

Pentecost 2021

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Introduction...

'Pentecost' means 50 days, it is 50 days since Passover, and the last supper, in the Jewish calendar it was a festival day, one when people undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. That is why there are people of so many different nationalities that hear the gospel, and come to faith in Jesus in our reading from Acts 2. For the Church, it also marks the end of the Easter celebration period, it is when the final part of Jesus' earthly mission is completed, it is the day we celebrate the Birth of the church, it is the day that the believers received and were filled with the Holy Spirit, and as a result 'heaven started breaking out' through the lives of ordinary Christians on earth.

Why did God wait until after Jesus' Life, death, resurrection & Ascension to give the Holy Spirit?

Well, simply put, the scriptures tell us that we were filthy vessels, a bit like a coffee mug left on a student's windowsill over the summer holidays, full of scuzz and mould! Would you be willing to pour the finest champagne into it? The Scuzz is our sin, our attitude to God, our pride, greed, hate, etc etc. And it wasn't until Jesus dealt with all of the sin, on the cross, that it could be cleaned out properly. That is why baptism is so important in people's response to the good news of Jesus, the symbolic washing of the outside of a person, to show what, when we commit our lives to Jesus, and repent for our sin, happens on the inside of us – we are washed clean. We may be chipped and cracked from the life we have lived, but we are clean on the inside, and now we are fit not to receive the finest champagne, but the very presence of the living God within us. We needed Easter, to be fit to receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, but why?

Jesus was the only person ever to live a perfect (sinless) life, because he was born without sin, and allowed the Holy Spirit to lead and work through Him. (Jesus is fully God and fully Human). Jesus needed the power and presence of God to live, and he knows we do too. We are designed that way. We are designed to relate to each other as humans, but to be dependant on God too. So on the cross Jesus set us free from the sin and mess in our lives, but we need the Holy Spirit to live out the freedom that Jesus bought for us. You see the Christian life isn't about trying really hard to live up to God's standards, but about letting God's Spirit transform us from within. We do have work to do, some of it is to learn to tune our 'spirit' in with God's 'Spirit', like you tune in a radio. This is what Romans 8:16 is describing. **"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."** In the activity we did with the children, the Holy Spirit comes to partner with us in a 3 legged obstacle course of life, with the power and wisdom of the creator God.

So what does the Holy Spirit want to do in our lives?

1) The Holy Spirit brings the power and wonderful presence of God within us. Unlike the people at the first Christian Pentecost, we don't have to travel to Jerusalem, or any other place. We don't have to use 'specific words', or give huge gifts to come close to God. To feel his presence, to talk to Him, to hear Him speak, for Him to guide us and help us. God is with us all of the time, if we have given our lives to Jesus, He chooses to live within us 😊.

We can ignore Him, we can upset Him. And it can take a bit of work to learn to hear & recognise Him. We need to learn to 'tune in', well actually it's more like, we need to learn to allow God to tune us in like a radio. But as He does, our 'spirit', our very innermost being starts to know what God wants to say to us (and what He might want us to do). So in Romans 8:12, the Holy Spirit wants us to know that we are God's most precious Children, and He delights in us. The Holy Spirit wants us to know that in the very depth of our being – because it sets us free. Free from other people's opinions, from many of the hurts of our past, free to know our true identity, free to be who we truly are, God's loved Children.

2) The Holy Spirit wants to lead us. God knows that life is best lived, and makes most sense, when we live it with Him. The Holy Spirit wants to lead us to a place where we can know and experience the fullness of God in our lives. But also for us to be a part of fulfilling God's Kingdom plans for our world (Hence our churches strap line of 'Growing Jesus' Kingdom together').

