

TITLE: BETWEEN THE CROSS AND THE DOOR

Pentecost Sunday – 12th June 2011.

OPENING PRAYER

We praise you God for giving the Holy Spirit to the first Christians, teaching them the truth and giving them the power to witness boldly: fill us with the same Spirit so that we may follow their example, in the service of your Son Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

“I believe in God the Father, God the Son and God Holy Spirit”

I suspect that very few people in this room will argue with me that a Trinitarian understanding of God is central to being a Christian today.

But did you know that until the 1950’s when writers like George Hendry began to tackle the subject head on, the Holy Spirit was often perceived as the realm of “experience enthusiasts”, “Pentecostal performers” and “radical reformers”.

Yet a correct understanding of the Holy Spirit is central to understanding the God who created the world, our identity in Christ and our purpose as believers.

The Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the result of centuries of God’s encounter with his people Israel and the body of Christ which today we call the church.

While not strictly Trinitarian the Hebrews still had a profound awareness of the Spirit of God.

The Hebrew word ‘RUACH’ conveys much of their understanding. It means breath or wind and captures the idea of the essential link between life and breath, between God and his creation.

Not only did the Hebrews believe that all life found its source in God but that Gods RUACH – God’s breath was the power which sustained life.

The Hebrews saw God's spirit, as His divine power at work in the world that He created.

The Hebrews also saw the Spirit of God as a source of empowerment:

Firstly, to enhance existing human skills

Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. (Ex31:1-5)

Secondly, to mediate a supernatural power – Sampson

The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. (Judges 14:6)

Thirdly, the ecstatic experience of prophecy – the compulsion to speak on behalf of God. Think about how God operated in the lives of the Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.

The Hebrews also knew that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a transitory thing that came for a God-ordained task, and left at God's command. Remember how God anointed Saul to be King and then removed his spirit from Saul when Saul went his own way.

But the Hebrews didn't think that it would stay that way. They looked forward to a time of completion when the "anointed one" from God would not only bear the fullness of God's Holy Spirit but be the agent of outpouring of that same spirit on all of God's people and not just a select few.

CHRIST

Christians believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophetic hope. In Matthew's Gospel Joseph is told to take Mary as his wife because:

"...the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 1:20)

All four gospels record the presence of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism

In Luke's gospel Jesus quotes from Isaiah's prophecy of the "Anointed One" to launch his ministry (Is 61:1-2)

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me..."

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says he is God's chosen one on whom:

"...I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the gentiles."(Matt 12:18)

Jesus told his disciples that the outpouring of the spirit was dependant on him

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7)

Just in case we still aren't sure Peter cites the Prophet Joel to affirm that the Old Testament hope of the Hebrews has been fulfilled at Pentecost.

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. (Joel 2:28)

THE CHURCH

It's common to hear it said that Pentecost was when the church was born. I am not so sure. Yesterday at the Mission Shaped Church seminar I saw this definition of church:

"Church is any place where people meet Jesus and change happens."

The believers were already together in one place. Perhaps it was the same 120 from (Acts 1:15), maybe not, was it the upper room, was it in the temple, was it somewhere else?

Personally I wonder more about what were they doing than where they were doing it? Were they:

*Praying? Talking? Singing? Eating? Telling stories?
Sharing their hopes and fears?*

It doesn't matter – they were gathered together because of their common faith in Jesus and that sounds like church was already happening.

PENTECOST

In the book of Acts the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost as promised by Jesus - is the fulfilment of the Hebrew hopes for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers.

Pentecost is a non-repeatable event. Like the cross it happened, it happened at the appointed time and it will not happen again.

Pentecost was definitely a supernatural event

- People heard the "sound like wind" and came to investigate.
- Tongues of fire separated over each individual
- A crowd was attracted as the "the wonders of God" were being praised by the disciples in languages other than the disciples own native tongue.
- Pentecost was the beginning of the proclamation of the gospel to the nations, and
- The disciples were equipped by the Holy Spirit for immediate action.
- Unlike the night before the crucifixion Peter stands unafraid, empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness on behalf of God. It is important to note that Peter is not controlled by the Holy Spirit, he's empowered, it is still Peters choice, but he is no longer alone.

Pentecost brought a new corporate identity to the church.

- Before Pentecost God related to the world through the institution of the Hebrew people, their culture and language.

- After Pentecost came the possibility of a personal and intimate relationship with God for each and every believer.
- **PERSONAL, BUT NOT INDIVIDUAL**

It is the same Holy Spirit for each of us but for each of us it is a personal experience that is unique to us and our relationship with God.

At Pentecost empowered by the Holy Spirit the church of believers were propelled out the doors and into the world; courageous, uncompromised, loving, Christ centred.

How many of us feel or have felt the compulsion to speak about Jesus the way Peter did? Not so much what he said but the way he said it?

How often do we feel or have felt the same joy, intimacy and power from the Holy Spirit as the disciples and the early church did following on from Pentecost?

I am convinced that Gods glory is most powerfully on display in the day to day, mundane living of the present moment when we learn to sing in the ordinary ways, on the ordinary days.

FROM THE CROSS TO THE DOOR

I have to be honest with you... I stand before you divided...

I do and I don't speak about Jesus the way Peter did. **AND**

I do and I don't feel that same post Pentecost joy, intimacy and power in unity with Holy Spirit.

Here in church... under the shadow of that cross and all it stands for
Oh man I am so... so... so...

- Bold
- I am certain, convicted black & white in belief

- I rise in agreement as I hear the word of God read and proclaimed in our midst
- My spirit soars as the sung worship lifts me up and encourages me
- My heart moves in company with the prayers for the world, the church and the people that God loves
- I'm love being here in the company of other believers

But then I leave... I go through the church door... and somewhere between that cross and that door... things change...

- I am less bold; my conviction becomes contaminated by compromise.
- My black and white suddenly includes shades of grey.
- Humble piety is infected by ego and pride
- Service and sacrifice make way for self-interest
- My reliance on the faith I have in Christ is beset by a desire to be self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-sustaining.

In short, my follow through doesn't always follow me through the door...

The world tells us that all we need is to be good, respectable, reasonable, just, compassionate; and that would be true if all we desired was to be a member of a great society.

But as Christians we are not called to be part of a great society, we are called to be:

- agents of God's kingdom
- a people of power
- the power of the HOLY SPIRIT

The temptation for me is to believe that what happens here with you amongst the body of Christ must be what walking with the Holy Spirit is supposed to be like.

But it's not!

Jesus commissioned us to go out into the world:

"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:19-20)

The power of the Holy Spirit is so that we can do what we know that Jesus did:

- preach good news to the poor
- bind up the broken hearts
- proclaim freedom for the captives
- release prisoners from darkness
- comfort all who mourn
- provide for those who grieve.

We don't need another Pentecost.

We have all we need.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians saying:

"If we are living now by the Holy Spirit's power, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." (Gal 5:25)

Let us pray, (together)

Come, free, abundant Spirit of God; fill your church, with the wonder of your presence; fill our hearts with your love; fill the whole Church with the power of Christ.

Come in all the mystery signified by wind and fire, beyond human definition, not held in the grasp of anyone, or any thought, or any programme.

Come, sovereign Spirit, and move our hearts to awe and wonder and action so we might tell the world of the hope we have in our risen conquering Lord Jesus Christ.

To Him and Him alone be power and glory and praise ever more.

Amen