

Sermon for Pentecost, Year C

Text: Acts 2:1-21.

The Holy Spirit – what & why?

Today, being Pentecost Sunday, our attention is drawn to the coming of the Holy Spirit into the hearts and lives of his people. Here we are very quickly reminded of why he is important and what his chief work is. Now it is important that we think about this because there is so much fuzzy thinking and false ideas bandied around in the name of 'I have the Spirit so ...' The devil is having a field day in the face of much of this false thinking that is around. This can and is affecting our faith.

Here, let us firstly, through our Old Testament reading, be reminded of what happens when people do not have the Spirit. There, in their own eyes they were achieving great things: they were building their own skyscraper so that they could make a name for themselves. Their whole focus was on themselves and what they could achieve for themselves. [Does that not sound vaguely familiar?] They think that they can even make their way to the heavens through what they are able to do for themselves. Their whole focus was on themselves and what they wanted to do for themselves. And God acknowledges that they and we have the ability to do quite remarkable things. But not to be able to achieve the heavens and equal rule with God.

In fact it is quite ironic; they think they have built this tower which will take them to the greatest heights, yet God has to come down to see this little dot of a thing that they have achieved for themselves. But at that point he confuses their language so that they would not rely on themselves and their own achievements: instead to hopefully be forced to look to and glorify God. So here again we see that our human spirit seeks to focus on ourselves and our wants and desires: the sin of Adam and Eve continues on to do what I want, rather than what God wants.

This now brings us to Pentecost Sunday and the coming of the Holy Spirit to his people. Here we find that though there are many nationalities gather together on this occasion, the Spirit speaks a message that all can hear and understand. Here there is a unifying message that enacts what the people have always sought after and could not achieve by themselves. They will have a name for themselves and they will be able to reach the heavens. All as they allow Jesus Christ and what he has done for them to touch them.

The Holy Spirit here focusses them away from themselves and their sinful desires to instead glorify God. Their attention is drawn to the *wonders of God* and what he has achieved for us, despite ourselves. Even though we have made

enemies of ourselves through our desire to do everything our own way: he has done what was necessary for us to once again get back to what was and is vitally important.

So the Holy Spirit's focus was, and still is, to point people to Jesus Christ and to find our life and hope there. The message that the true Spirit was giving through Peter and these first disciples was very clearly all focussed on Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for us and for our salvation.

Peter went on to say: that it was us and our sin that put him on the cross, but there he took the punishment that we deserve on himself so that we might be forgiven: And then he was raised again three days later so that we can be absolutely sure that here God himself is at work for us and for our salvation.

The Holy Spirit was and is seeking to teach us how remarkable and essential Jesus' work on the cross is for us. Here we have the great wonders of God that are beyond comprehension. Here in God himself we have the answers that we need for life and salvation.

The concluding sentence in our reading gets to the heart of the matter: *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Everyone who looks to him and recognises and accepts the fact that it is the Lord who is our life and salvation will be saved. Conversely those who think that they can work out their life and salvation on their own are in big trouble.

So the Holy Spirit's work is to point us to Jesus Christ and all that he has done for us through his death and resurrection. Now we know as we go on from this account of Pentecost a huge number of people came to faith in Jesus Christ. As the Holy Spirit works through people telling the simple, basic, yet powerful, life changing message of Jesus Christ, many lives were saved.

It was only when people changed that focus and tried to use the Spirit and the Word to suit themselves and to achieve what they wanted, that things went all wrong. From the congregation at Corinth all the way down through history, we find example after example of people trying to shift the emphasis from Jesus Christ and what he has done for us, to ourselves and our gifts and the like; and the results have always been negative.

Here I would suggest we only need to look to ourselves and our own church scene to see the same thing at work. As the focus shifts to my faith, my living the Christian life; my understanding of the role of women in the church; what I want out of the worship service; and many other things we see the results. Is it any wonder that the church is in decline? Is it any wonder that people no longer come to church? Is it any wonder that I struggle in my life and with my faith? We are trying to do it all ourselves.

When the Spirit is not given the free reign to focus on Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection, there will be a scattering of the flock. The more the focus is on me and what we must achieve, there will be difficulty. God's Holy Spirit will not be enabled to do his work.

So with that in mind, let us now in this Pentecost season let the Holy Spirit work in our lives, pointing us to Jesus Christ and the wonders that God has done through him. As we begin to appreciate the absolute mess that we have made of life on our own, and the death and hell that results from that, then also we will greatly appreciate the wonders of God and all that he has done to save us. Then the flow on of that will be, that we will allow him to be Lord of our lives and we will allow him to do what he wants in our lives.

Then also he will work through us to tell that same simple message to the people that we come across in our lives. When we truly appreciate the greatness of our Lord we will be only too willing to tell others. [We do that in every other area of our life. So if Jesus is important to us, we will not be able to help but tell others of him and his greatness.]

Here remember the last part of that reading where God says, *I will pour out my Spirit on all people*. As we turn to God and allow him to be the main focus in our lives we have the assurance that he will give us a rich measure of his Holy Spirit. As the message of Jesus Christ goes out, great things will happen: people will see signs that will reflect the consequences of lives lived in opposition to God and the judgement of God against it.

But in the face of it and with the knowledge that Jesus Christ is for real and that he is Lord and Saviour, there will be opportunity for all *who call on the name of the Lord to be saved*. The Holy Spirit will help all who do not reject him and try to do it on their own. He will do what he has been sent here to do.

The question is: will we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives? Or will we want to keep on living life by and for ourselves? Will we want to ignore or change what God has to say to us in his Word? Will we want to hear and do that which tells us what we want done? Or will we allow the Holy Spirit to point us to the centrality of Jesus Christ and the importance of his death and resurrection for our salvation and for our living out of our lives. Will we accept the greatness of who he is and all he has done for us, to be the basis of all that we are and all that we do?

Yes, may the Holy Spirit work mightily today focussing his message of Jesus Christ and the cross on us so that we then allow him to be Lord of our life. After all, to him alone belongs all glory and honour, now and always. Amen.

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