

Too much wine?

Please read: Acts 2 v 1-21 and then pray;

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me today, and enable me to see and rejoice in the wonders of Jesus' grace, power and truth. Open my heart to receive the living water in all the fullness of the Spirit; encourage me through the Word of God which You inspired and which You anoint. Amen

To say that **Acts 2**, which describes the first day in the life of the new-born Church, is one of the most momentous chapters in the bible, would not be an over-statement of fact. It is a chapter that describes *what actually happened* on that Pentecost morning, *what that means for the world and its history*, and how that first day culminated with 3000 baptisms! Let there be life and there was life!

Last week we considered what happened to the disciples in that upper room. As the heavens opened, **God the Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven by God the Son**, and disciples were filled to overflowing with the **presence** and **power** of the **Holy Spirit**. (Acts 2:4, John 7:38-39) They received the promised *baptism with the Holy Spirit* (1:5, 8). It was a *powerful experience* for each one of them as the Spirit came upon them like **wind and fire** and flowed within them like **living water**. Last week we left this fascinating scene with the disciples praising God and declaring His wonderful works through the supernatural gift of tongues – which both utterly amazed and perplexed the onlookers, who heard these ordinary Galilean northerners speaking in a whole variety of languages which they could not possibly have learned. THEN we get the first of **two** vital questions recorded for us in this chapter; the two questions act as bookends to this historic sermon

What does this mean? (v12)

Just before we look at **the meaning of Pentecost** and the outpouring of the Spirit, there are two issues that need to be faced. The first is this. In the light of Pentecost and the coming down of the promised gift of the Spirit – we must surely be able to see that Christianity is **experiential!** The Spirit brings to us a real and tangible experience of the Living God. Christianity (personally knowing and experiencing the living and reigning Christ) is **not** a dry intellectual religious belief system to which is added some formal, cold and lifeless liturgy. Nothing could be further from the truth! Christianity, life in the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God, is fundamentally **an experience of and encounter with** the Living God – and it is experienced through the gift and living presence of the Spirit in our hearts and lives! Our Christian faith and life involve us **actually experiencing** amongst other things;

- Streams of living water flowing within us (John 7:38-39)
- Spiritual empowerment (Acts 1:8, Ezekiel 37:26-27)
- The love of God being “poured” or “shed abroad” in *our hearts*. (Romans 5:5)
- The Spirit whispering to *our spirits* that **we are** God’s beloved children. (Romans 8: 15-16)
- An inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8)
- A peace that passes all understanding, which is not of this world. (Philippians 4:7, John 14:27)

If Pentecost is about the Almighty God of love and power filling us by His Spirit – surely that must involve a real, living, and vital experience and relationship. Such a living experience and relationship with God will engage, animate and raise our affections and emotions. We will know love, joy, peace (Galatians 5:22), power, hope, victory and life in all its fullness in Jesus – as a living experience.

Sadly, and regretfully, the experiential side of the Christian faith has been tragically played down and discouraged within many of the traditional denominations to which we belong. Consequently, so many people within our Churches are left with a rather dull, drab, lifeless, powerless and even joyless form of Christianity, a pale shadow of what Christianity is or can be. Many people in our Churches I fear,

who are genuinely hungry for a living and vital experience of God's love and power, have been spiritually ripped off and short-changed. All that has been left, to use the apostle Paul's words, is "*a form of godliness without any real power.*" (2 Timothy 3:5) We wonder why there is a dearth of life and power, spiritual vitality and zest within in our churches, and why most traditional denominations in the Western world are in terminal decline. Churches have neglected, even suppressed the life, power and presence of the Spirit. The Spirit has been quenched and his fire put out! (1 Thess 5:19)

Look at it another way. When I think of Pentecost, I am alerted to a consideration of **Pentecostalism**. The Churches of our world today that come under the "umbrella" of Pentecostalism are growing and thriving in the blessing of the Spirit. There is no decline here! At the beginning of 1900 – there were no Pentecostal Churches. This branch of Christianity did not exist. Then – all of a sudden (Acts 2:2) - they burst on to the scene, particularly after the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. **Today** – just *120 years* later – there are at least **280 million** Christians in Pentecostal type Churches around the world. Their growth has been phenomenal and unprecedented. In 1980, the Pentecostal movement made up just 6% of world Christianity. Today in 2020, they make up 25% of world Christianity – and within the next 20-30 years they will easily make up 50%.

