

**Sunday 20 May 2018: Pentecost**

**St Andrew's Church, Cobham, 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.**

**Acts 2.1-21; Romans 8.22-27; John 15.26-27, 4b-15**

## **The Holy Spirit**

---

Today, as you know, is Pentecost, when we celebrate that day about two thousand years ago, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the first Christians.

But just who is the Holy Spirit and what does it do? And more importantly, how should we respond to what we know about the Spirit

This morning I will try and answer those questions as best I can in the short time available – a crash course in the Holy Spirit.

So let's start by asking: *just who is the Holy Spirit?*

People often think of the Spirit as a sort of blind supernatural force. But in fact, the Spirit is a *person*, just as God the Father and God the Son are persons, one of the three persons that make up our one God. The Spirit knows and loves us, just as the Father and the Son do.

I've heard the Holy Spirit described as the love that exists between the God the Father and God the Son, and that's a wonderful idea – the love between Father and Son is so real and alive it is actually in the nature of a person.

The very first words of the Bible in Genesis tell us that the Spirit was present at the moment of creation, moving over the waters in the darkness. And he has been acting in the world since then, fulfilling God's plans and bringing his love and power.

In the Old Testament God sent the Spirit to empower particular people at particular times to achieve particular tasks. People such as Gideon, Samson, David and the prophet Isaiah.

But we see something else in the Old Testament – the promise that one day the Holy Spirit would be poured out in a new way. Instead of just being given to particular people at particular times, the Spirit would be poured out on all God's people.

Speaking of the final days, God says through the prophet Joel:

*'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.'* (Joel 2.28)

God has kept his promise.

He kept it through the birth, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. By dying on a cross for us, Jesus made it possible for the Holy Spirit to come in all his power.

It happened at Pentecost, as Jesus' followers waited in great anticipation, like a champagne cork exploding.

When bystanders witness the outpouring of fire and tongues, they are amazed and sceptical but Peter explains that this is exactly what Joel had prophesied – God has poured out his Spirit on all his people (Acts 2.16). And then Peter goes on to say something wonderful: this Spirit, with all its power, is available to everyone.

*'Repent and be baptized (he said), every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'* (Acts 2.38-39)

Every single person who repents and turns to Jesus will receive the Holy Spirit. If you have put your faith in Jesus and been baptized in his name, then make no mistake, the Holy Spirit is in you.

Now clearly, the Holy Spirit comes to us not just for fun but for a good reason. So we need to ask: what exactly does the Holy Spirit do?

One of the Greek words the New Testament writers used to describe the Holy Spirit is *parakletos*, and it means 'the one who comes alongside'. It is sometimes translated as the advocate, or encourager, or comforter, or helper.

When a small ship got into trouble on the Mediterranean, a big ship would sail out to help the struggling ship into the harbour, and this big ship was called the *parakletos*. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us – he comes alongside to help us.

And as our guide and comforter, the Spirit does some wonderful things in our lives.

For a start, he helps us to really understand that we are God's children.

When we come to have faith in Jesus, the Son of God, what happens is that we become children of God too. Paul explains in Romans that it is the Spirit that helps us to understand this and to come into God's presence like children coming to a kind and loving father, calling 'Abba! Father!' (Romans 8.15b-16).

More than that, *the Holy Spirit transforms us.*

He gives us the power to break free from all that is destructive in our lives, and he brings forth good fruit in us. In Galatians, Paul says this:

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.' (Galatians 5.22-23)*

What would you like to have more of in your life? Peace? Joy? Patience? These are ours to be had through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit also *gives us gifts to use in serving others.*

The Holy Spirit gives everyone in the Church a gift – yes, each of us here today has a gift that we can use to serve others.

Paul describes these gifts in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 12.7-11), gifts such as wisdom, knowledge and the power to heal and to prophesy.

We may think we have been passed over when it comes to spiritual gifts, but if you are a Christian, you do have a spiritual gift. I myself have seen many spiritual gifts in the people in this church.

All this leads me to the last part of this sermon.

*What should we do about the Holy Spirit? How should we respond?*

Now, as I said earlier, every Christian has the Holy Spirit in them. When we turn away from our sins and turn to Jesus and put our faith in him, the Spirit comes to dwell in us.

But it shouldn't end there.

Paul says in Ephesians that we must be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5.18). If we want to grow stronger in our faith, and grow closer and closer to God, then we need to have more and more of the Spirit in us – a bit like going from having one bar on your mobile phone to full reception.

But how do we do this?

It's very simple.

All we have to do is ask.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit Jesus said:

*'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.'* (Luke 11.9-10)

All we have to do is ask.

But there are things that stop us.

Often we don't think we are good enough, or our faith is too weak.

But Jesus has made us a promise, and he never lies: ask and you will receive.

We don't have to be all holy to be filled with the Holy Spirit – Jesus said that *everyone* who asks receives. No conditions, no small print, no list of good deeds needed.

Or perhaps we are afraid that being filled with the Holy Spirit will bring about strange and unwelcome changes in our lives, make us a bit weird?

But we have no cause to be afraid, because God is a loving Father who would never play a nasty trick on us. As Jesus says:

*'Which of you Fathers, if your son asks for a fish, would give him a snake?... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'* (Luke 11.11).

There is nothing to fear.

The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the world, and longs to come alongside us and bring us great joy and peace and fulfilment. All we have to do is ask him.

And so as I draw to a close, I am going to say a short prayer asking for the Holy Spirit to come and dwell with us all, and I invite you to join with me if you would like to.

*Our Father in heaven. You have promised that if we ask for the Holy Spirit, you will give him to us. So now, trusting in your promise, we pray that we will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Send him to live and grow in us, so that we can love you more and more. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

