

Pentecost 2021

Over the past weeks our readings and sermons have demonstrated the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the apostles and followers of Jesus.

Peter and John heal the lame man in the name of Jesus.

Philip is moved by the Spirit to preach to the Ethiopian and then disappears in one place to appear 30 miles away.

Peter goes through a transformation of understanding to meet with Gentiles, preach to them, stay with them. His bias and in-built racism are transformed.

The Disciples choose a replacement for Judas and trust the work of the Spirit in that choice.

Healing, preaching, miraculous events, transformed understanding, even business meetings – the breadth of the work of the Holy Spirit has been in these stories...but now we back-track to Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. As we do so, let's not lose sight of outcome of the Holy Spirit's presence, and let's not neglect from our list, ecstatic praise and exuberant joy.

Pentecost is 50 days from the presentation of the first sheaf of Barley from the harvest and was considered by the Jews to be the anniversary, (the celebration) of the giving of the law on Sinai; the 10 commandments.

It's no accident that this was the day God poured out His Spirit. Just as the law was meant to express God's will and guide the people of Israel, so now the church receives God's own Spirit to guide and help and indwell the people as they seek to live out God's will in Jesus Christ.

The point of Pentecost unfolds over the chapters which we have explored. The point is the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Although the presence and impact of the Holy Spirit gets our attention, we misunderstand if we think receiving the Holy Spirit is an end in itself. The Holy Spirit is the power within to live for Christ, proclaim Christ and share in bringing about God's Kingdom.

One big mistake would be to think that the account of Pentecost is a blueprint for how church should be every Sunday morning. It's a reminder of identity and purpose. We are reminded who we are (the Church of Christ), what we proclaim (Jesus Christ) and the source of that proclamation, the Spirit of Christ indwelling in us.

A couple of points from the text. Jesus followers were gathered together and all received the gift of the Spirit and on that occasion the evidence was the same for them all, speaking in the languages of those gathered in Jerusalem from the all over the middle east.

The point Luke is making is to reinforce the universal nature of salvation – it is for all people, and that the gift of the Spirit was to declare the deeds of God and give him the glory.

But this scripture can raise questions for us.

If we haven't experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in this same way what does that mean for us?

And if I haven't got a group of people around me all doing the same thing as me how do I recognise the work of the Spirit in me?

A few weeks ago I was struck by verses 44&65 in John chapter 6.

⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them,.

Pentecost 2021

⁶⁵ "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

Drawn / Enabled.

I've been pondering that ever since, particularly as I pray every day for those who have not yet felt at home in Christ's church.

None of us have been able to come to Christ, make a profession of faith, say the creed with genuine belief, unless we are drawn by God and enabled by God.

Not manipulated or forced or coerced, but drawn and enabled. The Holy Spirit is present and at work in all of us long before we recognise his presence.

The German theologian Bultmann says the drawing of God occurs when we abandon our own judgement and hear and learn from the Father.

It's as if the Holy Spirit is a personal tutor waiting only for us to ask a question, raise a doubt, want something more; and He provides the stepping stones to Christ, through whom we come to the Father.

And the enabling, I believe, is the love of God he longs to show all of us and as we experience even a fraction of what HE has in store we are enabled to go further onward.

The point I'm getting to is this. As each of us experience more of the Holy Spirit, we discover it's more of what we've already known. Yes of course some things can be new and surprising, like speaking in tongues or discovering you love to pray, or doing something in the church you never thought you would do – but it's

in continuity with the way the Holy Spirit has drawn and enabled you thus far.

Another German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, says "In the Kingdom of the Spirit, everyone will experience his or her own endowment and all will experience new fellowship together.

The work of the Spirit draws us into fellowship with each other the church is the work of the Spirit! And the Spirit endows each person uniquely equipping you, to proclaim Jesus Christ.

St. Peter goes on to quote the prophet Joel to say the Spirit is poured out on ALL – young, old, men woman, slave, free and they will prophesy.

That can create quite an image in the imagination...but think of prophecy not so much telling the future but truth-speaking. Who God is, what God has done, proclaiming Jesus Christ the Way the Truth and Life. Speaking God's truth into every situation so that. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

This Pentecost we cannot worship in the usual variety of ways we normally would and we cannot anoint with oil and offer prayer either...but let's join together as the church and seek the Holy Spirit's gift to equip us for the task of assisting His work of drawing and enabling those He has placed on our hearts into the fellowship of the church.

It's a give – so that I may serve prayer.
Give, that I may speak, prayer.
Give, that I may love, prayer.
Let's pray!!

Pentecost 2021

Holy Spirit, we thank you that you were present in drawing and enabling us to come to Christ before we had any understanding of your love for us.

We ask that you fill us anew, refresh and anoint us again in order that we can join you in bringing others to Christ.

We picture before you now those you have placed on our hearts. Husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, colleagues, neighbours.

Your love for them is infinite and eternal, Lord may we bring you glory by doing all we can, in the love of Christ, to bring these souls into your kingdom.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 23 May 2021