

SERMON ON THE DAY OF THE PENTECOST - 23 MAY 2021

COLLECT FOR THE DAY:

**Almighty God, with wind from heaven and tongues of flame
you poured out your Spirit on the disciples:
set our hearts on fire with joy and power and send us out as witnesses
to the wonder of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever,
Amen.**

May I speak in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today we conclude the Eastertide Season by commemorating the Feast of the Holy Spirit. At the Ascension Day Service last Thursday, Rev Darron pointed out the fact that in our liturgical year, we do not seem to give the Ascension Day the thought and the due protocol it deserves, that instead we get caught up with the Easter and the Triduum. I could not agree more with Rev Darron's observation. Ask any of the clergy and they will tell you how exhausted they get after Easter such that they need to take a holiday! Similarly, I believe that the Day of the Pentecost needs to be accorded due protocol as I strongly believe that this is when we are reminded as Christians about our responsibility to go out and spread the gospel of Christ as empowered and led by the Spirit.

I do not know about you but when I hear the word feast, what springs to mind is a celebratory mood that involves a variety of all sorts of foods, sounds of people chatting and laughing and even music playing in the background. However, that is not the picture we get from the narrative found in the book of Acts on the Feast of the Holy Spirit. In this scripture reading, we hear of a sound that is likened to the blowing of a violent wind, which came from heaven and filled the house where the disciples were gathered. Next, we are told about what seemed to be tongues of fire that came and rested on each of the disciples. That does not sound like a feast to me, however, something amazing happened here, the disciples received the Holy Spirit that they were promised by Jesus before he left them.

In Acts 2 verse 4, we learn that before he ascended into heaven, Jesus had commanded the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but rather to wait for the gift that his Father had promised, which Jesus had spoken about to the disciples on numerous occasions while he was still with them. It is now ten days later, as the disciples were gathered in the upper room that Jesus' promise is fulfilled.

Let us look at what Jesus had said about the Spirit to his disciples:

1. We learn in John 14 verses 15 to 17 that Jesus promised his disciples that he would ask the Father to give them another advocate to help them and to be with them forever, the Spirit of truth. However, in verse 15 there seems to be a condition that Jesus puts to the disciples for them to be given the Spirit, namely, that they must love Jesus and keep his commands.

In other words, as the followers of Christ, we need to keep his commandments so that he can intercede for us to his Father. We know these commandments by heart as they are included in our liturgy and we remind ourselves about them whenever we gather for worship - to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our minds and to love our neighbours as ourselves. The Holy Spirit within us therefore gets fully ignited when we love God and when we love our neighbours. And when the Spirit of truth is alive in us, we become aware of our environments and where our agency is required.

Allow me to tell you a story of what happened to me on Wednesday as I was on my way to the Clicks Pharmacy on Main Road from a doctor's appointment at the Riverside Clinic. After I had just crossed the robots, a young man approached me and asked how far he still had to walk to get to Cape Town. In our short engagement, I gathered that he had walked from kwaLanga to Wynberg and that he was now on his way to Cape Town and probably would have to walk from Cape Town back to kwaLanga. Having told him that he still had a long walk ahead of him before he reached Cape Town, I then reached for my purse and gave him a R10,00 note towards taxifare. The man was so grateful that he immediately crossed the road to catch a taxi. As soon as he had left, I remembered that I had bigger bank notes that I wanted to deposit at the Riverside Mall and that the feature of Cash Deposits on the machine was offline. Bang! only then did I realise that the offline status of the ATM was God preparing me to be able to share the bigger notes with the young man. Had my Spirit been alive, had I been in the moment, I would have remembered when the young man spoke to me and became a Better Samaritan, not just a good one!

This encounter reminded me of Luke's account about the men who were on the Road to Emmaus, whose hearts were not burning when Jesus joined them on their journey from Jerusalem. Let us therefore keep the Spirit of truth within us ignited at all times so that we are alive to where God is sending us.

2. We also heard in the gospel reading earlier as found in John 16 vs 13 that Jesus told his disciples that when the Spirit of truth comes, he would guide them in all the truth and that it would make known to them what the Spirit receives from Jesus. The Spirit is therefore reflected as the link between man and God. It is the direct dial to God! In today's global world of modern technology, it is easy to get connectivity in an instant. One gets provided with a link and sometimes a password to connect and gain access to wherever they are invited. We have zoom, skype, teams and all other platforms that keep us connected. These have proven effective especially as we are confronted with the scourge of Covid-19 that restricts our physical engagements.

