

Good Morning, I would like to begin our message, this morning, with this question, "What annoys you most about other people's driving habits. Well I don't have to think very long for my answer. What annoys me most is when someone is driving his or her car right on my bumper. I look in my rear view mirror and they are so close that I can see the glare in their eyes wanting me to drive faster. And what is worse is that they don't even care about the speed I'm driving. Well, I have a story about such a driver that I would like to share with us this morning. Our story begins with a driver tailgating another driver when suddenly up ahead the light turns yellow. The car in front decides to stop for the light and the car that was tailgating hits the brakes and skids to a stop just barely preventing an accident. Then the tailgating driver goes through the roof and begins honking the horn and screaming in frustration because of the missed opportunity to get through the intersection. While the driver was still ranting there was a knock on the drivers window from a police officer who had pulled up behind and was witnessing the road rage behavior. What happened next was that the tailgating driver was asked to get out the car and was taken into custody. The driver was later searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After several hours, a police officer approached the cell and opened the door. The driver was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with the driver's personal effects. He said, I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, shaking your fists and yelling profanities at the car in front of you. Then I noticed the 'Choose Life' license plate, the 'What Would Jesus Do?' bumper sticker, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk.

Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car. So, what is it that we may be able learn from our story this morning? Well, I believe that there is one obvious answer that might go something like this " If you present yourself as a Christian to the world, then you should live a Christian life, a life that will bring Jesus' love into the world. In last weeks bible study, we were studying the stoning death of Stephan who was one of Jesus' devout disciples. So when we think about living a Christian life and what it takes to do so, we can look to Stephan's death because right up until his last breath, he was more concerned about those who were stoning him than of himself. You see, as Stephan was dying in his last moments, he prayed to God that the sins of his killers would not be held against them. What a wonderful example of what it means to live a Christian life and care for others more than ourselves. There was one question that surfaced in our bible study last Sunday that has been with me all

week. The question, as best as I can remember, asked just how Stephan was able to endure such a horrific and painful death but still be composed enough that he was able to offer prayers for those who were killing him? You see in our discussion it was brought up; that wouldn't our physical reactions take over our bodies in response to all the trauma that we would be experiencing. So how was it that Stephan was able to rise above his physical distress and maintain prayerful thoughts in his mind right up to his death? To answer our question we need to know what Stephan had told the crowd that angered them so much that they wanted to execute him. Stephan was basically telling them that they did not know anything about God's truth anymore. Stephan's accusation erupted the angry crowd, but before they took him we find that something happened to Stephan and in **Acts 7; 55-56** we find the following;

***"But (Stephan) being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ...*** So there, we have our answer, Stephan was able to endure all that was happening because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. I used Stephan's example of receiving the Holy Spirit for us to understand that no matter how bad things are happening around us, that with Holy Spirit in our hearts, that we too are able to endure. There is also another example for us to study this morning and it is the story of what happened to the 11 apostles gathered together in fear as they hid from the Jews following Jesus' resurrection. You see, they feared for their lives and panicked with thoughts of Jesus no longer being with them. So when we think of the 11 apostles being in that room panicking behind locked doors we can now see the situation that Jesus saw when he appeared to them. There is one verse from our earlier gospel lesson in John that I find to be the most telling of what happened that allowed the apostles to no longer panic. We find from John 20, verse 22, ***"And when He (Jesus) had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*** So now, we have two examples, one from Stephan's story and one from the Apostle's story where we can see it is the power of the Holy Spirit that helps to keep us from worrying about what happens to us here on earth. Earlier in our message I made this statement, ***"If you present yourself as a Christian to the world, then you should live a Christian life..."***. But maybe when some of us hear this statement we may think to ourselves, "So how do I go about living a Christian life?" Well, some people may answer this question to themselves by saying that you may live a Christian Life by obeying the Ten Commandants and treating others the way you would like to be

