

## Sermon Theme: Pentecost

Preached by Murray Wills, 23 May 2021

St James' Church 8am

Acts 2:1-21 John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

May the words on my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, my rock and redeemer AMEN.

Happy Birthday!

Today we mark the feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit among the apostles and followers of Jesus. The start of the church's mission to the world.

Pentecost in Greek literally means "the 50th day." It is celebrated 50 days after Easter.

The events of the day were described by Jesus in the first chapter of Acts, just before his Ascension. This was the story you heard last week on Ascension Sunday.

While his followers were with the risen Christ, he tells them, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5, NRSV).

He goes on to say to them, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The followers would wait for 9 days in Jerusalem for the Spirit. The author of Acts, who is traditionally believed to be Luke, says in our reading today:

*"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each" (Acts 2:1-6).*

You will see symbols today in slides, what I and you are wearing and in the altar linen. Who can name some?

We celebrate Pentecost as the end of the 50-day Easter season and the start of the Church's mission in the world. The Spirit brings the church into existence and enlivens it and empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are to go out into our neighbourhoods and the wider world—to Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth—witnessing to the risen Christ.

So, what I hear you say is the Spiritual Significance of Pentecost for us today?

Here are four possible ways:

### **1. The Presence and Power of the Spirit**

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon those followers of Jesus who had gathered together in Jerusalem. What happened on the first Pentecost continues to happen to Christians throughout the world today, although not usually in such a dramatic way. We rarely get a heavenly wind and tongues of fire anymore. Nevertheless, God pours out the Spirit upon all who put their faith in Jesus Christ and become his disciples (see Romans 8:1-11).

Christians are meant to live in the presence and power of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit helps us to confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:3), empowers us to serve God with supernatural power (1 Cor 12:4-11), binds us together as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13), helps us to pray (Rom 8:26), and even intercedes for us with God the Father (Rom 8:27). The Spirit guides us (Gal 5:25), and helps us to live like Jesus (Gal 5:22-23).

Pentecost presents us with an opportunity to consider how we are living each day.

- Are we relying on the power of God's Spirit?
- Are we an open channel for the gifts of the Spirit?
- Are we open to and watchful for the guidance of the Holy Spirit?
- Is the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) growing in our lives?

Pentecost offers a chance to confess our failure to live by the Spirit and to ask the Lord to fill us afresh with his power.

### **2. The Central Role of the Church in God's Work in the World**

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on individual followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. This gathering became the first Christian church. New believers in Jesus were baptised as they joined this church. They, along with the first followers of Jesus, shared life together, focusing on teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. They shared their belongings so that no one was hungry or needy.

As these first Christians lived out their new faith together, "the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

In theory, the Spirit could have been poured out on the followers of Jesus even if they were not gathered together. There are of course times when the Holy Spirit touches an individual who is alone in prayer, worship, or ministry to others and 1 Cor 6:19 talks about the dwelling of the Spirit in individual Christians.

But the fact that the Spirit was given to a gathering of believers is not incidental. It confirms the central position of the church in God's work in the world. In 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul observes that the church is God's temple and that the Spirit dwells in the midst of the church (3:16-17).

Many Christians, especially who have been influenced by the individualism of our current culture (the me culture), live as if the church is useful but unnecessary. We seem to believe that as long as we have a personal relationship with God, everything else is secondary.

But Pentecost is a vivid illustration that the community of God's people, coming together is central to God's work in the world. Pentecost therefore invites us to consider our own participation in the fellowship, worship, and mission of the church. It is a time to renew our commitment to live as an essential member of the body of Christ, using our gifts to build the church and share the love and justice of Christ with the world. This is one reason why the Mission Action Planning discernment process we have embarked on is so important.

### **3. The Multilingual Nature and Mission of the Church**

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered believers in Jesus to praise God in many languages (Acts 2:5-13). Symbolically, this miracle reinforces the multilingual and multicultural mission of the church. We are to be a community in which all people are drawn together by God's love in Christ. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Pentecost therefore challenges all of us to examine our own attitudes and any prejudices we have; to open our hearts to all people, especially those who do not share our language and culture. We have an exciting number of new members of the parish. How can we ensure everyone is welcome and embrace worship that incorporates different languages?

### **4. The Inclusive Ministry of the Church**

After the Holy Spirit fell upon the first followers of Jesus, Peter preached a sermon to help people understand what had just happened.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29)

Later, Peter explained that the Spirit would be given to all who turned from their sin and turned to God through Jesus (Acts 2:38). This was a momentous event. For the first time in history, God began to do what he had promised through Joel, empowering different people for ministry. Whereas in the era of the Old Testament, the Spirit was poured out almost exclusively on prophets, priests, and kings, in the age of the New Testament, the Spirit would be given to "all people." All would be empowered to minister regardless of their gender, age, or social position.

Although this truth would not mean that every Christian would be gifted for every kind of ministry, it did imply that all believers would be empowered by the Spirit. The church of Jesus Christ would be a place where every single person matters and where every member contributes to the health and mission of the church (see Eph 4:11-16).

We can ask, therefore:

- Am I serving God through the power of the Spirit?
- Do I know what my spiritual gifts are?
- Am I exercising the gifts of the Spirit in my life, both in the gathered church and as I live for God in the world?

Pentecost is a time to ask God to fill us afresh with the Spirit so that we might join in the ministry of Christ with great strength and energy. And it is a time to renew our commitment to fulfilling our crucial role in the ministry of God's people in the world. Let us pray for all of these things as they relate to each of us today.

Amen