



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

Established, Empowered, Adopted

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8: 14-17; John 14:8-17; 25-27

Pentecost, 19th May 2013

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This Tuesday is a special anniversary for me. It was on 21st May 1976 that I was adopted – thirty-seven years ago. However, I continued to live with my birth parents after that time. Does that sound odd? It will come clear as we move on.

Today is Pentecost Sunday when we remember the Spirit of God being poured out in power on the early disciples. Jesus had promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to his disciples. We have just heard one of those promises in the gospel reading.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever - the Spirit of truth. you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”¹

Last week we heard that, at his Ascension, Jesus told his disciples to wait for the promise of the Father to come to them. Then came this dramatic fulfilment.

Yet there had already been a gift of the Holy Spirit. After the Resurrection, Jesus had breathed and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Was that it or was it Pentecost?

Perhaps the answer lies in understanding that there are two major aspects to the Spirit’s work in our lives.

Two aspects of the Spirit’s work in us

Our readings point to **Establishment** and **Empowering**.

We know that the Holy Spirit is the one who draws us to salvation. We are born again of the Spirit and given new life. We are saved by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. This is the aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work that Paul talks about mainly in Romans. It is to do with getting us born again, justified (that is declared innocent of sin), and on the road of sanctification as our lives are changed to be more and more in line with Christ’s. We might call this the **establishment** of the Christian.

Friends, we need to be established in Christ by the Spirit of God. That is the way of salvation. That is the way we respond to the call of Jesus, the God-man to follow him. If you would walk with him, you need to be brought into the new life by the Holy Spirit. Is that possible, you might ask? We

¹ John 14:16-18

heard in the Acts reading, the promise, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”² The invitation is there; the assurance of a positive answer is there – what stops you from asking?

The other aspect is the **empowering** which we heard about in the events of Pentecost. When the Spirit came on those early disciples who had been so fearful, they were transformed. They drew attention to themselves. They were given boldness.

When people asked what was going on, we can imagine that they could have tried to minimise and hide it. But no, Peter got up and preached a challenging sermon and the result was 3000 being added to the church that day.

The Spirit of God gives boldness and abilities beyond human ability: Just in this account we hear of people speaking in languages they have not learned “... as the Spirit enabled them.”³ They will speak the words of God in prophetic messages, and be given inspired dreams and visions.

Those gifts are available today. We have talked about them before. We see healing in our midst. Sometimes the use of the gift of tongues and interpretation, prophecies and words of knowledge as we convey God’s messages to each other. In my experience, we need to co-operate with God to be able to use these gifts. He doesn’t force us into doing something we do not want and have not been open to use. Paul says, “Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.”⁴

The event at Pentecost was a filling with the Holy Spirit. Through Acts, we find that there are many fillings – it is a repeatable event. We need fresh empowerments from the Spirit – we need to ask for them.

Adoption

One aspect of the initial work of the Spirit in establishing us in Christ is that he adopts us – he makes us his children. I want to look at that more closely.

What idea of adoption would Paul have? It was not a Jewish custom; however, it was a strong concept in Greek and Roman law. Even some Roman emperors determined their succession by adopting their desired heirs; e.g., the Emperor Trajan was adopted and he in turn adopted Hadrian as his heir.

Paul was writing to the Romans. In Roman Law, certain things took place when someone adopted a child:⁵

1. The adopted child lost all his rights in his old family and gained all the rights as a legitimate son in his new family.
2. The adopted child became an heir to his new father’s estate. If a son was later born to his new parents, he didn’t lose any of his inheritance just because he was adopted.
3. The old life of the adopted child was wiped out ... including his debts. He was regarded as a new person, and his past was past.
4. The adoption was legally binding, and the adopted child was considered a full and complete son of his adopted father as if he were naturally born.

Paul stresses that we are now sons of God means that we were once not. John Stott says,

“It is evident ... that the popular notion of ‘the universal fatherhood of God’ is not true. To be sure, all human beings are God’s offspring by creation, but we become his reconciled children only by adoption or new birth.”⁶

In other words, when we were saved, we were adopted into God’s family. The truths that apply to this parallel those of Roman adoption:

² Acts 2:21

³ Acts 2:4

⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:1

⁵ This material is based on a sermon by Pastor Ray Scott: <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/words-of-distinction--adoption-ray-scott-sermon-on-kingdom-of-god-64615.asp?Page=1>

⁶ Stott J., 1994, BST: The Message of Romans, IVP, Leicester, p231

1. You lost all your rights in your old family. You were in the Kingdom of Darkness and inheritors of wrath. You gained all the rights of being a child of God. (See Revelation 21:1-7)
2. You became an heir of your Heavenly Father's estate. Your new Father is rich beyond measure. He is the creator of all things, and He owns all things. He has multiplied blessings to pour out on his heirs.
3. The sins of your past life were wiped out when you were adopted by your Heavenly Father. The slate was wiped clean. You became a "new creature". You were given a new nature. You were born again as a child of God.
2 Cor. 5:17 – "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
4. Your adoption into God's family is legally binding. We can't be "un-adopted" ... it won't be rescinded ... our Heavenly Father won't disown us. "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."⁷

Paul goes on to tell us more about this work of the Holy Spirit within us.

The Spirit does not make us slaves to fear

Rather than hiding from God or approaching in a grovelling manner, he sets us free to come with confidence.

He puts the cry of *Abba* in us.

You know that *Abba* is the Aramaic for Daddy. It is the child's familiar, loving yet respectful address for his father. No Jew would have dared to address God thus. Yet Jesus is recorded as always addressing God as *Abba* except for the cry from the cross. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he told them (and us) to call God, *Abba*.

He testifies that we are God's children

This desire in us to call God, *Abba* Father, is a witness to us that the Holy Spirit is within us inspiring the expression of that relationship. I remember being offended at one time by people raising their hands in worship – I thought they were showing off. Once I was adopted into God's family – for that is the adoption I will celebrate on Tuesday if you hadn't guessed – I found it was a natural expression of reaching up to my Father as a small child might reach up to be picked up by his Daddy.

Here is evidence of God's kindness to us

Jesus said in the Gospel reading, "I will not leave you as orphans." Do you hear the compassion and the care in Jesus' words to his disciples? He knows what it is to feel abandoned. Through the Old Testament, God repeatedly says he will be a father to the fatherless and a husband to the widow. He cares for and protects the weak and vulnerable.

Don't think of adoption as some second-class thing. Paul writing to the Ephesians pointed to the great mercy of God who "predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."⁸ It is a high honour indeed to be chosen by the Creator for an intimate relationship.

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⁷ Romans 11:29

⁸ Ephesians 1:5

