



Sermon

The Work of the Holy Spirit

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

Pentecost - 5th June, 2022

© 2022 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

Today is the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost marks the birthday of the Church when the Holy Spirit came down on the disciples in power. He gave them the courage and power to tell people about Jesus and that day 3000 people were baptised and followed Jesus.

Jesus had promised his followers this would happen. We heard it in the gospel reading last week:

"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."¹

and this week:

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."²

Now the time had come. Verse 1 tells us that the Day of Pentecost had "fully come". The word carries the sense of fulfilment of a period of time in God's planning. Well certainly it was the fulfilment of the annual period of 50 days from Passover to Pentecost. Pentecost was the Harvest festival of Israel: the time to give thanks for the wheat harvest.

More significantly, it was also the end of the period of waiting that Jesus had told them about. And even more than that it was the time to fulfil God's plan to equip and empower the Church.

Something dramatic happened - there were three supernatural signs:

- Wind (v2): "Suddenly, there came from heaven the sound of a mighty rushing wind which filled the house where they were sitting." But it was the sound of wind rather than a felt wind.
- Fire (v3): "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them." It looked like fire but it did not burn.
- Inspired Speech (v4) "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." It is quite clear from the puzzled comments from those who gathered around that they were speaking in languages that they had not learned. These were country types

¹ Luke 24:49

² John 14:16-17

from Galilee who were speaking in the mother tongues of people from all around the Mediterranean coast, through modern day Turkey, up to the Black Sea and across towards Persia.

And what was the result?

These signs amazed a crowd who wanted to know what was happening. So Peter explained that although they had killed Jesus, God had raised him to life again and taken him up to a place of glory and authority in heaven. What they were seeing was the effect of Jesus sending the Holy Spirit as he promised.

Many of the local people in the crowd would have heard Jesus preach. Now it was the harvest time from his sowing.

The day Jesus rose from the dead was the same day that an offering was made in the temple to thank God for the very beginning of the harvest. It was the offering of the first fruits - the first barley was ready. That is why he is called the firstfruit of the resurrection. The day of Pentecost was to celebrate the gathering of the main harvest. It is fitting that it was on that day that the church was gathered together. 3000 people responded to Peter's preaching and were baptised into the church that day. And the harvest has gone on ever since.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

However, we have other readings about the Holy Spirit and I want to look more widely at His work.

The work of the Holy Spirit has been defined as "the active presence of God in the world and especially in the church." Effectively, any experience you have had of God has been the work of the Holy Spirit. We can describe the work of the Holy Spirit under four headings.

The Holy Spirit empowers, purifies, reveals and unifies. As we explore these headings, reflect on ways you have known the Holy Spirit acting in these ways and where you long for Him to act in your life.

Holy Spirit Empowers

Natural & Spiritual Life

It is the Holy Spirit who gives natural life to us. It was the Spirit of God who was moving over the water creating in Genesis. He gives breath to all creatures. Jesus told Nicodemus that we are to be born again by the Holy Spirit. That is, it is the Spirit who gives us new life when we are saved.

Power for Service

Jesus ministered in the power of the Spirit. He came out of the wilderness in the power of the Spirit. He preached that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me."

Jesus told the disciples to wait to be clothed with power from on high. Again in Acts 1, he said, "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." That is what we see in the ministry of Peter and the apostles who preach fearlessly and have miraculous signs following their preaching. The sound of a great wind on the day of Pentecost was a sign of this power. When Elijah experienced the presence of God, the wind was so strong it broke rocks!³ If you are a Christian you have already been drawn by the Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit dwells within you. That was true of the disciples. But we, like them, need to be clothed with the Holy Spirit's power to be effective in ministry and mission.

Holy Spirit Purifies

While wind is a sign of power; fire is a sign of purifying. We refine metals with great heat. Surgical instruments are sterilised in the heat of an autoclave. To pass through the fire is to purify an object. The Holy Spirit has the role of cleansing us and making us holy. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:11:

... you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

³ 1 Kings 19:11

He continues that work with the development of his fruit in our lives - the characteristics that reflect God's character: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Holy Spirit Reveals

He makes God known to us.