The Holy Spirit honours and blesses them, and it is especially interesting that this Church's explosion of growth is amongst various poor communities in our world – in many parts of Africa, Latin America and South East Asia. The gospel of Jesus is good news to the poor (Luke 4:18) – and the poor, unencumbered by materialism, become the "rich in faith." (James 2:5). Rich faith sees many miracles of conversion, healing and deliverance. There is no doubt that a major part of their growth success is due to the fact that they place a strong emphasis on the power and presence of the Spirit, and on knowing and enjoying a vital and ongoing living relationship with Jesus Christ.

We **need** to *move toward* a much more open and Spirit-filled form of Christianity if we are to ever experience growth. We can learn a lot from Pentecostalism! Spiritually thirsty people everywhere are crying out for a living experience and encounter with God – and this is possible through the fire and living water of the Spirit. ***Is this what we offer people at Christchurch?*** This is also of crucial importance if we are to truly participate in the mission of Christ (1:8) *to the ends of the earth*. **This mission can only be accomplished** in the power of the Holy Spirit. That was and remains the crystal-clear teaching of Jesus. (Acts 1:5, 8). No Holy Spirit power or presence = no growth in the Kingdom. Paul hit the right note, as he always does when visiting and then writing to the Thessalonians; (1 Thessalonians 1: 4-5)

*For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, **but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.***

The gospel is ***the power of God*** for the salvation of all who believe. (Romans 1:16) The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but **of power**. (1 Corinthians 4:20) When Paul took the gospel to Corinth one of the toughest places to evangelise in his day, he explained that "*my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a **demonstration of the Spirit's power**, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, **but on God's power.***" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). When will the dying and fading Churches in the UK finally understand that we must welcome and seek the Holy Spirit's presence and power? The Church can only truly grow *in and with the power of the Holy Spirit*.

A *second* detail that we must notice in our text is the reaction of the crowds in Jerusalem to the disciples who spoke out the wonders of God in *tongues*. The pouring out of the life of the Spirit always raises the eyebrows of onlookers – because there is a *supernatural and powerful* element to it. The crowds who were residents of Jerusalem, and representatives of the whole Jewish *diaspora* around the Mediterranean world and N Africa, looked on with both *bewilderment and perplexity* but also

amazement and wonder. They need an explanation and Peter will give them one, but a few have quickly concluded that the answer to the spectacle lies in the *drinking of too much wine.* The work of the Holy Spirit and the whole dynamic and presence of the Kingdom of God will never be understood by hardened unbelievers. Jesus warned his disciples that “the world cannot accept him (the Holy Spirit) because it neither sees him or knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17) The apostle Paul once again hits the nail on the head when he writes;

*“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may **understand what God has freely given us.** This is what we speak not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, **expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.** The man **without the Spirit DOES NOT ACCEPT THE THINGS THAT COME FROM THE SPIRIT OF GOD,** for they are **FOOLISHNESS TO HIM, and he CANNOT UNDERSTAND THEM, because they are SPIRITUALLY DISCERNED.**”*
(1 Corinthians 2: 12-14)

Unbelievers will always scratch their heads in perplexity and bewilderment at the presence and work of the Spirit. One needs to be born anew to either see, enter or understand the things of the Kingdom of God. There needs to be spiritual rebirth, enlightenment and awakening before one can appreciate what is truly happening as God manifests His awesome presence and displays His wonders. The work of the Spirit will often be mocked, as it was here on the day of Pentecost, and as it has been during every period of revival and renewal. Unbelievers cannot grasp that the Spirit of God is at work and so resort to cynically offering explanations of “madness”, “wildfire”, “over-enthusiasm”, “spiritual emotionalism”, “over-the top wayward Christianity”. And tragically, the strongest criticisms and misunderstanding often come from people in the Church – religious institutional leaders – people who cannot accept or understand the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. So, we need a strong apostolic voice to tell us the real meaning of what is happening!

Peter stands up to provide it! Let us note a few things about the spokesman before we look at his explanation. Peter is the main spokesperson in the early Church as can be seen from this and his previous role with regards to Judas’s replacement (Acts 1:15). But **the eleven** (14) are right there *with him.* This is a group showing solidarity. Peter will speak respectfully and formally (14), but he will speak with boldness, clarity, directness, seriousness, tremendous biblical insight, and as one who is now *full of the Holy Spirit and clothed with power.* If you ever want a good example of no-nonsense preaching look at this message, which Luke provides in a summarised form. **Peter** begins by *ruling out* the ridiculous notion of drunkenness. That is not to say that these disciples are not *under the influence of the Spirit* – but it is not the new or sweetened wine referred to by the mockers and scoffers!

