

Sandy Parish Church

God's Empowering Presence

Revd Huw Davies May 31 2020

Pentecost Sunday

Just a few weeks ago we celebrated Easter. On Easter Sunday morning Jesus appeared to Mary and then in the afternoon to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and to their family, then later that evening to the rest of the disciples. Later on, as we spoke about last week, he met them at the sea of Galilee cooked fish and ate breakfast with them. Over the weeks, Jesus met them in various situations and Paul tells us, was seen by more than 500 people. (1 Corinthians 15:16)

Eventually the time came for Jesus to leave them after his resurrection appearances at what we call, his Ascension.

Passover was the annual celebration of freedom and the rescue of the Jewish people under Moses from 400 years of slavery in Egypt, and fifty days later Pentecost was the great annual celebration of the giving of the Law through Moses on Mt Sinai. Jerusalem was again crowded with tens of thousands of people from all across the known world. The disciples were meeting together to pray and the Holy Spirit came upon them in a very dramatic way.

When Jesus left them he had told them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come and that when the Spirit came he would fill them with power so that they would be empowered to speak and preach to all the nations of the earth and others would come to be followers, disciples of Jesus and receive the Spirit for themselves.

In our family we have a general understanding that if I cook the dinner somebody else has to do the washing-up! We share the chores around the house. But if I just go around the house saying it's not my turn, it's not my job to do that I haven't really learnt the purpose of rules. I need to grow to a place where I internalise these things. I need to do it not out of compulsion, but because that is the right thing, the best thing, the kind thing to do. It is not fair for one person to wait hand and foot upon the other whether that is a husband or wife or a partner. Because we are a team you play your part and I'll play my part we share this together. (2 Corinthians ch.9 v.7)

So it is with the followers of Jesus. They had walked with him and learned from him. Now he was to leave them and they must internalise what they have learned. He was to now come to be in them!

I don't know about you but when I am on a camping trip I much prefer to have the chocolate and food in my stomach than to carry it in my rucksack upon my back. The food instead of being a burden to me becomes part of me and empowers me. And that is what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit "Now you have him with you but soon he will be in you, in your heart, in your mind helping you to know how to live and how to act". (John ch.14 v.7)

At the Last Supper, Jesus said soon I am going to be betrayed and arrested but when I am killed do not be afraid I won't leave you comfortless I will come to you. I won't leave you as orphans I will send the Holy Spirit to you.

Who is this Holy Spirit? He is variously described in the scriptures as the spirit of God and the spirit of Jesus. What Jesus did he did in the power of the Spirit. If you like Jesus, his character and the things he did and said you will love the holy spirit. (Matthew ch.3 v.16 Romans ch.8 v.2&9&11&14 ch.15 v.19 Acts ch.16 v.7)

Jesus used a word for him in John chapter 14. He uses the word Paraclete. It's difficult to translate this Greek word. It means the one who comes alongside to help. So sometimes it is translated as Councillor or lawyer or barrister.

If I was to trip over a step I might need a barrister to help me sue the owners of the building. But before that I would prefer that you call the paramedics to help me with my broken leg. But later I will need a home help to cook my meals and do my shopping and after that a physio to help me get fully recovered.

This is all encompassed in the term paraclete.

The one who comes alongside to pick me up when I fall, to help me get back on my feet and to speak on my behalf when the law and my conscience accuse me. The one who comes alongside to encourage me. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

In his first letter John writes in chapters 1 and 2: 'My children I write to you to encourage you not to sin and to do all that you can to live a good life and not fall into the habit of sinning but I know that we do all occasionally do things that are wrong and that we regret. If we say that we have no sin we deceive only ourselves and the truth is not in us. But when we do sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and he is the propitiation for our sin. He not only pleads our case and speaks on our behalf but he has paid the penalty for us by his death on the cross. The innocent for the guilty. He is our counsellor, our helper, our paraclete'. (Hebrews 4:14)

John chapter 14 through to chapter 17 Jesus says a number of things about the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that the paraclete will come to lead us into all truth, to help convict us of our failures and to convince us that Jesus is the saviour that we need. (John ch.16 v.8)

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as another comforter like Jesus himself. John ch.14 v.16

John uses a specific greek word in his recollection of Jesus' description of the Spirit.

If I were to say that there is one car on this side of the road and another car on the other side I could use one of two words in greek. A BMW on this side of the road and a Mini on that side would be "heteros". One car here and another different car there. But if they were both the same or similar type, both Ford Fiesta cars I would say there is one car here and another similar "allos" car there. And that is the word John chooses when he writes about the way Jesus described the Holy Spirit, the gift that was to be given: "Another similar "allos" comforter, just like me".

Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover tens of thousands of people were gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate the giving of the law through Moses. Now the spirit of God was to be poured and the power to keep the law, the power to do what is right, the power to live well, that power, is given through the Holy Spirit.

The great New Testament Scholar, Gordon Fee entitled his classic 900 page book on the work of the Holy Spirit, "God's Empowering Presence".

Jesus, just before he left his disciples, told them wait for the Holy Spirit to come. (Acts ch.1 v.8)

Wait because when the holy spirit comes you will be empowered to be my witnesses throughout the world.

That day in the upper room when there were 120 of them gathered to pray the Spirit fell upon them like a rushing wind and what looked like tongues of fire rested upon their heads. The experience ignited their own tongues to preach a message of joy and praise that no amount of persecution or hardship would ever be able to extinguish. That day they went out into the streets worshipping and praising God and people gathered to ask what is this all about? Surely these men are drunk? Peter preached his first sermon, at the end of which 3,000 people decided to become followers of the Way of Jesus and were baptised that very afternoon.

Peter and the other disciples could not but declare a saviour who comes alongside to help, to lift the broken hearted and to raise the bruised spirit.

"O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemers praise" Charles Wesley's great hymn.

The Paraclete has come. The promise is from God the Father in heaven, sent by Jesus, to you.

The essential, empowering, encouraging, enlightening, invigorating, enduring presence of God.

It is for you and for your children and your children's children and to all who will open their hearts and come with open arms and the humility to say - Sorry - Please - Thank you.

"I am truly sorry for the ways that things have been in my life, Please come to my heart Lord Jesus and fill me with your Holy Spirit. Thank you!"

What a beautiful thing, the Holy Spirit has come to help us in every situation and like the bar of chocolate on the camping trip he comes not to be a burden on our back but to be an empowering presence within us.

Not a burdensome set of rules to be obeyed religiously but to open up an exciting new way of living.