At Pentecost, the disciples were given the gift of tongues which in that instance allowed words of praise for God to be understood by people of all the languages gathered there. They overflowed with God's praise in tongues and probably prophecy. That may happen when the Spirit comes strongly on someone.

The signs of the Day of Pentecost were Holy Spirit activity: fire, wind, the gift of tongues. The Holy Spirit shows the presence of God.

He bears witness to us that we are children of God.

We heard that in our reading from Romans.

... you received the Spirit of sonship [adoption]. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ⁴

It is the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us who assures us that we are children of God. When we are saved we are adopted into the relationship with the Father. It is the Spirit of God who causes us to address God as Abba, Daddy, Father. The night I was saved, I had revelation of the basic truths of the faith: that God is my father, Jesus is the Son of God, God is trinity; that I was forgiven and adopted as a son of God. That was the Holy Spirit revealing truth to me and that I was an adopted son of God.

He guides and directs God's people

Paul writes of being led by the Holy Spirit and walking in the Spirit. This is more than obedience to moral commands, since Paul contrasts being led by the Spirit with following the desires of the flesh (sinful nature).

He guides us often in subtle ways, sometimes more obviously. Sometimes it is small nudges - perhaps to contact someone.

Sometimes there are major course changes which we would not have thought of ourselves. Our involvement with Kondo Diocese was like that. The idea to invite Bishop Given to preach here was a minor nudge which started a significant relationship between this parish and Kondo.

At that stage I had no thought of going to Africa - I was positively averse to going there! The guidance to go on the first trip to Kondo in 2013 was more like a series of spiritual 'pushes'. Nine years and two weeks ago, I preached on the Macedonian call of Paul. In the following week two separate documents came across my desk quoting from that text, "Come over here and help us" accompanied by a strong witness of the Spirit. When I was wondering where I was to go an email came from Bishop Given inviting me to teach at his Clergy School. Once I sensed the Spirit's call, my resistance to Africa evaporated!

Holy Spirit releases His fruit when He manifests his presence

When the Holy Spirit manifests his presence, his attributes tend to be felt. He may bring conviction of sin, righteous and judgement. He may bring a loving atmosphere of love between believers or peace or joy - in fact all or any of the fruit of the Spirit. He may impart truth, wisdom, comfort, freedom or hope.

Holy Spirit Unifies

Again we see this in the events of the Day of Pentecost. The prophecy Peter quoted speaks of a community coming into being: old and young; men and women; boys and girls; servants and free - all were receiving the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. That day, 3000 joined the disciples as the early church. They shared fellowship including their possessions - this was unity indeed. We continue to find unity in the fellowship of

⁴ Romans 8:15-16

the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is working strongly in a church, one evidence will be a beautiful harmony in the church community and overflowing love for one another.

1) Empowers with spiritual power for service

2) Purifies

3) Reveals:

- a) God to us
- b) That you are a child of God
- c) Guides and directs his people
- d) Brings His fruit in our personal and corporate lives.

4) Unifies His people.

Are you open to the Holy Spirit working in your life? Many people resist, but think of it, if you are alive and most of you are (☺) then the Holy Spirit has given you the spark of life - that wasn't too scary was it? If you are a Christian, it was the Holy Spirit who drew you to Christ and he already dwells within you.

So are you open to more of the Spirit of God? As you look at that list of ways in which He works, let's ask the Lord what he wants for each of us. Are you drawn to one of them more than the others?

I encourage you to name that desire and ask for it.

Listen to what Hosea wrote:

"Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD; his going forth is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." Hosea 6:3 [RSV]

Jesus encourages as well:

Luke 11:9, 10, 13 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ... ¹³ If you [then, though you are evil,] know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Be specific; name it and ask for it. He actually wants to give to you!