Peter gets straight to the point and answers the question, “*What does this mean?*” So, what is the meaning of Pentecost? What has happened and how do we understand it? **Peter** immediately dives into the Old Testament and a prophecy of Joel for the answer. It is very important for us to understand that Jesus had spent much time after his resurrection teaching the disciples about Old Testament revelation and how they were to understand and interpret it – so that they could preach it! (Luke 24: 44-46) Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would *lead the disciples into all truth.* (John 16: 12-15)

Peter explains that what the large crowds have just *seen and heard* is the actual fulfilment of a specific prophecy from Joel. They are witnessing the fulfilment of God’s prophetic word and promises. **Peter** outlines **4** great truths through sharing this quotation from Joel, and their meaning is **so very important for us,** for our world, and for its future salvation and judgement. **Firstly,** Peter highlights that what has just been witnessed is the **POURING OUT** of the Spirit on all flesh. The first thing to be grasped is the **historic scale** of the outpouring. The Greek term used for “pouring out” implies a vast outpouring that can be compared “to the tumultuous precipitation of a thunderstorm.” (Bruce Milne) This is a massive **DOWNPOUR** of the Holy Spirit and the Scripture conveys the sense of almost

uncontrolled abundance and overwhelming fullness. Once when I was descending from Wherside Peak in the Yorkshire Dales, suddenly the clouds grew very dark and there was an almighty downpour of rain. Everyone coming off that Peak that day was absolutely drenched and soaked to the skin. There was no escape. The downpour was tremendous and unrelenting for several hours, and water began gushing down the side of the peak in huge quantities. **Peter** explains that this is what happened in a spiritual sense that morning. There was a downpouring, a tropical storm of the Spirit of historic proportions. The Spirit was unleashed “as the prophet said it would be”. **The promised era of the Spirit had now begun – in earnest! This meant seismic changes including;**

- Movement into “**the last days**”. (17) This, biblically speaking, is the period of time between the first and second comings of Christ. It is the period when the gospel must be taken to *the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8, Matthew 24:14) before Christ returns and his Kingdom is fully and finally consummated. (1.11) The last days will be challenging for God’s people. (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 2 Peter 3: 3-9) and there will be much social and political upheaval and persecution.
- Movement into the age of the “**new covenant**”, which was instituted through Jesus’s death and the shedding of his blood, and which brought about for the people of God a relationship (a covenant) with God marked by the gift of the Spirit, a new heart, a new nature, a new obedience in the Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27) and a personal relationship with the Lord with complete forgiveness for sins (Jeremiah 31: 31-34)

Secondly, the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy would mean that the Spirit’s outpouring would be for *all God’s people*. In the past, the Spirit had only come upon certain prophets, priests and kings. The coming down of the Spirit had been highly selective and occasional. Now the scale and inclusive breadth of the giving of the Spirit would know no limits. It would include *all* God’s people – men and women, slave and free, rich and poor, young and old. The gift of the Spirit would be the distinguishing mark of every Christian, and each would also receive gifts from the Spirit to enable them to contribute to the building up of the Church and the extension of God’s kingdom around the globe. **We have all been given the gift of the Spirit** as the *first fruits* (Romans 8:23) of this amazing Pentecostal era. **We have all been given gifts of various kinds** – some even carrying a distinctly supernatural element, others not supernatural but equally important for the building up of the Church and the mission of Christ. *All will prophesy* in the sense of joining in the proclamation of God’s word to the world through their words of life and deeds of love. The Spirit, his gifts and fruit are *for every child of God*.

Thirdly, Peter *warns* that we are now in the time (last days) when there will be markers/signs of God’s coming judgement upon the world – hence the apocalyptic language of **verses 19-20**. This would include significant upheavals upon the earth, but also cosmic disturbances as we move into the final stages of *the last days* and the world is readied for the return of Christ and his eternal kingdom (Matthew 24: 4-14, 29-31). In Joel’s day, judgement came in the form of a plague of locusts, a harbinger of the future world-wide judgement to come. So, **Peter’s message and ours is very urgent!**

Which leads to the **fourth and final** point rising out of Joel’s prophecy, that this is now the time for people to **call upon the name of the Lord (Jesus) for salvation**. (v21) Today is the day of salvation. Now is the time, the era, the age of the good news of the Kingdom, and the window of opportunity to hear it, accept it, and be saved through it. Now is the time to call of the name of the risen Saviour of all, the Lord who reigns and will soon return. Now is the time to repent, to turn from sin and toward God, to be baptised, and receive for yourself *forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit*. (Acts 2:38-39). The Church is now charged to take the gospel of God’s kingdom, in the power of the Spirit, with the gifts of the Spirit, to the ends of the earth before Christ returns in glory to save and to judge. What a challenge lies before us – a challenge grasped by Peter and the others – and now we have the baton in our hands. We are running the race now. We are the witnesses of the resurrection today! **Amen**