I remember the stories my father-in-law would tell about him calling to establish whether his wife travelled safely when she visited her parents eCala, a small town in the Eastern Cape. He would dial through a local switchboard in Aliwal North and request to be connected to a telephone number eCala. He would then have to wait for the switchboard operator to call him back and connect him to the number he had requested. This usually took place on a Friday afternoon. The switchboard operators detested being reminded of the call one had requested and therefore there was nothing else that one would do except to wait for the switchboard operator to call back and connect them to the requested number. In most cases, my mother-in-law would have returned from her visit to eCala when the switchboard operator called my father-in-law back to connect him to the telephone number he had requested almost three days ago.

Imagine if we depended on such a system for us to be connected to God! Our prayers would never reach God timeously if they reached him at all! So, in the Holy Spirit we have a giver of life that enables us to remain in tune with our God and to always be alive to his purpose for us. It is incumbent upon us therefore to keep the connection alive so that we can receive from the Spirit all our messages from Jesus.

Of course, Jesus himself knows the power of the Spirit because it was through the very Spirit that he was conceived. In other words, the transition of Jesus the Son of God to Jesus the Son of Man was orchestrated through the Holy Spirit. Further, at Jesus' baptismal on the River Jordan, we learn in Luke 3 verse 22 that the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and descended on him whereafter, full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was led to the wilderness and went through

rigorous temptation by the devil. Having overcome the temptation, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit and began his public ministry.

We see the effects of the power of the Spirit in the disciples after they receive it in Jerusalem. First, they were enabled by the Spirit to continue to fulfil the task that Jesus had begun. Through the Spirit, all who were with them could hear the disciples proclaiming the Kingdom of God in their own languages. Later, we learn that Peter, in the company of John healed a disabled man at the Temple gate. Also, during the apostle's persecution that had followed, the Spirit brought an angel to rescue Peter from prison.

We also learn about how the apostles themselves took part in imparting the Holy Spirit to other nationalities. First to the Samaritans, as we read in Acts 8 vs 17 that Peter and John put their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit. Then to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house as we read in Acts 10 vs 44-46 that while Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. In Ephesus (Acts 19 vs 2), after establishing that the disciples he found there had never heard about the Holy Spirit, Paul placed his hands upon them, and the Holy Spirit came on them. In all these instances, the Bible tells us that upon receiving the Holy Spirit, all spoke in tongues and prophesied.

We too have received the Holy Spirit, first at our baptismal where we were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and at our confirmation where the Bishop conferred us to the Lord to confirm and strengthen us with the Holy Spirit.

How then do we keep the Spirit within us alive? Our Manual as Christians is the Word of God that is found in the Good News. The Word asks us to remain in Jesus and for Jesus to remain in us, for without Jesus we can do nothing (John 15 vs 5). Whenever we meet for the eucharist service, we end our prayer of humble access but asking God to grant us that as we eat the flesh of his son and drink his blood, we *".....evermore dwell in him and he in us"*. Have you ever experienced fiddling with a gadget trying to figure out how to operate it? And yet all gadgets come with a manual that takes you step by step on how they work. The manual takes you to the manufacture's mind in designing and producing the item and others even include the ingredients used in making the item.

Similarly, as Christians we have a Manual that we are required to consult to understand God's purpose for us, how he intends us to live and what he expects from us. The Anglican Communion has made our

reading of God's Manual a somewhat easy exercise. Every year we receive a Lectionary that has daily morning and evening prayers, each with scripture readings. This helps us to keep our spirituality alive and ignite the Holy Spirit in us.

Lastly, let us look at life by the Spirit as found in the Manual in St Paul's letter to the Galatians chapter 5, reading from verse 13. Paul tells his audience here that they should live by the Spirit and that when they do so, they will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Paul then goes further and mentions these fruits of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, forbearance/patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Since therefore as Christians, we ought to live by the Spirit, we are urged to keep in step with the Spirit and exude these fruits. We know how Jesus emphasized in his disciples the importance of love and more importantly that they themselves should love one another as he had loved them (John 13 vs 34). Jesus goes further and tell his disciples that by them loving one another, all will know that indeed they are his disciples (John 13 vs 35). We also therefore ought to be conspicuous as Christian through the love we have first among each other and the love we express to the greater world.

Again, in John 14 vs 27, Jesus tells his disciples that he leaves them with peace, that he gives them his peace. So, the next time we emulate Jesus and offer each other peace at our eucharist services, we should be mindful of the fact that this is the peace that Jesus left with the disciples, which is one of the fruits of a Spirit led life.

I challenge each one of us that for the next nine days we take one of the nine fruits of the Spirit and consciously live it out in a particular day. Let us begin the challenge tomorrow, Monday 24 May 2021 and start with the fruit of self-control. As we go about our daily lives tomorrow, let us kindle the Spirit within us during our morning prayers and ask that it assist us to exercise self-control throughout the day. In the evening, as we do our evening office and examen, let us reflect on the day and see how we fared in the challenge, asking for the Spirit to help us where we fell short.

In Jesus' name AMEN.