

When the Spirit comes down in power

Please read **Acts 2: 1-13** and **Isaiah 64: 1-4**; then pray these words of Samuel Longfellow (1819-92);

Holy Spirit, truth divine, dawn upon this soul of mine; word of God and inward light, wake my soul, clear my sight. Amen

After the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:9), there was a 10 period in which the disciples waited in an upper room. (1:13) **Together as one**, they were constantly united through waiting and expectant prayer (1:14). As instructed, those present were waiting for the sovereign action of Christ who would “soon” pour out a promised gift (John 16:7, Acts 1:4, Acts 2:33). When the **day of Pentecost** arrived – their waiting was “suddenly” (2:1) over. In the early morning, “out of the blue”, something or rather **Someone** supernatural, came down upon them, powerfully and dramatically.

Allow me to use the language of **Isaiah 64** to explain to you what occurred sometime before 9am that morning. Firstly, something happened in heaven before it came upon the earth with power. The heavens were ripped open, rent apart; then the Holy Spirit “came down” in awesome power and great profusion. God the Holy Spirit – sent by the God the Son, “came down” into a particular room and rested **upon** and flowed **within** the disciples. They were all “filled” with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. (2:4) Not surprisingly they were shaken and amazed by what they **heard** and **saw** and **experienced**. This was the glorious, long promised and anticipated coming and visitation of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit was not visiting – He was taking up permanent residence in the hearts and lives of chosen, waiting disciples. The **era of the Spirit** and the Spirit’s power had begun (Acts 2:16-17). History moved into the **last days**. The mission to all nations (2:5 & 1:8) was to be immediately launched with the arrival of the Spirit of God and his enabling and accompanying power.

Try thinking of it this way. Jesus, now ascended and exalted sends down the Spirit in power. At his own baptism three years earlier, the heavens had been opened up by the Father (Luke 3:21), and the Spirit was sent down upon his *own* beloved Son. The Spirit descended upon the Son of God in bodily form “like a dove”. (Luke 3:22). **Now**, the same heavens are torn apart again and the Spirit comes “like wind and fire” upon disciples of Jesus (Acts 2:2-3). When the Spirit fell upon Jesus, the Father declared Jesus to be his own beloved Son. Now the disciples, who are the sons and daughters of God (Acts 2:17) receive the promised Spirit who is generously poured out by the highly exalted Son. (Acts 2:33) Just as Jesus was *filled with the Spirit for his mission* (Luke 4:1, 14 & 18), **so now** the disciples are filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit *for the evangelistic mission* Christ has given them. (1:8).

This is clearly the **baptism with the Spirit and fire** (1:5) prophesied by John the Baptist (Luke 3:16) and now delivered by Jesus the Baptist! Jesus is the Lord who baptises his people with the Spirit and fire. Scripture teaches *Jesus is God with us*, God Incarnate, God in flesh, Immanuel. Scripture also teaches the *Holy Spirit is God upon and in us*. God has *come down* to live *within* his people *and* the new-born Church - which will start growing and rising through the Spirit’s power (Acts 2:41 & 47).

We move now to consider the “sights” and “sounds” of that unique Pentecostal Day – and think about their relevance to us who serve Christ Jesus in these *last days*. The disciples suddenly *heard* something **like** the sound of a mighty rushing wind. It was like a whirlwind and it “*filled the whole house where they were sitting.*” What we have here, in the first instance, is the coming down and arrival of the wind or breath of God. And the wind comes with power like a tornado and fills the room. Jesus had gently “breathed” the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (John 20:22), just weeks earlier, **now** the breath of God, emanating from the Son in heaven, comes upon them with much greater power and in much greater measure.

It is really important to understand that “breath” in the Old Testament is invariably linked to **life**. The Spirit is the author of *life and imparts life to all*. This seminal truth found in Genesis leaps out at us;

God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. (Gen 2:7)

Other parts of Scripture reaffirm this idea (Psalm 104: 29-30) that the Spirit gives physical life and being to all God’s creatures and creation. The famous passage in Ezekiel 37 about the valley of very dry bones strongly emphasises – *“I will put my breath in you and you will come to life”*. Ezekiel is directed to prophesy to the breath (37:9) - *“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army. (37:10)*

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit came as powerful Wind/Breath to release and establish **SPIRITUAL** life, not physical life. What life is this? **The life of Jesus and the life of His Kingdom. The life and power of the Kingdom of God within a new covenant** – The Spirit came in power to make **Jesus and his Kingdom A LIVING REALITY and EXPERIENCE in our hearts and lives.**

