

What was so attractive about a scraggly itinerant preacher that could attract hordes of people to walk for miles in a hilly region? I think it was the burden of sin, and the deep desire to be forgiven. What a relief to know that my sins are forgiven and not being held against me or over my head; that there's no big threat or punishment in my future. Forgiveness is a huge relief.

Of course it does require first the uncomfortable part of being honest with ourselves. We have to look and first admit our own sinfulness. But after that comes the sweet relief, Joy, hope, that we have been forgiven.

But there's more to John's message. He says, "There's something greater coming. There's someone who has *more* to offer than forgiveness. He will offer you the Holy Spirit." *Who's that?*

And then Jesus shows up and he's immersed in the water, and something greater than forgiveness happens. The Holy Spirit comes upon him. He hears the great pronouncement that he is a beloved child of God and it changes his life.

The Spirit then pushes him out into the desert. It takes him 40 days to understand what this means. It takes forty days to face the temptations of how he could act, and figure out what he should and should not do. And then he comes back and he has a new mission, a new purpose, a great passion that drives him for the rest of his life.

So this is what I wonder -- why do we just settle for the first step? Why do we settle for the minimum? Yes, it's great to be forgiven, and then we feel better. But we are offered the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That might be too scary. Perhaps we don't want to change, or we're not really looking for a mission because we already have enough on our plate. Or we don't want more passion, which takes a lot of energy and time. And so we deprive ourselves of the Holy Spirit.

God is alive and constantly pressing in, pressing, pressing, trying to make a place in our lives. The Spirit of God is a flame trying to burn through to our core. God is the flame boring into our hard wood. First, there's sputter, and steam, and crackle; until finally the wood itself becomes the flame of God.

Believe the good news! God is coming! God is pressing in! God wants you to know that you are a beloved child.

I think of the prophets who always had an excuse for why they couldn't do it – I'm too young; I can't talk in public. And God always took care of it. And so it is for us – don't be all tied up worried about your sins. That's been taken care of; they're forgiven. Now let's get on with the mission. God wants you to have the freedom of forgiveness so that you can live a life of passion, on fire with the Spirit, burning with the passion of the spirit.

Why would you settle for anything less?