Our world is messy, complicated and broken, yet through all of it God is at work, working things out for the good of all people. Things in your workplace or family might be really difficult, but the Holy Spirit is with you, and wants to lead you, so that you can make a difference for God, even if things don't change quickly. You may be the one who listens to and encourages others. The one who remains honest and truthful even if others aren't. You may be the one who dares to hope or dares to love, because God does. You may even be the one who 'prays in' the solution. The Holy Spirit wants to lead us, and others towards God's kingdom.

But it's not just about where we already are, the Holy Spirit may also want to lead us into new places, new situations, and new opportunities for the Kingdom, because those people or places are important to Him too. This is what inspired the Eden Youth Drop in and the Foodbank, amongst other things. What are the next things on God's heart for you, for our Church, when did you last ask Him?

3) The Holy Spirit brings power to help us change. We all know that there are some things in each one of us, that we would love to see change, but we can't do it ourselves. An Attitude of heart. A regret we can't let go of. A pattern of anxiety. An addiction that we keep secret, the list is endless.

As we let Him, the Holy Spirit will work within us, as we read God's word and let the Holy Spirit apply it to our lives, as we talk and listen in prayer, as we do the things that we know reflect God's Values and character, we become more like God. Paul describes some of the fruits of the Spirit's work in us (Gal5:22-23 ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”***). These are the good things that God wants to grow within us as individuals, but also as a church community (in John 13:34-35 Jesus says ***“A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”***).

The Holy Spirit, not only wants to grow fruit in our lives, but also wants to give us Gifts, to help us grow together, and to grow God's kingdom. Whether it be praying to God freely in a heavenly language (praying in tongues), a special gift for sharing the good news of Jesus with people (evangelism), Hearing God speak to you with words of encouragement & wisdom for others (Prophecy), or God telling you something you could never possibly know that unlocks a situation in someone else's life (a word of knowledge). These gifts rely on the Holy Spirit at work within us, as He was in the apostles and many other followers of Jesus since.

4) The Holy Spirit works to restore community & bring people together. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell, the wonder of the Spirit of the living God was experienced, and the first thing the Spirit did was to invite other people from all tribes and nations to be drawn back together and into God's family. The Holy Spirit invites 'everyone' in Jerusalem in their own language to hear what God has done through Jesus. Many join the new community. The only thing that they have in common is being saved by Jesus, made children of God, and given the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes like a magnetic attraction, a common bond between believers. Then and now He is someone who mediates between us, as my heart is tuned into the Holy Spirit, and your heart is tuned into the Holy Spirit, we find our hearts are tuned into each other too.

But it's not just people who know Jesus that the Holy Spirit wants to bring together, he lays on our heart, what is on His heart, and in doing so He gives us the capacity to love with His love too. Even the people we find hard, we can love (both inside and outside of the church). It is that love of the Holy Spirit that tells us and compels us to go out and tell others about Jesus, because He longs to welcome them home too. To be a part of God's family.

Our response?

Some of us find the idea and the work of the Holy Spirit easy to understand and let move freely in our lives, for some of us we find it much harder. The idea of God within us, or that God wants our permission and partnership to change us (even if it is for the better) is challenging, so often we resist it. We say "this far and no further", we'll let him through the front door of our lives, but leave Him on the door mat! We won't let him into the everyday rooms of our lives.

Some of us are scared, cynical, or disappointed from previous experiences of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so we keep a lid on those too.

Pentecost, and the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit, is as much a part of the works and gift of Jesus, as the cross & Resurrection. Jesus gave His life to make it possible for us to receive the Holy Spirit, He said ***"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."***(John 16:7) He is a blessing and source of life and freedom, a Gift from Jesus.

So what are you going to do this Pentecost?

I encourage you to open your heart again (or for the first time), and invite the Holy Spirit in, further than the door mat of your life, say "come Holy Spirit I invite you in again", and then "would you change me, lead me, and tune me into your heart, so that I can enjoy you, and be a blessing to our world". That's my prayer this Pentecost – It would be great if it is yours too.

Why not find a quiet space, light a candle, and spend 10 minutes being with and welcoming the Holy Spirit?