



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

The Witness of the Spirit

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-16:15

Pentecost 27th May, 2012

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Today is Pentecost Sunday - one of the most important days in the Church year.

Over the last three years I have preached on Pentecost Sundays about the straightforward events of the coming of the Holy Spirit - exploring the mighty wind, the fire and speaking in tongues. Then we considered his role as paraclete (counsellor or advocate) and his indwelling and filling of us. Last year, I challenged us to consider what eagerly desiring the spiritual gifts means. We saw that prophecy is the normal response to God's strongly felt presence.

The Holy Spirit has many roles: today I want to concentrate on the Spirit as a witness. A witness is to give evidence of what he knows or observed.

Witness to Disciples

Last week we heard John in his first letter referring to the testimony or witness of the Spirit.

The Norwegian Amundsen was an explorer of polar regions. It is said that on his journey to the North Pole, he took a homing pigeon with him. When he had finally reached the North Pole after three years, he released the bird. You can imagine the delight of his wife, back in Norway, when she looked up from the doorway of her home and saw the pigeon circling in the sky above. She would have known that her husband was still alive.

So it was when Jesus ascended. He was gone, but the disciples clung to his promise to send them the Holy Spirit. What joy, then, when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. The disciples had within them the continual reminder that Jesus was alive and victorious at the right hand of the Father. This continues to be the Spirit's message.

In the gospel, Jesus says the Holy Spirit would testify about him. So the coming of the Spirit fulfilled the promise Jesus had made that he would send the Spirit from the Father to them.

Another testimony of the Spirit is that we are saved. The gift of the Spirit is intended to assure us that God indwells us and gives us confidence in our salvation.

In Romans 8, Paul refers to this with the phrase, "the firstfruits of the Spirit"¹. It is no doubt heavily influenced by the fact that Pentecost celebrated the beginning of the harvest when the first part of

¹ Romans 8:23

the harvest was brought in. So too, the gift of the Spirit to Christians is just the beginning with more to come later.

Elsewhere, Paul says the same using the imagery of the deposit or guarantee². The gift of the Spirit is a deposit given to us by God promising the full glory of heaven which will be ours one day. It guarantees the later full payment; it gives us a sample of the quality of what is being offered.

Paul also refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption³ – the same idea the Holy Spirit gives us an inner confidence of our adoption by God, our acceptance by him and our salvation.

Jesus says in the gospel, that the Holy Spirit will testify of him and his disciples will testify too⁴. Look at the change in the apostles. At Gethsemane they ran away and denied Jesus. After the resurrection they were locked away in the Upper Room for fear of the Jews. Between the Ascension and the day of Pentecost they are in retreat in that apartment. But as soon as they were filled with the Spirit, they start preaching publicly that Jesus is the Christ and rebuking them for killing him. That is a radical shift. It is a transformation.

Just this last week, I turned 36. You may doubt that ... but it was the 36th anniversary of the day I asked Jesus to be my Lord and Saviour. You may remember that I was saved during a mission conducted by Bill Burnett, the archbishop of Cape Town, here in Auckland.

When I prayed asking Jesus to save me, I had a powerful experience in which I was given that confidence that he had saved me. I knew (not wished, hoped or thought but I knew) that I was forgiven, and adopted as a son of God. I knew that God was my Father and Jesus my Saviour. I then felt something expanding within me like a balloon blowing up. As I wondered what it was, a thought played through my mind, “ ‘He who believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ This he spoke of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ I knew God was telling me that he had given me his Spirit and I later found out it was a quote from John’s gospel.

That was on Friday 21st May 1976. The Archbishop was speaking again at a youth event the following afternoon. I was going, and next morning I visited a friend to invite him and his sister to come with me and hear the Archbishop. Immediately, I wanted to tell others.

You see, I knew the witness of the Spirit to me and the impetus to witness to others.

Witness to the world

Jesus also said the Holy Spirit would testify to the world and by his message convict it of guilt. There were three aspects to this: sin, righteousness and judgment. He explains a little more:

“...in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”⁶

Sin is separation from God or rebellion against God. To refuse to believe in Jesus when presented with the evidence is truly separation from God.

The conviction of righteousness lies in Jesus being proved right because the Father raised him back to life after the crucifixion.

The judgment issue is that while men thought they were judging Jesus and condemning him to death in fact the tables were turned and the prisoner was really the judge, the accusers (including the arch-accuser, the devil, the prince of this world) are found to be the guilty ones.

I said last week, that we can find Peter using quotes from Jesus in his preaching. This conviction of guilt by the Holy Spirit is an instance. In the continuation of his Pentecost sermon he picks up the three points.

² 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:14

³ Romans 8:15

⁴ John 15:26-27

⁵ John 7:38-39

⁶ John 16:9-11

- The sin of rejecting Jesus: “You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”⁷
- The righteousness of Christ: “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God. ... God raised him from the dead ... because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”⁸
- The judgment of those opposed to Christ: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. Save yourselves.”⁹

And the result was indeed that very many of his hearers were convicted. “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”¹⁰ And of course, he called them to repent and be baptised.

We have seen how the Holy Spirit testifies to us, moves us to testify to others and convicts the world of guilt. There is another testimony – his guiding Christians into truth and teaching us about Jesus.

Availability of the Spirit

The great change which happened at Pentecost was that the Spirit of God was made permanently available to all the people of God. Before that, the Spirit of God came on certain people only for special tasks. When Peter got up to explain to the people what had happened with the outpouring of the Spirit, he said it was what the prophet Joel had said would happen:

“In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy...’ “¹¹

It was the start of the last days, the days leading up to the end. We are still in the last days. The Spirit is still available, still being poured out, still testifying, still convicting, still stirring up prophecies, visions, dreams. The Spirit is still enabling his Church to serve with his gifts.

Why would you not want his assurance within you of being saved? Why would you not embrace all he has for you? What part of young/old, male/female, slave/free excludes you?

Why would you not welcome his activity in your life?

Church, we are not just told to be open to the Spirit, we are commanded, “Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.” I don’t think Richie McCaw became an All Black by wandering down to the rugby field occasionally and idly kicking a ball around. He trained, he worked, he pushed himself. He earnestly desired it.

Now I am not suggesting it is a case of striving like that to receive, but it is important to be serious and intent - to take seriously and seek what God has for us. If you lack assurance – seek it. If you lack experience of the Spirit – get among those who are experiencing him at work. If you want more of what the Spirit has for you press into him – don’t be satisfied with less. Let’s press into all he has for us.

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⁷ Acts 2:23

⁸ Acts 2:22, 24

⁹ Acts 2:34-35, 40

¹⁰ Acts 2:37

¹¹ Acts 2:17-21