

Pentecost 2019

“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline”
2 Timothy 1.7

We sometimes talk, don't we, about events which have changed the world. Sometimes these events are the rise and fall of empires, the beginning and ending of wars... the fall of the Berlin Wall or attack on the twin towers. Sometimes its speeches which catch the imagination: “We shall fight them on the beaches” ... “I have a dream”. Sometimes its inventions like the printing press or the discovery of penicillin.

But without a shadow of doubt, the event since Jesus' ascension to heaven which has done more to change history than any other is the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit on all believers.

Let's recap for a moment.

The Holy Spirit is one of the three 'persons' who make up the One God – along with God the Father and his Son Jesus.

The Spirit, scripture tells us, has always existed; there never was a time when He wasn't.

Indeed, He was an integral part of God's creation of the world as he brooded over the face of waters and as he breathed life into the first human beings.

But for all the years before Jesus, the Holy Spirit's activity is limited to specific people at specific times:

Bezalel that he might decorate the tabernacle.

Gideon for leadership.

Samson for strength.

Isaiah so that he might prophesy.

But there is an ever-growing hope through the Old Testament that one day God would pour out His Spirit in a new way – upon all believers, not just the select few.

And this was what Jesus promised: that after his ascension he would give the gift of the Spirit to all who followed him.

And so, on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection there is the sound of rushing wind and flames of fire appear from heaven and the believers, gathered in an upper room for prayer, are amazingly filled with the Spirit of God.

And what happens?

They begin to speak in languages they have not learned, they tell a crowd gathered from all 4 corners of the known world about Jesus, and 3000 people become Christians!

And from this beginning, the church has spread throughout the world until now 2 billion people would claim to be followers of Jesus.

This is the most remarkable of stories.

The Church has faced, and still does, severe persecution. For the first years of the church's life, Christians had no place to meet and were routinely fed to the lions!

But despite the most severe opposition and oppression, the Church has grown and flourished.

And Christians have transformed the face of the world: in science, medicine, business, finance, the arts, and of course in human rights.

It was Christians, with a belief in a God of order and purpose, a God who loves all people, who have set out to make the world better reflect the nature and purposes of God – to see his kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

But none of this would have been possible without the Holy Spirit.

Again, Scripture teaches us, that it is the Holy Spirit who:

- Brings people to faith and adopts them as God's children
- Who teaches us and shows us how to be disciples of Jesus
- Who helps us pray
- Who makes us more like Jesus
- Who gives us gifts that we might use for good.

It is this Spirit who St Paul says in his first letter to Timothy, “does not make us timid but gives us power and love and self-discipline.” (1 Timothy 1.7).

Recently the ministry team attended a leadership conference in Brighton. One of the comments which really struck us was, “The kingdom of God was never built by tweaking.”
Surely this is true!

When the prophet Joel looked forward to God pouring out his Spirit he predicted that,
“Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.”
And indeed, as Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost to explain what was happening, this was the verse from the Old Testament he quoted.

I have a question for you...us... this morning:

Are you dreaming dreams?
Are you having visions?
Are you speaking God’s word boldly (prophesying) in the context in which you live?

Are you living a life of power, of love and of self-discipline?
Or have you been cowed by the world around you?
Have you settled for less in your own life, in your family and community and place of work... in your church?

Too often, I think, we believe the lies of the devil:
That there is no urgency to working for God’s kingdom – after all its been 2000 years since Jesus ascended...
It doesn’t really matter anyway... everyone’s going to get into heaven no matter what they believe or what they have done...
And there’s nothing much we can do even if we wanted... the world is increasingly secular and no one is interested.

But we need to call these out for the lies that they are:

Yes, God is being patient in delaying Jesus' return so that more people have chance to believe in Jesus and find salvation; but Jesus might return any minute and in the parables of the 10 virgins and the faithful steward Jesus told us to live as those prepared.

And it does matter whether people believe in Jesus or not. To have Jesus is to have life, but to not have Jesus means eternal death.

And we can do something about the state the world is in.

If Wilberforce had thought he couldn't change the world, we would still have slavery. If Martin Luther King thought he couldn't change things there would still be segregation in America.

Up and down our own country, even today, ordinary churches are feeding the homeless, helping people come off drugs, running courses to support family life and helping people whose marriages are in trouble.

Churches are supporting schools and helping children get an education where faith is at the heart of school life.

Churches are running Alpha and people are finding life in a relationship with Jesus.

Up and down our country people are starting businesses based on Christian principles, which seek to care for people and the environment as well as make a profit.

Ordinary people are speaking up for doing the right thing in their places of work.

Christians in politics are pointing to a better way to engage in debate and find solutions to society's problems.

It is happening...

Of course, you won't hear about it on the 10 o'clock news. It doesn't make for good TV.

But it sure is noticed by those people whose lives and families and communities are changed for good.

We, as Christians, need to grasp who God has made us to be.

We need to understand that we are sons and daughters of the King of Kings.

We have been given a Spirit not of timidity, but a Spirit of power and love and self-discipline.

And we need to get stuck in.

Its an interesting combination of characteristics isn't it: power and love and self-discipline!

Power without love is dangerous.

Love without power is impotent.

But power with love can change the world... especially when they are brought under the control of a life surrendered to God.

What might our lives and our church look like if we once again opened ourselves to God's Spirit, and lived lives of power and love and self-discipline?

Let me suggest a few ideas:

1. We would think bigger

In our own lives, how often are we happy to just get by? In church how often are we happy just to pay the bills and keep the doors open?

But filled with God's Spirit might we not see our lives as part of God's big picture of redeeming the world, of saving souls?

Filled with God's Spirit might we not see our church as the hope of our village and direct our energy and resources to sharing the good news, bringing healing and hope to our community?

Instead of getting by we would make a difference.

2. We would be more willing to take risks.

Playing it safe is a recipe for disaster in God's economy.

It is those who seek to hold on to their lives that lose it; but those who are willing to give up their lives who will save them.

It is as we prove faithful in small things that God entrusts us with bigger ones.

God is not going to entrust people who to a church which is only concerned with keeping a building standing. Instead he is going to entrust people to churches which are prepared to exercise faith, attempt great things for the kingdom, may a difference.

3. We would have more fun.

Who is the only person in history apart from Jesus to walk on water?
Peter! The one who was prepared to get out of the boat and walk, at
Jesus command.

Life is supposed to be an adventure; to be wild and exciting – not
chasing after pleasure or personal gain, but being open to the wind of
the Spirit, to be co-workers with Christ in building the kingdom of God.
Life is supposed to be purposeful, meaningful and of eternal significance.

On this day of Pentecost, I want to say to us...

Stop playing it safe...

Don't let 'getting by' be your aim in life.

Be filled with the Spirit:

Dream dreams... have visions... prophesy.

This is what we were created for.

And it is God, by his Spirit... the spirit of power and love and self-disciplines,
who can do this great thing in us and through us.

But we must be open.

And we must ask.

Can I invite you please to stand...