

4th June 2017 Pentecost Sunday

Today is Pentecost Sunday where we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the first disciples in Jerusalem.

Davis Dictionary of the Bible:

Pentecost means fiftieth days after Passover (counting from after the Passover Sabbath) It was also known as the Feast of Weeks: It falls 50 days after feast of unleavened bread (Passover) and in some places, it is known as 'Day of first fruits' as the first fruits of the wheat harvest were offered before the Lord at this time.

Davis offers this insight into why looking at this date in the church calendar is a useful one.

"The essential traits of an institution are seen in the history of its establishment. At the institution of the church, the Holy Spirit descended into all believers regardless of age sex or class. Life had been imparted. The Spirit had been given to men before, but now the church entered upon what is characteristically the dispensation of the Spirit. The Spirit is given in full measure to all believers without the intervention of prescribed rites. He had preserved a people of God on earth; in this new era of His power he devotes his divine energy to enlarging, perfecting and edifying the church."

On Pentecost Sunday, it seems an ideal opportunity to talk about the Holy Spirit but when doing so it is important to remember that we don't separate the three aspects of the Trinity too much and see them as completely separate entities. They are all expressions of the one Lord God and as such have different perspectives to offer to us as believers to help us understand who God is better and to be able to understand our relationship with him better. We probably could describe Father God and Jesus Christ his Son, but today we think about the Holy Spirit.

They are three in one and all relate together. All are equally important expressions of God Himself.

The Holy Spirit comes to empower us to preach the gospel and to reach out to others. Jesus says so in Acts 1 v 8.

"But you will receive Power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When the Spirit falls on the believers in Acts 2 that is exactly what happens. We get hung up on the evidence of "speaking in other tongues" but we miss what else was happening. What the people who were there said was ***"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"*** (2 v 11) The people who were saved after Peter's Spirit inspired speech were enabled by the preparation of the Holy Spirit using their language.

The wonder and surprise as well as the gospel message was that those speaking in other languages were Galileans widely regarded as uneducated riff raff from the country, Galilee "can anything good come from Galilee?" the region was part of the area where Solomon

gave towns to Hiram in return for Cedars of Lebanon for the Temple which he considered as bit of an insult as it was a bit of a wasteland.

Lesson:

The Holy Spirit falls on anyone regardless of any judgement we might make about their suitability for the task. Look at all the 'heroes' of the Old Testament who considered themselves unsuitable for God to use...e.g.

Moses, Gideon, David, Jeremiah

*With the Holy Spirit inside us we are invincible because of **HIM** in spite of our own abilities or lack of them. Is there anyone we think should be excluded? We might need to repent!*

So, the Holy Spirit comes upon the people and the church is born, we hear Peter's first sermon and then we have this lovely part of chapter 2 where it talks of the establishment of the church. In Acts 2 v 42 – 47 we hear of how the early church lived. Notice that they were an attractive bunch. People wanted what they had, wanted to be with them and to share in the good news together. What a picture of the church working together in unity and of thinking for and caring for each other. We would do well to really spend some time considering what it was like for those early disciples and how they were able to share the gospel with their neighbours.

In these verses, we read about the basic tenets of our faith that we still do today devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread (communion) and prayer. Four basics we should all be committed to at least every week if not daily. It appears in these early records that they lived the life DAILY (v46). We read throughout the New Testament in teaching about all of these areas, For example:

Apostles teaching: Acts 17 v 11

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

Fellowship Romans 12 v 10

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.”

Breaking of Bread (Communion) 1 Corinthians 11 v 26

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

Prayer Ephesians 6 v 18

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Challenge:

How much do we continue to put Scripture, Fellowship, Communion and Prayer First in our lives?

They lived in a way that no one among them was in need so they didn't value possessions over anything else but sold their possessions to help the poor. This was an outworking of the spirit living within them and coming upon them. Not to make them all poor but so that no one among them was poor. They shared meals and lives together (not necessarily living together though it doesn't say they set up a commune). They knew each other well enough to know each other's needs.

Challenge:

How well do we know each other? Look around you now. Think about the people you can see. What needs do they have? Could you be part of an answer to their prayers?