Did you know that the Holy Spirit makes us **alive to Jesus, alive to God’s reality, and alive to the Kingdom’s reality / existence and dynamic nature?** Do you remember the famous conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus? Here are the words the Lord Jesus from that conversation;

*“I tell you THE TRUTH, no one can **see** the Kingdom of God unless is born again”.*

*“I tell you THE TRUTH, no one can **enter** the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and **the Spirit**. **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit**. You should not be surprised at my saying “You must be born again”. **The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.**” (John 3:3-8)*

The Spirit comes and enters us to bring new life, new birth, new eyes of understanding “to see” the reality and truth of the Kingdom of God; and new power to “enter” into it. We receive washing, rebirth and renewal through the generous pouring out of the Holy Spirit by the exalted Jesus. (Titus 3:6)

Pentecost witnessed the descent of Spirit of life, the Breath of life, to equip the disciples to preach and demonstrate through works of power – the reality and availability of the Kingdom of God to all who repent and put their faith in Jesus. Kingdom life begins now! The Church is God’s instrument to share that life and power. New life comes through the Spirit to me and to you, and to all who embrace the good news of the Kingdom. Don’t forget Jesus had spent much time after he had been raised to life teaching the disciples about the **Kingdom of God** and the **Spirit of God**. (Acts 1: 3 & 5)

Has your life been opened up to the reality of the living and reigning Jesus and his kingdom? Have your eyes been opened to see the Kingdom and enjoy its life which is eternal? Paul writes in Romans: “For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, joy and peace **in the Holy Spirit**.” (Romans 14:17) As well as the Kingdom not being *a matter of food and drink*, it is also *not a matter of talk, of useless, idle and futile talk, but of power*. (1 Corinthians 4:20)

The Kingdom comes is power through the working of the Spirit! (Matthew 12:28) Do you feel that the Church today lacks life and power? Be honest. This is a key question that must be faced square on! Is the Church alive with *the Spirit’s life and power? Is the Church alive or dying – struggling to breathe? What about our Church?* How much genuine Kingdom life and power do we experience and exhibit? If you are at all concerned about the powerless and lifeless state of Christianity in the UK today – then I suggest you prioritise seeking a new and fresh outpouring of the Spirit’s power and life for yourself and for Christchurch! This is our greatest need!

“Breathe on me breath of God – fill me with life anew” (Edwin Hatch) – can be a personal plea of prayer.

“O breathe of life come sweeping through us, revive your Church with life and power” (Elizabeth Ann Porter Head) – can be a relevant heartfelt cry for the Church today.

The disciples *heard* the arrival and entrance of the wind (life - breath and power of the Spirit), but they also *saw* something – that **looked like tongues of fire coming to rest ON EACH OF THEM!** There was fire as well as wind. Fire is often associated with the coming down of God in the awesome power of his holiness. It was part of Isaiah’s understanding of the coming down of God in his prayer;

As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil. Come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you. (Isaiah 64:2)

The Psalms refer to “fire going out before God”. (Psalm 97:3) Moses encountered the Lord through the *burning bush*. He had to remove his shoes because he was on *holy ground*. (Exodus 3:20) Mount Sinai at the giving of the law and covenant were associated with God’s fiery coming and glory (Exodus 19:18 & 24:17) God descended on that holy mountain in fire! There was the pillar of fire to guide and protect the Israelites! Elijah’s sacrifice was consumed and totally burned up as fire fell from heaven in response to his cry to God and in the sight of the many prophets of Baal (1Kings 18:38). In Hebrews, the Jewish Christians in danger of backsliding are warned about the need to worship God with reverence and awe for “God is a consuming fire.” John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:16). It is hardly surprising then that on the day of Pentecost, when God the Holy Spirit came down – there were what appeared to be *tongues of fire!*

If mighty Wind/Breath symbolised the coming of power and life to the disciples, then fire symbolises the coming of holiness and fine-tuning. Fire in the Old testament is so often associated with consuming, purging, and refining. The **Holy** Spirit is called “**Holy**” for a very good reason. He brings holy fire and refining power and love. Born at Pentecost, the chief characteristic of the Church, which is the **temple of Holy Spirit** (Ephesians 2:21-22), was to be holiness. Holiness comes even before love – because God’s love is a holy and pure love, not like the so often tainted love of the world. The disciples were being “separated” (as the tongues of fire had been) for God and his holy purposes.

