

Pentecost. 19 May 2024.

Ezekiel 37:1-14,

Acts 2:1-21,

John 15:26-27 plus Ch 16:4b-15

Sermon: God's Holy Spirit: Fill the Vacancy! Revd David Treharne

Preamble – not in the spoken sermon

Christianity is not just a moral code or a set of intellectual beliefs... it is a supernatural religion. The God revealed in the Scriptures; the God revealed in Jesus Christ; the God revealed in the stories of Christians over the last 2,000 years including Jen, John and Shane confirmed a couple of weeks ago... this God doesn't just sit back and watch and remain detached from our human experience. No! Our God is involved in creation, creating and recreation and desires to be involved in our lives... renewing, revealing, restoring, transforming, discerning, reconciling, enthusing, performing, teaching, encouraging, gifting, loving.

God expresses himself in a community of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person of the Holy Trinity, not an impersonal force or green mist. God the Father creates and sustains the world. God the Son, Jesus, shows us what God is like and redeems us. God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, is God's action in us and in our world.

The Holy Spirit is God with us now. The Spirit is the power of God at work as seen through Jesus' ministry. At Jesus' baptism the Spirit appeared to him like a dove, the Spirit led him into the wilderness and sustained him. Jesus' teaching and miracles were performed through God's Spirit. And Jesus said that when he was gone he would send them a helper who would teach you and make you remember all that was told (John 14:26). After his death and resurrection the Holy Spirit was sent to the whole Church (Acts 2).

In Old Testament days the Holy Spirit was not given to every believer. The Spirit of God rested on great national leaders (like Moses); great prophets (like Elijah); great kings (like David) and on other special individuals.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on these people was a definite event that made a real difference to their lives.

But the prophets foretold a time when God would pour out his Holy Spirit upon all people.

This is what happened on the day of Pentecost... the day we recall and celebrate today! The disciples' lives were completely transformed. The same promise of the Holy Spirit is given to every Christian today.

The Sermon

Vacancy

Now, in July there will be a vacancy here in the Parish of Tidenham... a vacant post for the role of Vicar. This should be of concern to all... because this is a key appointment for leading the next chapter in the life of this Parish.

However, what if I were to tell you another possible vacancy that should be of far more concern? A vacancy of/for God the Holy Spirit!! For our lives and / or our life together to be vacant of the Holy Spirit... be concerned about that!!!

Christianity is not just a moral code or a set of intellectual beliefs... it is a supernatural religion. The God revealed in the Scriptures; the God revealed in Jesus Christ; the God revealed in the stories of the last 2,000 years... this God doesn't just sit back and watch and remain detached from our human experience. No!

This, our God wants to fill our lives – our very souls – and is involved in creation, creating and recreation and desires to be deeply involved in our lives.

And yet the sad reality of so much Christian life and experience over the centuries has been the very absence of a tangible involvement and experience of God in daily life! There has been an unfilled vacancy in the lives of so many Christians and worshipping communities.

We have not taught the Holy Spirit

We have not spoken enough about the life of God given to us, the power of God, the working of God...

Acts 19:2 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered him, "No, we've never even heard of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:30-31 "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

Erroneous Belief

Some of us might still hold to what I think is an erroneous belief (Deism)... of a God that does not act or intervene in the Universe... a God that is impersonal, absent and unable to affect our lives. This is not the God I know who is revealed on the Cross, revealed at Easter or revealed at Pentecost. No, our God is the God is personal, present and wanted to affect our lives. He is the God who says...

Acts 2:17. *I will pour out my Spirit on everyone*

Ezekiel 36:26. *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;*

John 14:15-17 ¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Romans 8:11. *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you.*

John 14:12. "Truly, I tell you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I am doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

Hard and Leaky Hearts

We have not been open and expectant enough. Many of us have great tales to tell about the Holy Spirit at work... but quite often these are stories from the distant past... rather than here and now. Ephesians 5:18 says to all Christians, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that leads to debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." The verb "be filled" is famously a present tense verb which means **to do it regularly, continually.**

I don't know about you but when I'm filled with the Holy Spirit I tend to leak and need to be refilled! Now leaking is a good thing – we are meant to leak! The love, peace and joy of God has been poured into us in order to be shared – to leak. But that does mean we need refilling.

