1 Corinthians 10:1-13; John 14:15-18;25-27 May 20, 2018

*Half Truths, Part 3*

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*The Day of Pentecost!*

Holy Spirit, living Breath of God,  
Breathe new life into my willing soul.  
Bring the presence of the risen Lord  
To renew my heart and make me whole.  
Cause Your Word to come alive in me;  
Give me faith for what I cannot see;  
Give me passion for Your purity.  
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.  
  
Holy Spirit, come abide within;  
May Your joy be seen in all I do—  
Love enough to cover ev'ry sin  
In each thought and deed and attitude,  
Kindness to the greatest and the least,  
Gentleness that sows the path of peace.  
Turn my striving into works of grace.  
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.  
  
Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,  
Giving life to all that God has made,  
Show your power once again on earth;  
Cause Your church to hunger for Your ways.  
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise.  
Lead us on the road of sacrifice  
That in unity the face of Christ  
Will be clear for all the world to see.

We are in the third week of our sermon series called ‘Half-Truths.’ If you haven’t been here I suggest you go online to our website [www.upvpc.org](http://www.upvpc.org), click on ‘Watch’ at the top of the page, which will then take you to a page with picture tiles for each sermon series. If you click on the topmost one it will take you to the video of the message from the previous Sunday. If you scroll down just a little you will see a matching smaller tile. If you click on that one, you will be able to choose which message you want to watch or download the printed copy to your computer or phone. Thanks to our great tech team for their Sunday morning work, and thanks to Laurie Ruby, Betty Myers, and Barb Ramsey who then share the responsibility of getting it all online.

We started the series with the phrase I hope none of us ever say again to someone going through a hard time, **“Everything happens for a reason.”** On the surface the phrase is true. Everything does happen for some reason or another. But what is implied when we say the phrase is that God *causes* everything to happen for some pre-determined reason, which is not true to Scripture. However, if we yield our lives to God, he can and he will weave his grace and his goodness into and around and through all the circumstances of our lives and bring some eternal fruit from them!

Last week we looked at the phrase, **“God helps those who help themselves.”** Part of that phrase is true. God does help those who do their part, who use what God has given them to the best of their abilities. But part of the phrase is definitely contrary to what the Bible teaches us. God helps those who *cannot* help themselves. This rescuing help is called grace, and God extends his grace to us in giving us the gift of salvation (something we could never earn on our own). We, in turn, extend God’s grace to others who need help in any way. We looked at scriptures that call us to help the widows, the orphans, the poor, and the needy. The call to us is clear. God does help those who help themselves, but God also helps those who cannot help themselves through the extension of his amazing grace.

Today, contrary to what your bulletin says, we are not repeating last week’s phrase. Obviously, I needed more help last week than I asked for! Today we are looking at the phrase **“God won’t give you more than you can handle.”** How many have heard it? How many have used it? How many like the phrase? How many don’t like the phrase? If you’ve said it when I’m within earshot – you already know I DO NOT LIKE this phrase ONE LITTLE BIT! I’m so excited to blow this thing out of the water today!

This phrase is in the ‘half-truth’ category because it was born from a verse in 1 Corinthians 10 that sounds very much like it on the surface, but in fact means something very different.

Here’s what was happening in the Corinthian church that caused Paul to write what we did. Corinth, as we learned together last summer when we went on the road with the apostle Paul (remember that?), Corinth was a city drowning in pagan, cultic practices. There were many public sacrifices of animals to pagan gods. A tiny part of the meat was burned on the pagan god’s altar, some of which was then given to the priest, and the rest was distributed to public officials. Both the priests and the public officials then sold surplus meat to the town butchers. It was hard, if not impossible sometimes to know whether the meat you were eating had come from a pagan sacrifice or not. Paul wrote to the new gentile (none Jew) converts to Christ warning them to avoid eating meat from the sacrificial rituals if at all possible. Why was this so bad?

First of all, the new believers in Corinth presumed that because they had been baptized and welcomed to the Lord’s Table that somehow, they were immune to the reality of evil when they knowingly ate food sacrificed to idols either in temples or in pagan homes. Thus, they were putting God to the test, assuming that he would preserve and protect them in these situations. Paul says to them, “Learn from what happened before to your ancestors. Don’t test God in this. Don’t test him. Do not crave evil things like our ancestors did and suffer a like fate under God’s judgement.” Many didn’t live to see the Promised Land.

Secondly, Paul was reminding them that as Christians we must always be considering how our actions reflect our faith in Christ. How does it help those who are enslaved to cultic practices (including offering sacrifices to idols) get free from such practices and come to faith in Jesus Christ if we join right in with them as if nothing has changed in our hearts and souls and minds?

Let’s take a look now at 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, *“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,****2****and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,****3****and all ate the same spiritual food,****4****and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.****5****Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.* ***6****Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did.****7****Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.”****8****We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.****9****We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents.****10****And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.****11****These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.****12****So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.****13****No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”* It’s that last verse that somehow got twisted into “God won’t give you more than you can handle.”

