

Pentecost 2019 – Mrs. Thompson’s Pentecost

Introduction

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost and we mark the end of the Easter season. We also celebrate the end of the school year. The Pentecost event marks a turning point. The Father and Son send forth the Spirit, and the Spirit provides the power for change. In sending the Spirit Jesus fulfills his promise... The promise of an advocate, one called forth to aid another. In the spirit of beginnings, endings, turning points, and the power of transformative love I would like to share this story...

Mrs. Thompson and the Holy Spirit

As she stood in front of her 5th grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children an untruth. She looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. However, this teacher knew that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed the following... He did not play well with the other children, his clothes were messy and he constantly needed a bath. In addition, Teddy could be unpleasant.

It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would take great delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, with bold X's and a big "F".

Mrs. Thompson was required to review each child's past records, she decided to put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was shocked.

In first grade Teddy's teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners... he is a joy to be around.."

His second grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness. Life at home must be a struggle."

The third grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest. His home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

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Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and he sometimes sleeps in class."

Now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper. Sadly Teddy's present was clumsily wrapped in a heavy brown paper grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children laughed as she did so. Upon unwrapping Teddy's present she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume. She stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to." After the children left, she cried for at least an hour.

On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy had become one of her favorite students.

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had.

She got another note from Teddy several years later. He had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had.

Four years later, she got another letter from Teddy, saying that he had stayed in school even though it was a struggle. He persisted, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best teacher he ever had.

Four years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer.... The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

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The story does not end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom.

Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. She wore the bracelet, with several rhinestones missing and, she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference."

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back... "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

And for you that don't know, Teddy Stoddard is the Doctor at Iowa Methodist Hospital in Des Moines Iowa. He is the founder of the Stoddard Cancer Wing in the hospital, which overlooks the Iowa Hawkeyes football stadium. On football Saturdays the kids suffering from various cancer related diseases will wave at the stadium from the top floor of the cancer wing. The game is paused so that everyone in the stadium can wave back.

Power and Turning Points

The truth of Teddy’s life opened Mrs. Stoddard’s heart and allowed her to see his true worth and dignity. This truth transformed her forever. It gave her the power to change. That’s the kind of power the Holy Spirit offers for those who open their hearts to Christ. It is the power to change... to inspire. This was the power the disciples experienced on Pentecost. For the first time their words struck every heart in a way that each could understand. It is a power to speak to the heart of another, through the heart of Christ himself.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, enkindle in us the fire of your love.