

Acts 2: 1-21 Pentecost

At the start of Acts, we learn that Jesus has ascended into heaven and has left instructions with his friends to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon them, giving them power to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Jesus doesn't tell them to get straight on with the job in their own strength,
but rather he tells them that they must wait,
until the Spirit is upon them.

And this is what they do.....they gather together, about 120 people, and we're told,
they wait and they pray.

And, just as promised, on the 50th day, the Holy Spirit comes.

The language that Luke uses is like that of a heavy, tropical rainstorm.

I don't know how many of you have experienced heavy, tropical rainstorms....

Whilst the team were visiting in Ghana this month,
we experienced a couple of rainstorms....

one minute the weather is hot and humid, and then suddenly,
almost from nowhere, the wind picks up, a black cloud rolls overhead,
and then the rain falls....
not rain like we have here....
but massive droplets of water...
and in no time at all a dirty, dusty road is awash with water,
water pouring everywhere,
channelling new streams, where moments before the land was parched.

And Luke tells us that suddenly a mighty wind blows among them and a great noise fills the building.

Then there appears to be visible flames of fire which rest on each of them and then all are filled with the Spirit and began to speak in new languages as the Spirit enables them.

These phenomena are supernatural and extra-ordinary.

We're told that a crowd gather and are bewildered by what they see taking place.

They are baffled for they can all hear their own native language being spoken.

All are amazed and perplexed and say to one another what does this mean?

Some joke and say that these Christians must be drunk?

But Peter very clearly refutes this allegation and makes clear to all,
that what they see happening, what they hear happening,
is what has been promised not just by Jesus, but long ago,
many hundreds of years early through the prophets,
and Peter quotes Joel.

You see for a long time; God's people had looked forward to a time when the Spirit would
be poured out on all people.

The Spirit would no longer be for a few, no longer just for prophets, kings, priests and
righteous men and women, but in a sudden burst of divine energy, released for all.

Joel's prophecy makes clear that the Spirit is for old and young,
men and women, for everyone.

And when the Spirit comes, God's kingdom shall come close for all,
with people experiencing dreams and visions and prophetic insight.

Peter tells the gathered crowd that what they're witnessing is the start of this time,
a time when God's Spirit is poured out
for ordinary, everyday people.

And if we were to follow this story a bit further than we did in our
reading today....
we learn that the Holy Spirit brings transformation and change.

Firstly, we learn that when the gathered crowd hear what Peter says;
when they hear his testimony about Jesus's death and resurrection,
they become convinced that it is real and so repent of their wrong doing and
about 3,000 people trust in Jesus.

And if we were to go a bit further we learn that the coming of the Spirit had a massive
effect on the early Christians and their community life together....

- they became a learning church, regularly reading scriptures together,
- they became a loving and generous church, sharing their resources with one another,
- they became a church who were deeply committed to worship, to praising God and praying

- and they became a church, whose priority was to reach out to others, telling them about Jesus
- and as a result, many, many people came to believe.

Now some have argued that the Holy Spirit came just once at Pentecost, but I would want to refute that idea...

Peter when first speaking to the crowd makes clear that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a gift and it is for all who believe in Jesus, it is a promise not just for them then, but for all who come after... Peter talks of their children, and all who are far off.

And as we look at the rest of Acts, time and time again (4:31, 10:44-48, 19:1-6) we see the Holy Spirit being poured out on men and women, in new fresh ways, empowering them and enabling them, giving them the words to say, a boldness, a love for others, a desire, a motivation to keep reaching out to others.

Our account from Acts 2 is clearly an inauguration, the beginning of something new, something fresh and powerful.

Pentecost brought to the early Christians then, and to us today, the person of the Holy Spirit.

And if we think about the apostle Paul for a moment.

Paul has a dramatic encounter and then is filled with the Holy Spirit.

And years later as Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus, he encourages them to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word that Paul uses for 'be filled' is in the present continuous tense—it means 'Go on being filled, over and over again.'

So, both the testimony of Acts, and of Paul himself, show us that being filled with the Holy Spirit isn't a one off, it's an on-going experience.

At home our gas boiler has a small pilot light there, which is on all the time..... but when work is needed, when we want hot water, or we nudge the thermostat up for heat, the boiler suddenly goes bggghhhh.....

and so it is with us as Christians.

We all have God's presence in us....a pilot light....
but in order to experience power and to get the job done,
we need the Holy Spirit to fill us a new,
to make us go bggghhhh....

so that we're firing on all cylinders, if you don't mind me mixing the metaphors!

