children were too young to know what she was about to do. They laid there still, her arm about them. Finally the oldest looked up into her mothers face and she smiled and said, "Mother I love you." With that the mother broke into tears and she grabbed both children under her arms and rushed back to her home. And she said in that moment I had an insight that I hadn't had before. I was loved, I was needed, someone depended upon me. Things began to change for her, she continued her studies and she became one of the great stars of the Metropolitan Opera. Love how we desperately need it. That kind of love, not the physical kind of love that is so easy to come by and just as easily lost. But the kind of love that Paul talked about.

And then Paul said that a fruit of the spirit is peace. I was driving through the park yesterday when I passed a volkeswagon with some young people dressed as non-conformists. Momentarily my eyes met theirs and they lifted their hands in the sign of peace. I returned it. Peace, we all want peace desperately. But it's so illusive. This morning my youngest son picked up the newspaper ~~xxxxxxx~~, only seven years old, and he read the newspaper about an act of war and he turned to his oldest brother and he said it that far from us. The fear of war, the loss of peace is evident to the very youngest. And how we desperately want peace we see in evidence the desire of peace in these last few weeks as groups

have been clamoring for peace in their own way they are crying for the same thing. Almost all the people of America are hungering for peace, we're divided because we can't follow the same paths. But we are all reaching for the one thing that is illusive, peace. Because of the make-up of the world and the nature of man and because of their ideologies quite frankly, we won't have international peace except out of fear. Unless we could all embrace the high concept of life as taught in Christ apart from that we won't know peace, there will always be skirmishes and war. There's a war going on in each one of us at all times. The raging of different attitudes and aspects that cannot live comfortably together. We battle disease, we battle fears, we battle failures, we're caught up in anxieties, emotions that do not bring peace. Its a part of life. When we hear the angel's song 'Peace on Earth' and we wonder why it fails. It's because once again we have not taken hold of the real understanding of peace as Paul meant it, as Christ meant it. Peace, a serenity that enables us to stand firmly, strongly with courage; even in the sight of war, even in the sight of anxiety. Even when we are caught up in the fear of every day living, there is a serenity, a peace that God gives.

There was a ship being tossed about on the sea by a storm and all the passengers were caught up in fear for their own lives. One little girl stood over by the side and she alone among all of them was calm, no fear there. Other fearful of their own lives, one went over to her and said, "litte girl, why aren't you affraid." And she smiled and she said, "be cause my daddy is the captain of this ship." That's why we don't have to be affraid. Because we know our father is at the helm. And God is the captain even in such days as these.

John Wesley taking that initial trip to the Americas was caught up in a storm. While other, he among them were fearful for their own lives. Saw a group of Maravians, serene and calm in the face of the danger. And inquiring of Peter Bolger he learned, it is peace that we have with God. Love,peace, but Paul mentions one other.

He said the fruit of the spirit is Joy. Once again we don't have to revert to the concept of shouting, of showing our emotions outwardly. Emotion runs parallel with all other emotions of religion, we can't separate intellect from our emotions if we really believe in anything if we hold any truths to be self evident. It is charged with emotion and we are able to stand up and fight for that which we believe. But the joy that comes from theserenity is that kind of joy which expresses it= self in many ways and the greatest of all is the quietness of the human spirit.

We are having quite a few babies born in our church these days. I remember when each one of mine were born, what joy there was. Each time stand out vividly from all other incidents in my life. And how when the doctor said the mother and baby are doing fine, there's just no joy that I've ever experienced equal to that. I didn't jump up and down, I didn't shout, I was simply quiet and I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. Most of my highest joys have left me mute. A greater joy than can be expressed in words.

Love, peace and joy. That's all Paul had to say about it. Jesus spoke about the coming of the holy spirit and he added one ingredient that Paul left out and he said when the holy spirit comes upon you,you will

power. We talk about a powerless country, a powerless institution. Much is being said today about a powerless church. Power is the promise of the holy spirit. When those who were in the presence of Christ wondered at the great miracles that he was able to perform he said to them, greater things than these you will do, when the holy spirit comes upon you. If we do not have the power to conquer the earth, if we do not have ~~the power~~ that strength, that fiber in order to possess ourselves in such restless times, perhaps it's because we have left out that one ingredient in life that brings us power, and meaning and purpose.

We are living in an age in which atomic energy is synonymous with power. Yet the power of God through the holy spirit cannot be compressed into human terms. And that one aspect we shy away from.

Come holy spirit, come. Come with fire to burn, come with the winds to cleanse, come with the love to reveal, convict, convert, consecrate, until we are holy thine. Amen.

Let us pray.