Sadly, I also find that when I am empty and dry I tend to fill my spirit with other things other than the Spirit of God!

I did it my way...

Many of us consistently rely on our own strength and not the strength and power of God... "I did it my way!" and I wonder why it goes wrong or why we're exhausted. We look to ourselves and our own resources and not to God who supplies us with all our needs (Phil 4:19).

Karl Barth "*When we are at our wits' end for an answer, then the Holy Spirit can give us an answer. But how can He give us an answer when we are still well supplied with all sorts of answers of our own?*"

And a couple of quotes from John Stott...

"What we need is not more learning, not more eloquence, not more persuasion, not more organization, but more power from the Holy Spirit."

“Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from His fruit, and no effective witness without His power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead.”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we need the Holy Spirit to fill the vacancy!

When looking to fill a vacancy, one generally looks for particular knowledge, skills and experience. The Holy Spirit provides all the KSE... and meets the person specification we need to see the reign of God and transformed lives.

Knowledge

The Spirit leads us into all truth (John 16:13) and teaches us about God (John 14:26). The Spirit gives counsel, discernment, understanding and wisdom... and gives us a knowledge of God and the things of God through revelation and grace.

Skills

The Spirit equips us. Christianity is actually quite a good deal. God calls us to be someone and do something and God offers to help us, equip us and bring it to pass within us. The Spirit will work within us... like sap in the vine... to produce the things of God in us.

The Spirit gifts us. We see evidence in the natural order of God's gifting through those with great skills and talents. But the Spirit also gifts us with supernatural gifting – a word of knowledge, ability to teach, gift of healing. Turn to 1 Cor 12 & 14.

We need to go to God to be equipped for the works he has prepared for us to do. I loved what Ed shared the other day that if you put the word 'go' at the beginning of 'disable' it becomes 'God is able.' Without going to God all of us are disabled. By going to God and going forth in his name God is able to use anyone!

Experience

The Spirit has rather good experience to do the work of God in our lives and our world. After all the Holy Spirit is God and has been at work throughout the whole of creation! The Holy Spirit earths the life of God... the Father for us, the Son with us and the Spirit in us! Romans 8:15&16 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*

Romans 8:26 *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

Images and symbols of the Holy Spirit give us an idea of the Spirit's work within us ...

- Fire – can be a spark or a raging inferno... burning, purifying, warming. Wesley was 'strangely warmed.'
- Water – can be a gentle dew or a drenching downpour... refreshing, renewing, overflowing
- Bird – a dove, a symbol of peace... appearing at Jesus' baptism... the Celtic Christians chose the wild goose to represent the Holy Spirit. It's a noisy bothersome bird... jars our complacency, our apathy!!
- Breath or Wind – There is the sound of a mighty wind like in Acts 2:2. Or a gentle breath on the forehead. There's that lovely moment in John's Gospel where Jesus breaths on the disciples (John 20:22).

Without breath there is no life.

Ezekiel 37 vs 5 "I will put breath in you, and you shall live."

Breath or wind. Without breath there is no life – throughout the Bible the Holy Spirit is shown actively at work to give people new life... God's life. We need that life!

The Holy Spirit works in human beings – in the lives of each believer. Like breath and wind we might see his work but we see the results. We shouldn't be frightened of God's Holy Spirit.

So to conclude. There's a really important role to be filled in many a soul and worshipping community... we need someone who will enable us to live life together in the flow of God's love. Someone who will enable us to do relationship well. Someone who will bring life in all its fullness. We need someone to heal and restore and transform. Someone who will bring the reign of God in us, amongst us and around us. The Holy Spirit is the only viable candidate and has all the knowledge, skills and experience we need to bring these things to pass!!!

Come Holy Spirit and take your place.

Notices

- Today: There will be a Bring and Share lunch at 12.30pm in St Luke's and a chance to gather and celebrate Nicki's ministry here.
- Sun 26 May/ Trinity Sunday: TPP with the ABC. Tickets available. You will need to have them for entry on the day. Please arrive by 9am in St John's School. Limited parking available so if you can walk or share a lift that would be helpful. ONLY other worship gathering is 6pm at St Luke's... Holy Communion.
- 9 June. 3pm Lancaut Pilgrimage... all being well!