However, I wonder whether at times, we live our lives with just the pilot light on.....

Let me explain more.....

I wonder whether at times we have simply become too comfortable, too secure,
we're happy with the status quo....
we have what we need materially, food, drink, shelter, clothing,
in fact, many of us have way beyond what we need,

and I wonder if this level of contentment effects our spiritual hunger also....

I wonder whether we really thirst and hunger for more of God in our lives....

I wonder whether we have become too used to depending on our own resources instead of
depending on God?

Whether we have become too comfortable....

I wonder whether as Christians it is too easy for us to just tick along.
To read our bibles every now and then, to pray when we can....

whether it's too easy for us to come along to church and to do the same, to tick along,
After all we know what to expect,
it's not too demanding,
we can come and go as we want,
we can get a bit involved if we want,
but nothing much ever happens.....

I wonder how often do we encounter God in a deep way?

Is our faith centred in an active relationship with God?

How often do we leave church and feel compelled, motivated, and have an
urgency to share our faith?

How often do we experience the Holy Spirit filling us a new?

Yesterday, Bishop Michael delivered a fiery, passionate, blazer of a sermon at Harry and Meghan's wedding... (I really recommend either watching it, or reading the text online)

Bishop Michael talked about the power of love... He reminded us that we “were made by a power of love, and our lives were meant – and are meant – to be lived in that love. That’s why we are here.”

And I agree – and that is what the Holy Spirit brings to our lives...

The Spirit brings unconditional love - God’s love - that we in turn may love God with all our hearts, and minds, strength and soul, and that we might love each other.

And the Spirit brings power. Real power. Power to change the world.

*The Bishop’s sermon was heard by about a sixth of the world’s population...
and judging by comments on Facebook and in the press,
he certainly shook things up a bit and got people thinking!*

I wonder whether it’s time for a shake-up,
a time to experience the power and energy of the Holy Spirit??

Outside these walls this morning, there are hundreds, thousands of people here in Denmead who have never heard the good news of Jesus.....

many may know the Christmas story, or a bit of what Easter is about,
some might know the odd bit from the Bible,
but many will have never encountered Jesus.

Many will have little idea about what the church/Christians are really all about.....

People today, need to hear the truth of God’s word,
they want to belong and find a home (what we call fellowship)
they want worship that is living and real,
they need encounter, relationship with a living God.

As a church, more than ever, we need to break out,
just like those early Christians did,
it is time for us to engage with people,
it is time for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit,
that we might be empowered, enabled and passionate about sharing the love of God with
our neighbourhood.

There is power in Love.....

Like the early Christians it is time for us to change our practices,
to let go of our baggage,
to adapt our traditions and reach out to a culture,
to a society that is rapidly changing and becoming less and less Christian.

Now you may not agree with all my analysis this morning of where we are at.....

I'm not denying that in many ways we are well connected with our community,
we do see many signs of life and growth.....
we do see amazing things happen.

I'm not saying that what we do is wrong.....far from it.....

But when I consider the book of Acts there seems to be a normative pattern,

**A pattern in which God's Holy Spirit is crucial in filling the life of believers,
changing them, guiding them, leading them
and this motivates, energises, compels them to reach out,
to speak out, to show God's love and actually see in very real ways the ongoing
work of Jesus.**

These Christians do not stay still, they push forwards.

I am convinced that there is much more than we experience and know right now....

there is a greater depth,

a greater encounter,

a greater need to know God's love and truth in our lives and in the lives
of those we love.

a greater witness,

a greater mission,

a greater urgency to see God's kingdom of peace and justice and mercy here,
in Denmead.

We are called, every single one of us,
whatever our age, whatever our background,
whether we're male or female,
to be central characters in God's work of redemption and salvation.

We each have a crucial part to play.

And so just like those early Christians we need the Holy Spirit, Jesus' life in us.

**And so, for us this morning, we don't have to sit and wait as the early Christians did,
waiting for something new to happen, waiting for a promise.**

**We are the children, those far off, that Peter talks of, we are those to whom the Spirit has
been given and is continually given.**

The promise that Jesus made to these early Christians is the same for us today....

Jesus wants us to know and experience His Spirit and work in our lives.....

that we might be his witnesses,
that we might love, sacrificially, unconditionally

that we would know power, passion, adventure
which compels us to move forwards,
to make the next step,
to keep pushing onwards.

We simply just need to come and askthe Holy Spirit is for each of us....

We need to say Jesus' come and have your way among us, fill us anew with your Spirit.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me....

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.