

## Sermon – Pentecost Sunday 2020

Acts 2: 1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:1-13 & John 20:19-23

Sometimes on radio or TV there is a segment that starts "On this day....." and they go onto describe some key events that occurred from history. I feel like say the same thing today,

'On this day...

1. The Birth or the start of the Christian church
2. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the advocate, a helper, a comforter
3. And Jesus commissioned his disciples to 'go into all the world and preach the Gospel'

Let us start with a briefly look at the Background to Pentecost; The Feast of Pentecost which comes from Leviticus 23:16 meaning "50 days" referring to the number of days from the offering of the barley sheaf at the beginning of the Passover. On the 50th day was the Feast of Pentecost. Since the time elapsed was 7 weeks, it was called the "Feast of Weeks" It marks the completion of the barley harvest. It is also called "feast of Harvest" and the "Day of the First Fruits"

In the New Testament one of the main references to Pentecost is from Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2 *'When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.'*

The first question is: **What or who is the Holy Spirit**

Jesus tells us very clearly in John's Gospel that he would **not** leave us to struggle on alone.

*In John's Gospel Jesus said; 'You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.'*

**And then he promises the Holy Spirit**

*<sup>15</sup> "If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> 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 <sup>18</sup> in you.'*

Here we have Jesus telling us the he would send another helper. The Greek word is **Parakletos**, it has been translated as comforter, advocate or helper. It means someone who has been called in, and the Greeks used the word in a variety of ways. It might be someone who is called in to be a witness in a law court for a friend. They might be an advocate called in to plead the case for someone. They also might be an expert called to give advice or help in a difficult situation. Always this person is someone called in to help in times of trouble or need.

As Christians we sometimes talk about being unable to cope, sometimes things in life become very difficult. And this is where the Holy Spirit can step in and help, as a comforter, as an advocate. The Holy Spirit takes away our inadequacies and helps us to cope with life. The Holy Spirit is available to **all** people but is given exclusively to God's people. In John 16:7 Jesus says that it's important that he goes, if he did not go the spirit, the advocate will not come. And this must have been very hard for the disciples to understand

This then raises the question what is **The Nature of the Holy Spirit?**

There are a number of different views as to the nature of the Holy Spirit, is the Holy Spirit an **'it'** or a **'person'**

There are perhaps 3 main concepts as to the nature of the Holy Spirit:

1. Impersonal, divine energy - as a power not a person
2. Oscillates between the personal and the impersonal. Stays with the disciples, but on the other hand is a power to the disciples.
3. Is personal, projection of the person in another form. The Holy Spirit is a distinct person.

But should we think of the spirit as a distinct person? John seems to see the spirit as a distinct person - Trinitarian - 3 persons - 1 God

For me the Holy Spirit is **not** a vague, ghostly creature. The Holy Spirit is a person in every respect, except does **not** have human form like us. The Holy Spirit has a mind and a will. The Holy Spirit can love and guide, protect and help. and possesses great power and authority, for the Holy Spirit is God. All powerful, all knowing and present everywhere. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives when we open up our hearts to Jesus. He is Jesus' promised gift to every Christian. As we are told, the promise of the Spirit in John 14:16 *'I will ask the father and he will give you another advocate, to be with you for ever.'*

Then there is **The Work of the Holy Spirit;**

The Holy Spirit comes as a consequence of Jesus' death and resurrection. The problem with this is there are many references in both the Old & New Testaments to the Spirit. The day would come when God would pour out his Spirit on **all** his people. On **all** who believed. The New Testament reflects this, and the Book of Acts is a great example of the work of the spirit.

Firstly, and primarily the coming of the Holy Spirit is consequence of Jesus being glorified. In John 20:22-23 - on the day of resurrection *"Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit..."*

Secondly, in the book 'I believe in the Holy Spirit' Michael Green sees the spirit coming in three acts:

**Act one:** on from Eden, It lasts from the beginning of the world's history until the coming of Jesus Christ. It comprises the whole history of the people of Israel until the coming of the Messiah. The Law, the Prophets and the writings, combine to teach one basic lesson, there is **one God** and **no** runners up.

**Act two:** on from Bethlehem, God comes in person to make himself known to us. After many years of scrutinizing Jesus, of listening to his teachings, of watching his character, of observing his miracles, after witnessing his shameful death and experiencing that glorious resurrection, the men and women who knew him best were sure of it. This man Jesus, the Son of God had brought God into focus.

**Act three:** on from Pentecost, It began with Pentecost and has **not** ended. Nor will it until the completion of God's purposes for this world at the return of Christ. God the creator, the God who had come alongside men and women in Jesus, now has made himself available to come along side us, in the person of the Holy Spirit. In our reading from John, Jesus went on to say that the world **cannot** recognize the Spirit. There are some people who live as if there is **no** God. Jesus was saying that we can see, only when we are enabled to see.

Some examples of this are:

- An astronomer will see far more in the sky than an ordinary person.
- A botanist will see far more in a garden than someone who knows no botany.
- Someone who knows about art will see more in a painting than someone who is ignorant of art.
- Someone who understands about music will get much more out of a symphony than someone like me who knows very little about music.

Always what we see, and experience depends on what we bring to sight and to the experience. A person who has removed God from their life will never listen to him and cannot receive the Holy Spirit.

As William Barclay said in one of his books. "The Holy Spirit gate-crashes no one's heart; **he** waits to be received. So, when we think of the wonderful things which the Holy Spirit can do, surely we will set apart some time amidst the bustle and the rush of life to wait in silence for his coming."

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, with profound thanks we bring to you the prayers of our hearts. We thank you with all our being for the love you showed us in the redeeming grace of the life death and resurrection of Jesus. We also thank you for sending us the Holy Spirit, to enable us to do things that would otherwise be impossible for us to contemplate. Amen.

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