Are you passionate for personal holiness? We are called to be part of that holy temple which is the Church, and in fact our personal **bodies** are also temples of the Holy Spirit and must be kept clean (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). Do you desire to grow in the holiness of Christ and of the Spirit? Do you seek to live a live holy life for God’s glory? Are you open to the refining and purging work of the Spirit? In any genuine renewal movement, or in any real revival of Christian faith – you will always see a re-emergence of passion and hunger for holiness. Desire for holiness reappears in the Church and captures the hearts of newly awakened and quickened Christians. Do we understand that our God is a consuming fire, and that without holiness no one will see the Lord? (Hebrews 12:14) He who ascends the hill of the Lord must have clean hands and a pure heart. (Psalm 24:3-4). We are called to be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to the Lord – ready to do his perfect and pleasing will – in a world which we must not be morally conformed to, or compromised by. (Romans 12:1ff)

The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost to bring life, power and refining fire to his people. The Holy Spirit personally **fills** EACH DISCIPLE. Just as *each* disciple has a tongue of fire resting upon their heads (v4), so *each* is filled with the Spirit. When we consider *being filled with the Spirit* – I feel prompted to bring in the symbolism of water – living water. Just as the Spirit is like “breath” and “fire” – so He is often likened to refreshing and life-giving water. One of the most important references to Pentecost in the bible is in John 7:37-39;

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow FROM WITHIN HIM. By this he meant THE SPIRIT, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

The Spirit would bring refreshing, thirst quenching peace and overflowing joy. The Spirit would bring life in all its fullness. His inner living presence and power would bubble up into new life, freedom, joy and love. Nothing compares to life and joy in the Spirit! We can see why Paul encourages Christians to be filled (continually) with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18 ff). When the evangelist D L Moody was asked about whether he was filled with the Spirit, his reply was; ***“Yes, but I leak...”*** Therefore, the Spirit must be sought continually, daily, for spiritual refreshment, renewal and power. The disciples who were filled at Pentecost were seeking to be re-filled a short time later (Acts 4:31). Can I encourage you to seek with daily consistency “the filling of the Spirit” so that you might be empowered for living the life of the Kingdom of God? ***“Spirit of the living God – fall afresh on me”*** – should be part of our daily prayers and petitions.

The disciples were so filled with the Holy Spirit that they OVERFLOWED! The overflow was glorious praise directed toward God. (2:11) But the praise came in the form of the gifts of tongues. The disciples we are told, were ***“each enabled by the Spirit”*** (v 4) to speak out the wonders of God in a language that they had not learned, but one that was recognised by the cosmopolitan crowds of onlookers. They were supernaturally gifted to do this. Today I do not want to spend time going into detail about the spiritual gift of tongues which is also mentioned in other parts of the New Testament and in Acts itself (10:46 & 19:6). The point that I want to make now – is that the fullness of the Spirit always brings forth streams of praise and worship as it did here. Every revival within Church history is accompanied with huge bursts of worship, praise, hymn writing and singing. In the 18th century we only have to think about the prolific Spirit-filled writing of Charles Wesley and so many others; ***“O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise...”*** came hot of the press in a long season of great revival!

When the Spirit comes in great measure upon his people to revive and renew, the cork in the bottle of praise shoots out and the sparkling wine of the Kingdom overflows! It is not surprising that hundreds of songs have come forth as a result of the 20th century charismatic renewal in Churches around the world. The Spirit fires up the worship and praises of the people of God! The crowd’s reaction to hearing their own native languages pouring from the lips of the disciples in praise to God is interesting and I will say much more about it next week. We are told by Luke that the crowds were ***bewildered*** and ***perplexed***, but they were also ***utterly amazed*** and left wondering. They too sensed something extraordinary was happening but they were left puzzled, which is where Peter’s great explanatory sermon comes in. That is for next week.

I close by once again **urging you to ask, seek and knock for more of the Holy Spirit** (Luke 11: 9-13) in your own life and in the life and witness of our Church. We need to feel the breath of God and be challenged by the fire of God more than ever! We need to be refreshed and revitalised through being filled with the living water of the Spirit. Our praises will then rise and burst out upon a watching and curious world. I began with Isaiah 64 – Read those words of the prophets cry once again, and then pray the words from a hymn writer of the 18th century Evangelical Revival – William Cowper (1731-1800) which are based on the hopes of Isaiah’s prayer: **Lord we are few, but Thou art near, nor short Thine arm, nor deaf Thine ear; O rend the heavens, come quickly down, and make a thousand hearts Thine own! AMEN**