When the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer's life He brings about change from the inside out. He empowers us to live a life worthy of our calling and of the shed blood of Jesus. Paul calls this the Fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5 v 22 – 23

Love – for all regardless of who they are

Joy – deep joy not necessarily happiness

Peace – beyond understanding in the midst of crisis or storm

Patience – which helps us to endure under pressure

Kindness – showing love to one another

Goodness – being righteous in all our dealings

Faithfulness – doing what we say we will (following through), continuing to read Bible, pray etc....

Gentleness – not being harsh with others, still correcting but gently- harsh words to others hurt them but also grieve the Holy Spirit within them (Word for Today 4.6.17)

Self control – to avoid temptation and to continue in the faith

Lesson:

Which of these fruits do we need to allow the Holy Spirit to nurture in us?

As well as the fruit of the Holy Spirit we are also given Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12 v 4 – 11 **Turn Here Now and Read**

These are supernatural talents that serve to strengthen and 'edify' others for salvation or to grow in faith. These are available to all but used by a few and are given by the Lord to those whom He has determined to use. However, this does not mean that we should not ask to receive such a gift.

Lesson:

What gifts do you have from God? When was the last time you operated in it?

Straight after this passage in 1 Corinthians it goes on to talk about the one body made up of the many parts. At the end of that passage it reiterates that we are all different but we belong together we all have the same Spirit running through our actions. Then of course follows one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament letters read out at most weddings, the section on Love.

I cannot help but see that the passage on Love is a description of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So much of that directly relates to the passage in Galatians about the gifts of the Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit living and working through us that others get to see the Love of God. Of course that is seen through the picture of Christian marriage but it is much more than that as it is outworked in His body here on earth – the Church.

Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of the Father now. We are His feet and hands here on earth empowered by the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

Challenge:

How much do I allow the Holy Spirit to use me to show love to others around me?

Warning:

It is possible to quench the Holy Spirit or put out the Spirit's fire (1 Thessalonians 5 v 19 ***“Do not put out the Spirit's fire;”***).

It has often been said that Jesus is a gentleman and does not force his way upon us. That is God's way. We do not believe that we are “taken over” by the Holy Spirit but rather that He works within us to supernaturally help us to change or to do things for God.

We are empowered by him but we have to have a faith to be empowered first. Acts 2 v 38 – 39

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”

As part of our growing relationship with Him we learn to obey what He asks us to do. We can quench the Spirit in our lives when we are disobedient or do not do what we know we should. God never leaves us but we can stop talking to Him, stop listening to him, stop obeying him. (Fingers in ears La La La)

We might still feel able to call ourselves Christians as we do believe in God but actually, I might shock you here, but the Devil believes in God too. I think God calls us to be distinctive living lives in obedience to God.

Challenge:

Do you still hear from God or have you ignored his voice so you have nearly forgotten what He sounds like?

Conclusion

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge His work in our lives and the change He brings about. We welcome Him to come, We cannot live up to God's standards without Him. Let us think about some of the lessons and challenges and warnings I have issued today:

Lesson:

The Holy Spirit falls on anyone regardless of any judgement we might make about their suitability for the task. Is there anyone we think should be excluded? We might need to repent!

Challenge:

How much do we continue to put Scripture, Fellowship, Communion and Prayer First in our lives?

Challenge:

How well do we know each other? Look around you now. Think about the people you can see. What needs do they have? Could you be part of an answer to their prayers?

Lesson:

Which of these fruits do we need to allow the Holy Spirit to nurture in us?

Lesson:

What gifts do you have from God? When was the last time you operated in it?

Challenge:

How much do I allow the Holy Spirit to use me to show love to others around me?

Challenge:

Do you still hear from God or have you ignored his voice so you have nearly forgotten what He sounds like?

I hope that you will have questions and thoughts about what I have said today and my prayer is that you leave here today determined to find answers for yourselves like the Bereans. I pray that you will seek to see the Holy Spirit at work in your lives, to understand His role, to welcome Him to help you.

Awaken your curiosity and your awareness of him working in your life. Seek to grow with His help to be more like Jesus.

Blessing

1 Thessalonians 5 v 23-24

“May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”