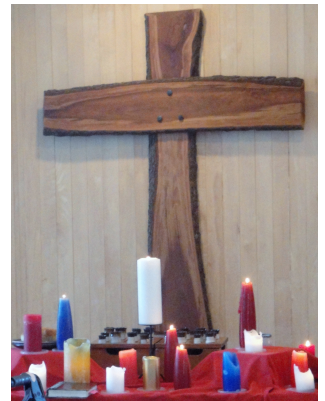


# “Spiritual Awakening” by Teresa Ramsey

May 15, 2016



## Day of Pentecost

Good morning. Happy Pentecost Sunday. I am always a bit intimidated to share the word here at Seekers because I compare myself unfavorably to the many highly skilled speakers who speak here regularly. Today, I am asking Jesus for grace in this effort because there is much I want to share with you and so little time. I wish to speak about the spiritual awakening of the apostles, my own spiritual awakening, how the apostles called others to God and community, and how we might do the same, in twenty minutes or less.

Let me start with a verse from today's gospel reading [John 14:15] in which Jesus, who knows he will soon be leaving, promises the apostles that he will ask the Father for another advocate to help them and be with them forever. Of course, Jesus means Holy Spirit when he says this. The Holy Spirit is the means by which God makes his power available to us. Fast forward to the epistle from Acts Chapter 2, verses 1 to 21, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The Father responds to Jesus' request and sends the Holy Spirit who

arrives on Pentecost Sunday accompanied by the sound of a mighty wind and appearing as tongues of fire resting on each apostle. As the apostles are filled with the spirit, they began to speak as if they were "on fire" each one in a language understood by people who spoke different languages as is the apostles spoke in their language. Some thought the apostles did so because they were drunk. These folks confused the spirit enabling this feat. I have made the same mistake myself.

The apostles were not drunk, as Peter explained. In fact, the apostles had experienced a sudden spiritual experience, also called a spiritual awakening. A spiritual awakening is a personality change brought about by a spiritual experience which can be in the nature of a sudden and spectacular upheaval. We see the personality change immediately in Peter. Peter, who three times denied he knew Jesus becomes a bold and fearless speaker as a result of the spiritual awakening. Spiritual awakenings by means of a sudden transformation occur fairly frequently but are by no means the rule as to how spiritual awakenings occur. Some other examples of sudden spiritual awakenings are Paul's experience on the road to Damascus when he heard the voice of God and Bill Wilson's mountain top experience in the Towns Hospital. There are other sudden dramatic spiritual awakenings reported in the bible that you may recall as well. Perhaps someone here has had one.

However, most people who have had a spiritual awakening, myself included, do not experience a sudden transformation, but rather what William James calls the "educational variety", that is, the transformation develops slowly over a period of time. God consciousness is the essence of the spiritual awakening.

Jesus tells the apostles in today's gospel [John 14:8-17], that the Father lives in him and he is in the Father. Jesus also says that the world cannot accept the Spirit of Truth because it neither sees him nor knows him but tells the apostles "he lives with you and will be in you." This is true for us also. God lives in us but we are, most of us, not conscious of this because we neither see him now know him. I have observed that most people seek God, not knowing where to find him. That has been the case with me. It was not until I had a spiritual awakening that I experienced God living in me and me in him. Bill Wilson is reported to have said: "One argument in religion is about as good as any other, but an experience beats an argument."

Bill Wilson describes this better than I can in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous:

Deep down in every man, woman, and child is the fundamental idea of God.....We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that he may be found. It is so with us.

Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Page 55.

And so it was with me. I had the fundamental idea of God but could not find him, seeking God, not understanding where God could be found. No church I attended instructed me how to find God, to know him with my own spirit. Yes, I heard a lot *about* God. I was given the intellectual arguments about

how we know God exists and what God is like. I was encouraged to pray to God. I was instructed to fear God. But, I was never told that I myself could experience God, could have a conscious contact with Him. It was only in the 12 step program of AA that I learned that:

“God does not make too hard terms with those who seek him. To us the Realm of the Spirit is broad, roomy, all-inclusive, never hidden or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open to all men.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Page 46.

I was astonished when I heard this. What? Was there no litmus test of belief in certain “truths” required? Was God really available to all persons who sought Him? Why wasn’t I told? Up until this point I had only found a spirit in a bottle. I was skeptical but curious enough that I followed the directions outlined for seeking Him. You see, I desperately wanted a spiritual awakening for I was spiritually bankrupt. If I could be spiritually awakened, well then anyone could be.

The steps by which a spiritual awakening is achieved are outlined in 12 step programs and correspond with recommendations found in the bible and in the principles of many faiths. Admission of powerlessness (humility), surrender, belief, seeking, decision-making (turning of the will), and action are necessary. Some of the required actions include self-assessment, personal inventory, confession, restitution/apology, forgiveness, service to

others, a willingness to have God remove ones character defects, prayer and meditation. Together these steps bring about a spiritual transformation and God consciousness that is a spiritual awakening.

