

Reflection – Day of Pentecost
28/05/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 2: 1-21 The Holy Spirit comes upon the believers at Pentecost

Psalm 104: 26-36 God is the Creator of All

1 Corinthians 12: 1-13 There are many gifts of the Spirit, and they all
work in harmony as part of one body

John 20: 19-23 Jesus tells the disciples "Receive the Holy Spirit"

Introduction

Today in our Church Calendar we celebrate the day of Pentecost. We recall the day in church history, recorded in chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles, when the Holy Spirit came upon all of those gathered in Jerusalem, who believed in Jesus.

As we remember that first Pentecost today, I would like to explore what actually happened, and I would like to explore the implications for us as believers in Jesus today.

The First Pentecost

So let us begin by looking at what happened on that first day of Pentecost.

In chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles we hear:-

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

What happened is what we would call a supernatural event.

There was a violent wind, there was the appearance of fire resting on the believers, and they were given the ability to speak languages that they had not previously been able to speak.

Wind

Now violent wind, in and of itself, is not particularly exceptional. I come from North Queensland and cyclones are a fairly regular occurrence, but the wind was symbolic of the presence of God. In today's reading from John's Gospel we hear how Jesus "breathed" on the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit".

Right back at the start of the Bible, in chapter two of Genesis, we hear how God formed Adam from the dust, but it wasn't until God breathed into his nostrils that he became a living being.

This "wind" or "breath", is a sign of God and the symbolism is that we are only really spiritually alive when we accept Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit.

Fire

The "fire like" appearance on the believers though is probably something a bit more interesting. I say "fire like", because it's clear it wasn't a real fire on their heads, otherwise they would have been rushing around to find some water and put it out. But it must have been quite an intriguing sight for it to be recalled and recorded.

Again, we have the symbolism from the Old Testament, in chapter three of Exodus with Moses and the Burning Bush. Here fire represents the presence of God. The tongues of fire were a very clear sign of God's presence with the believers.

The reason that Bishops in our tradition wear Mitres, that's the funny pointy hats, is that they are symbolic of the flames that rested on the disciples heads at Pentecost.

Languages

Speaking other languages that they had not previously been able to, was also a sign of God, but more importantly it had a practical application for the work of God.

It was clearly the work of God, because they had not learned the languages they were speaking, but the outcome was both symbolic and also practical in allowing all those gathered to hear the Good News of Jesus.

At Pentecost, the start of the spread of the Gospel around the world, began with those many different peoples and languages, empowered by the Holy Spirit to hear and respond to the Good News of Jesus.

The clear symbolism here is that God's Holy Spirit is for all people. Language will not be a barrier, all will have opportunity to hear and know about the Good News Jesus offers.

The Presence of the Holy Spirit

Throughout the Bible the Holy Spirit is present, however in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit of God comes to particular people, at particular times, for particular purposes. We hear in chapter one of Genesis how the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters. We hear in Judges how the Spirit came to Gideon for Leadership and Sampson for Strength. We hear how the Spirit gave Isaiah the gift of prophecy.

Then in the New Testament, the work and presence of the Holy Spirit increases dramatically around the birth of Jesus. We see the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove, when he is baptised by John the Baptist. We hear throughout the gospels how Jesus promises the disciples that he will not leave them alone, but he will send the comforter, or the advocate to be with them.

Pentecost is the point in history when the Holy Spirit becomes available to all.

It follows the Ascension of Jesus. The ascension of Jesus was the point where he could no longer be physically with the disciples. So, at Pentecost, God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, came to all who believed in Jesus.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Throughout the New Testament we hear how the Holy Spirit enabled and gave gifts to the early church so that they could build one another up, and so that they could work together to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

In our reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians today we hear:-

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

And in Paul's letter to the Galatians we hear:-

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came from God, so that the disciples would not be left alone, and so that they could continue to work together, to do the work God had planned for them.

The Holy Spirit Today

This Holy Spirit, that caused such a stir on the first day of Pentecost, is living within you right now.

That's right, the Holy Spirit resides in all who have accepted Jesus. No "if's" no "but's". All who believe in Jesus have the Holy Spirit is within them.

Now of course, as we heard in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians today the Holy Spirit will give differing gifts to different people, but we all have the same Holy Spirit within us.

And we hear how they prayed for the Holy Spirit to continually fill their lives.

This filling, this guiding, of the Holy Spirit was something that had a continuous sense to it. It didn't just happen once and then stop. Those first followers of Jesus were continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.

It's a bit like a sponge being placed in water. It fills until it can fill no more and then it overflows.

And just as the overflowing of the Holy Spirit enable those first followers of Jesus to share about the joys of knowing God, when we are filled by the Holy Spirit, God's love will flow out from us.

Conclusion

So today, we gather to celebrate and remember the first Pentecost, with the miraculous signs of God's presence. May we also call upon the Holy Spirit to come and to fill our lives, so that we may encourage and support one another, and so that we may take our part as God's people, in sharing God's love, by showing and telling the Good News of Jesus, with those around us.

Come Holy Spirit. Amen.