treated. And then there are some people who may believe that you can live a Christian life by having faith in Jesus and live by His example as to how to treat others. These answers are wonderful answers in that they tell us what we should do to live a Christian life but there is something they don't tell us. And what is not being told to us is how we as earthly humans will actually accomplish what is needed. You see because we are earthly humans we have one major drawback that hinders us to be successful in living a Christian life. What if I told you that it is our inherent fallen human nature that keeps us from being successful? So with such a handicap right out of the gate how will we ever be successful at living a Christian life? Our answer is the same answer that Stephan and Jesus' apostles came across in overcoming their human natures, they received the Holy Spirit. Would you be surprised if I told you that many people believe that receiving the Holy Spirit is impossible for them? Would you believe that many people believe that their past is preventing them from every knowing the Holy Spirit? And would you believe that many people may not even know how to go about finding the Holy Spirit? Well, this would be a wonderful time for us to redirect our thoughts and find out what John Wesley, our founder of the Methodist Church, felt about receiving the Holy Spirit. You see, the beginning of Wesley's Sermon titled "On the Holy Spirit", gives to us a simplified approach as to how we may come to know the Holy Spirit in our lives. Now, Wesley's writing style is very complicated at times and I have decided to paraphrase his thoughts for us this morning instead of reading them word for word. In Wesley's explanation he begins by talking about how the traditional Jewish Laws were so demanding that it would deprive anyone of a joyous life because of the frustrations that would arise in not being able to obey the laws. Wesley goes on to mention that our sinful nature is at the root cause for our failures, which ultimately leads to our spiritual death. But now for the good news; Wesley recalls for us that it is the Spirit that gives life. And it is the Spirit that was not only promised to us but also placed on us. And it is the Spirit that enables us to live as Christians without the ruins of sin and death. Wesley concludes his viewpoint on the Holy Spirit by telling us that it was by the incarnation, preaching, and death of Jesus Christ that we may receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So what can we conclude from Wesley's viewpoint? We can conclude that it is only by our receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit that we can live a Christian life. So here's the big question for us today, "How do we know if or when we have received the Holy Spirit?" In answering our question we need to first realize that this is a very, very personal experience and that each one of us has to determine for ourselves the way that we have come to

know the Holy Spirit in our lives. You know, I have found it amazing that many people who are already filled with the Holy Spirit may not even be aware of it. It's also amazing to know that many other people may have come to already know of the Holy Spirit in their lives. So how can we tell if our lives are being filled and led by the Holy Spirit? Would you believe that we can find a clue to our answer by how a scientist knows that atoms exist without ever being able to see them. You see an atom is so small that we can only see the effect of what an atom does. Think about an atom as a small silver ball traveling through water at a speed so fast that the human eye cannot keep up with it. And with our limited eyesight we are only able to see the results of an atom's movement by seeing the water move. So when we think about the Holy Spirit as being something that we may or may not be aware of in ourselves, we may know that Holy Spirit is within us because of how we live our lives. The Bible gives us many examples of how the Holy Spirit will affect a person's life. In 1 Corinthians 2: 10-14 we find Paul telling us that God's Spirit will open up our spiritual understanding of things that seems like foolishness to those who have not received the Holy Spirit. In Hebrews 8:10 we find that the Holy Spirit will help us to keep growing in our faith and to understand God's plan and our part in it. We also find in Romans 12:2 that the Holy Spirit enables us to transform or change our minds and therefore our lives. But the real clincher for us is in Romans 5:5 "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." And with God's love in our hearts, according to 1 Corinthians 13:4 we are more patient, less envious, less boastful and less arrogant or rude. We tend to no longer insist on our own way or be irritable or resentful towards others. And lastly we no longer rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoice in truth. So, simply put, "if the shoe fits wear it" So if you find that you're living a life that resembles many of these qualities, and if you even sense that Jesus may be in your life it's very probable that the Holy Spirit is already with in your heart. And with the Holy Spirit in your heart it is also very probable that you are leading a Christian life. So if you're every pulled over and stopped by a police officer, you'll not have to worry about being arrested for stealing a car because you don't match your car's Christian bumper stickers but you might have to worry that you were actually speeding. Amen

***Worship Service Readings for April 26, 2015***

***First Lesson - John 3: 3-8 ... Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."***

Please stand and join together as we sing, "Glory be to the Father" No. 70 in your hymnals.

***Gospel Lesson - John 20: 19-22 "When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.***

Please join together as we sing Hymn No. \_\_\_\_\_

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