
Sunday 23rd May – Pentecost
Readings: Acts 2:1-21 & John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Acts 2:1-21

The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'

Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'

Peter addresses the crowd

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

The work of the Holy Spirit

‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, “Where are you going?” Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

‘I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.’

Reflection

In these wonderful passages, we read about both the promise of the Holy Spirit and the fulfilment of that promise on that miracle-filled celebration of Pentecost. It is fitting and fun to reflect on these as we remember Pentecost this Sunday. As with all scripture, there is an enormous amount we can take from these verses. The theme that strikes me most strongly though is that of God's Presence with us.

In our Home Group, we recently completed a teaching series from RightNow Media on Psalm 23. It was excellent and an easy study to recommend to you. The series is presented by a man named Matt Chandler. In the video for the closing session, Matt made a very interesting statement. He said that all of the Bible could be summarised in 3 words: God with us. He went on to point out how the idea of "God with us" is consistent through the biblical narrative. God had been with the Israelites in the tabernacle in the desert, He had been with them in the temple built in Jerusalem, and most significantly, when Jesus walked the earth. The tabernacle and temple were placed right in the heart of the Israelite community as a constant, daily reminder of God's presence with His people. The tabernacle and temple though were only the signs pointing towards God's ultimate plan to be with us in a far more intimate way: the indwelling of His Spirit in each person who believes in Jesus.

This is a weighty concept indeed! That God would dwell with me personally and fill me with the goodness of His very self is the outrageous grace of the gospel. It's amazing to think that God came and proactively sought me, even when I didn't know I needed Him. Jesus paid the price I should have but couldn't; He bought me, and now as a result God lives in me. This is love. Moreover, when the same thing happens with many "me's", God builds His church by His Spirit, unifying us, counselling us, guiding us.

In the second of the passages in John, Jesus tells us of the joy that awaits those filled with the Spirit. God's Spirit convicts us sin, helping us to know right from wrong, keeping us on a good path and helping us continually come back to our loving Father. He testifies to Jesus' victory, a truth that we need moment by moment in the myriad difficulties we face daily. He brings all the fullness of the Father to bear in our daily existence. He brings joy, peace, and comfort. Unlimited joy, unlimited peace, unlimited comfort. God with us.

Gareth Buchner