Would I have it? You bet I would. I followed the recommended steps with a whole heart. In return, I received for the first time a conscious contact with the God of my understanding, an awareness of His presence within me and me in Him. What joy! To know that I am not alone and that God is with me. Like the apostles following the arrival of the Holy Spirit described in today's epistle, having been spiritually awakened, the first thing I wanted to do was to share my God consciousness with others.

Since the time of my own spiritual awakening, I have shared my experience with several other women who I have sponsored in AA. I showed them the path to spiritual awakening and walked beside them on the journey. I have found this to be one of the most beautiful experiences in my life. I have been blessed to witness another person, broken and shame-filled initially, undergo an amazing personality transformation as she made conscious contact with God. The broken person is transformed. The effects of spiritual awakening are remarkable. Some of the effects of spiritual awakening are: self-control, humility, calmness and concentration, non-attachment, intuition, self-knowledge, discernment, happiness, and freedom. It is my hope that I can continue to coach women through the spiritual awakening to God for the rest of my life.

Reverend Samuel Shoemaker, a member of the Oxford Group [that gave Bill Wilson many of the ideas used in AA] described in a

poem the joy of connecting people to God. He describes better than I can why I wish to be part of the process. I will share a few verses from his poem with you:

I stand by the door

I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out

The door is the most important door in the world-

It is the door through which men walk when they find God.

There is no use my going way inside and staying there,

When so many are still outside and they, as much as I,

Crave to know where the door is.

And all that so many ever find

Is only the wall where the door out to be.

They creep along the wall like blind men,

With outstretched, groping hands,

Feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door,

Yet they never find it,

So I stand by the door

The most tremendous thing in the world

Is for men to find that door- the door to God.

The most important thing that any man can do

Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping  
hands

And put it on the latch- the latch that only  
clicks

And opens to the man's own touch.

Men die outside the door, as starving beggars die

On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of  
winter.

Die for want of what is within their grasp.

They live on the other side of it-

Live there because they have not found it,

Nothing else matters compared to helping them  
find it,

And open it, and walk in, and find Him.

So I stand by the door.....

*I Stand By the Door* by Sam Shoemaker (from the Oxford  
Group)

On Pentecost Sunday we remember how the apostles received the Holy Spirit and immediately set out to share the news that anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Their spiritual awakening caused them to reach out to others as God called them to do.

While I have been called to serve through AA in bringing people to have conscious contact with the God of their understanding and to undergo a spiritual awakening, I feel a call to do more. It is not enough to achieve personal conscious contact with God. I believe that we, the children of God, are meant to worship God within community. Following the events of Pentecost Sunday that includes the baptism of 3,000, today's epistle reading is followed by a description of how the apostles and the other early Christians formed a spiritual community. I struggle to conceptualize how to apply this lesson, the lessons that following a spiritual awakening one should be in community, to my sponsee and others within the 12 step community. While those who commit to a 12 step program can be helped to achieve spiritual awakening, once awakened, they need a community of spiritual companions.



The members of AA are a community in the best sense of the word, they are not a worship community and the program does not go beyond the awakening of the individual and service to the still suffering alcoholic. That said, let's talk some more about me. I am here at Seekers because, having been spiritually awakened, I want to worship God within community. I have found my community here at Seekers. But what about the others who do not have a community? As I bring others to God-consciousness, I wonder if or where they will find a worship community. ?

This brings me to the outreach committee at Seekers.....The committee has been meeting since last fall to grapple with how we might reach out to others seeking a spiritual community. The various members are not of one mind, at least not yet, and we have different motives for why we wish to invite others in. Yet, I can report that our general rationale or reason for reaching out is the same as that of the apostles following their encounter with the Holy Spirit, we want to share the good news with others. We have heard the words of Gordon Cosby spoken in one of his sermons, that we should "let people know that God is for them.....[and] calling them into the family of God's love."

Over the past several months we have done a lot of brainstorming around outreach and what it might look like. You may have heard rumors about some of our work. I had hoped to share more of it with you today, such as our "elevator speeches" but time does not permit. So another day another sermon? Anyway, our workgroup has reached the stage of recognition that our work is on-going not short-term. Some of our members have reached the stage of recognition that we are receiving a call. We are looking within the Seekers community for others who may be hearing a call to join us or who would like to come alongside for a while to see if it is for them.

Someone, I won't say who, teased me this week about sharing the word and asked if I would be setting us on fire. No, I no longer am confused about who is God and whether that is me. For me to set you on fire would require matches, so I have simply prayed for some of you to be called to join us in the outreach group which we hope will become the outreach mission group or OMG. If you are considering, let me encourage you with a few of the closing verses from Reverend Shoemaker's poem:

As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,

Near enough to God to hear him and know He is  
there,

But not so far from men as not to hear them,

And remember they are there too

Where? Outside the door –

Thousands of them. Millions of them.

But- more importantly for me-

One of them, two of them, ten of them,

Whose hands I am intended to put on the latch.

So I shall stand by the door and wait

For those who seek it.....

If some of you would like to stand by the door too, I invite you to consider joining in the work of outreach group as we develop a plan for connecting others to God. We meet next tomorrow night at 6 pm in the library. Thank you