The apostle Paul was saying to them, “God knows you. He knows your strength. As you do your part [living a disciplined life], God will make sure that you are not so overwhelmed by such temptations that you cannot get yourself loose.” F.F. Bruce, biblical scholar, writes, *“But if the Corinthians (or we) “deliberately put themselves in the way of temptations to idolatry and its associated evils, they were ignoring the preferred ‘way of escape’ and need not be surprised if they ‘fell’”*. (*Bruce 1971:94, 1 & 2 Corinthians, New Century Bible Commentary*).

I hope that helps us all understand that in its historical context, the verse *“God won’t let you be tested beyond your strength”* has little to nothing to do with what we mean when we say the words, *“God won’t give you more than you can handle.”* When we say it, we’re not talking about temptations, are we? When we say it, we mean that God won’t send you too many hard things at once.

The first problem with the phrase “God won’t give you more than you can handle,” comes with the understanding that it is God who gives us all the bad stuff that happens in our lives. It’s God’s fault that your sister died, or your car blew up, or your bank account was hacked, or your test came back with a big ‘F’ on the top. This takes us back to what is implied in the first phrase we studied, “Everything happens for a reason,” meaning that God is micromanaging everything. “God won’t give you more than you can handle” sends the message that God is the one sending hardship into your life. The truth is that God knows about and allows certain difficult things to happen in our lives for the refining of our faith. What we don’t know is how much God diverts to spare us. We must remember that God is a merciful and compassionate God who loves us with a perfect, everlasting love.

But the biggest gripe I have with the phrase “God won’t give you more than you can handle,” is that it sends the message that if we are overwhelmed with life, if things are more than we can handle, then somehow, we are deficient, we are lacking something that we are supposed to have. Listen, LIFE is more than I can handle on my own. Being a PASTOR is way more than I can handle on my own. Being a godly MOM and GRANDMOTHER is more than I can handle on my own. Being a godly WIFE is more than I can handle on my own. Being a FAITHFUL STEWARD of what God has given me is more than I can handle on my own. Fill in the blank for yourself. Being a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is more than I can handle on my own. Being a DISCIPLE of Jesus is more than we can handle on our own, right? BEING and MAKING disciples of Jesus is more than our congregation can handle on its own. It’s ALL more than we can handle on our own. That’s why God sent Jesus to save us! That’s why God sent the Holy Spirit to help us!

Listen to these words from John 14:15-18, *“****15****“If you love me, obeymy commandments.****16****And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you.****17****He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.* ***18****No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.”* And now 14:25-27, ***5****“I have said these things to you while I am still with you.****26****But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.****27****Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”*

Every time the descriptor *Advocate* is used, a footnote is given that says, “or *Helper.*” Why would the Holy Spirit be sent to us as our Helper if we could adequately handle everything on our own? The truth is that first, God doesn’t send all of the adversity that comes to us. It just comes. And the second truth is that on our own, as those who truly do want to be faithful disciples of Jesus, we can’t do it on our own, even if we wanted to. We need the Lord. We need Jesus. We need the Holy Spirit.

What a gift it is to us that when our hearts are opened to faith in Jesus Christ, confessing with our lips that Jesus is Lord and believing in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, what a gift it is to us that in that very moment, the Holy Spirit comes to take up residency within us. In Ephesians 1:13 we read, *“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”* We just read in John 14:16 that the Holy Spirit will never leave us. Once we come to faith and say “YES!” to Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us FOREVER! Always there. Always with us. Yet, sometimes grieved and sometimes barely evident, barely heard, because of the ungodly choices we are making in our lives.

That’s why if we want to be able to “handle” the Christian life, if we want to be more fully devoted disciples of Jesus, we need to say to the Lord, “Fill’er up!” We need to be filled anew with the Holy Spirit, giving freedom to the Lord to occupy EVERY area of our lives, guiding, comforting, helping, counseling, teaching, reminding, convicting, encouraging us to the greatest fruitfulness for the kingdom that we can bear! Ephesians 5:18 says, *“Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

* Today, I pray that every person here, young and old, would welcome the gift and the filling of the Holy Spirit – knowing that life is more than we can handle – but God, who is faithful and good – is ready to help us do exceedingly more than all we could ask or imagine.
* Today, I pray we are all granted the kind of peace that only Jesus can give as we come to the Table, confessing our sin, confessing our need for the LORD, and entering into communion with Him and with our brothers and sisters in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.
* And today, after we share communion, I pray that will joyfully enter into a time of the offering of our resources and of our very selves in a way we have never done before.

After we share the communion meal, we will give of our resources to God, giving back to Him a portion of what he has done for us for the work of the Kingdom here and around the world. Then, one by one, you will be prompted to come from the back pews forward to put your unique mark on this beautiful painting representing the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church.

Our fingerprints are unique. No one else in the world has the exact same set of ridges and lines that you have on your fingers. Not even identical twins have the same fingerprints. Your fingerprints also stay the same from the time you're born until death - they are permanent, and they are unique. As you put your thumbprint on the canvas (as helped by Jacki Cook, our artist), I invite you to say quietly to the Lord, “Here I am. I cannot handle this life as your disciple on my own in a way that truly makes the most of the unique gifts that you have given. Fill me, melt me, mold me, use me in whatever way you will to the glory of your Name!”