

Pentecost – 19 May 2024

Message – Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life

Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life, revealed to us through the One Spirit, open our hearts and minds, ears and eyes, to your love and grace. **Amen.**

Being English and reserved and generally viewing the world through a scientific lens, talk about the Holy Spirit, God within us, God in the world, feels uncomfortable. This discomfort extends to many people for a range of reasons.

Yet, the Holy Spirit was an essential part of Christ's ministry. And, was promised to those who follow Christ, to each of us. The Holy Spirit should unite Christians, as it did that first Pentecost. Sadly, this doesn't stop some Christians from using their experience of the Holy Spirit in quite excluding ways and questioning the experience of others.

If we look at the lives of the saints, those whom the Church through the ages has felt were most filled with the Holy Spirit, we see great diversity. So, we need to be very careful about limiting how God may work in the world. God works in all sorts of ways, from the miraculous to the apparently mundane, from acts of great wisdom to acts of simple persistence. God knows no limits!

We meet as a church week by week because we believe that God is still present, and at work, in the world. We meet because we believe that God can work in and through us to transform the world, though we are perhaps a little fuzzy on exactly how that is going to happen. Through the incarnation of Christ culminating in Pentecost, rather than

us reaching up to God, God reaches down to us. In the Holy Spirit God offers each of us a personal sign of the Grace and Love that were revealed in the Life of Christ.

Both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures are accounts of God's interaction with the world. The Holy Spirit acts in creation, as breath across the waters; bringing about God's revelation through his chosen people; acting in the lives of judges, prophets, kings, and even ordinary people.

The Holy Spirit continues that revelation through Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, all revealing God to the world. And, now, the Holy Spirit continues to reveal God through the Church and through the lives of all who try to follow God's intent for their lives.

We perhaps wonder at the descriptions of the work of the Spirit in the scriptures; they are difficult for scientific minds to accept. I have been privileged, as an ordained minister, to hear many accounts of God moving in people's lives in ways they can't explain but which were just the right thing, at just the right time. Some may be dismissed as chance but other are truly beyond explanation.

There can be a perception that the Holy Spirit takes control of our lives and even our bodies. The accounts that come from some charismatic churches give cause for concern. Some of what we see is not from God. St Paul and St John are both clear that we need to discern the origin of those things that appear to be gifts of the Spirit. Are they really of God? God is a God of power, not abusive power. We are always free to choose the degree to which we accept God into our lives. God's grace is freely given not imposed.

I occasionally pray in tongues. For some of you that is probably a long way from your own experience and church tradition. It may even come as a bit of a surprise.

For those who are unsure, praying in tongues takes two forms. In our reading from Acts, the Apostles were speaking in foreign languages; a particular shock as Galileans were not considered a bunch of yokels whom no one else could understand. And, here were people from every part of the Roman empire hearing God's praise in their own language, from these yokels. That hasn't happened to me.

There is a second, more common, form of speaking in tongues, is where, through the Holy Spirit, you pray in a language that you neither know nor understand. For all I know it could be complete gibberish. But, Paul talks of it as the language of Angels and *'sighs too deep for words'*. It feels as if one is expressing yearnings of the heart and being drawn closer to God. I first prayed in tongues when I was a teenager. I worshiped with a Pentecostal church for a while. Praying in tongues was what everyone did. I found myself doing it too, which was odd because though people had prayed for the gift for me, I had not spoken in tongues at a previous church. All in God's good time!

St Paul tells us there is a time and a place for praying in tongues and that it is not generally in public worship; As St Paul puts it, *"in church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."* (1 Cor 14.19) It is a gift that can help to build up our private prayer life. But, nothing says God gives it to everyone and drawing on it too deeply deprives other parts of our spiritual life.

There are many gifts of the Spirit, all to build up the body of Christ. One of Paul's tests of apparent gifts from the Spirit is whether they build up the body. If they do not, they are either not from God, or we are abusing them.

The term "*charismatic*" comes from the Greek charisma meaning "*a gift from God*". God can give Spiritual gifts through quiet contemplative prayer or good liturgy, which is itself usually a creative weaving together of the scriptures, the inspired Word of God, just as easily as those same gifts are given through what we refer to as charismatic worship.

I have been a part of both Charismatic and High Anglo-Catholic Churches and found Spirit filled people in all of them as well as, people whose lives seem oddly untouched by their faith in all of them. These diverse churches have more in common than we ever admit.

We should not assume how God will speak to us or work in us or our church. That followers of Christ will receive the Holy Spirit is clearly stated in the New Testament and is the experience of history. However, so is the fact that it takes many forms and with many different gifts. Our duty is to find out how the Holy Spirit wishes to work in us. It will be in a way that builds up us and our community.

Christ offers us an "*Advocate and Guide*". Baptism is an outward sign of God's gift of the Spirit to each of us. It is up to us how far we allow the Spirit to enter our lives and to find out how God wants to transform us. Any control God has over our lives is voluntary on our part. Sometimes God will speak clearly but most of the time we have to be listening carefully and choose to respond.

I encourage you all to open your hearts to the Holy Spirit of God, so that the fire of God's love may dwell in you. The choice is yours, but the Holy Spirit is a gift that God longs to give us. There are many expressions of God's grace. God may want to give you wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning spirits, tongues, or the interpretation of tongues. God definitely wants to give you the gifts of Christian service and enable you to bear the fruits of the spirit, Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.

God has special gifts for each of us, if we will open ourselves to them. I have focused today on the gifts that God gives us through the spirit there is a whole other sermon about how God is walking with us, and shaping and moulding us through the experiences of life through that same Spirit: I leave that for another day but please remember that God's constant presence with us, whether felt or feeling distant, is also a part of the work of that same Holy Spirit, God within us and in all the World.

As we are seated let us pray...

Almighty Creator, thank you for transforming the world through the work of the Holy Spirit. May we play our part in witnessing to your work in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen