

Acts 2:1-21

We live in an increasingly secular age. Although people claim to be spiritual, that spirituality is often a self-serving eclectic mix of ideas that authenticates the behaviour and life style the individual chooses.

It's "our own" spirituality.

The enlightenment and modernity have separated us from a common acceptance that there is a God and that God is present and active in our lives.

As rational thought, secular ideas, science and technology become the norm, the miracles we speak of in the modern age are technological miracles, not faith miracles.

You can carry in your pocket a communication device that allows you to have a face to face conversation with someone in Australia. It's a miracle, but we know how this miracle is done.

Earlier this year at a baptism a Godparent couldn't be here, they were in the States. The Mother of the two candidates kept her phone running and this lady (who I met the other day) watched the whole service in the USA.

Your mobile phone can do a host of miraculous things.

It can map my run.
I have an app to tune a guitar.

You can have your bible on your phone or any book you choose, along with taking photographs, playing music, doing your banking and paying for things.

If you happen to be bored you can text a friend.

Speaking of which, Terry is on holiday in Portugal, lets send him a text.

[NB – I sent a text asking Terry is he was missing us with a picture of the 9:00am congregation giving him a wave. In no time he texted back...]



I think the flames were to represent Pentecost!!]

Our modern miracles can be explained, planned and programmed and they serve our needs. Because rational thought and secular ideas are the norm, the idea of God, (faith in God), and God breaking into our lives miraculously becomes an area for suspicion, or doubt, or disbelief.

The story of Pentecost has all the things that people in the modern age will be most sceptical about. How do we understand this story? How do we experience God's spirit? How can the Spirit empower us to speak into our secular age?

Throughout his time with his disciples Jesus has promised that when he goes he will send the Holy Spirit.

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He uses different titles for the Holy Spirit and these are clues to the Spirit's activity.

Spirit of truth is straightforward. It's by God's Spirit we are led into the truth.

Comforter is another title and we frequently pray for those who mourn or are troubled that they receive the comfort of God by His Spirit.

Counsellor is a third title. What is meant by this is an active wise counsel that leads...so it would be right to pray as we start a PCC meeting (or any meeting) Lord grant us your Counsel, fill us with your Spirit.

The title used in this morning's reading is Advocate and an advocate is someone who publically supports, defends and promotes a particular cause. Our son is a barrister and he will be an advocate on behalf of his client.

The Holy Spirit is the supreme advocate who promotes and supports and defends God the Son.

All of which is helpful head knowledge to understand the work of the Spirit but the disciples didn't particularly know what the experience of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit would be like.

We think that the disciples were in one of the temple courts at Pentecost therefore a reasonably public place. Pentecost was an annual celebration held 50 days after the Passover. There were all 120 of Jesus' followers it wasn't just the 12 Disciples.

The sound and sight are described as like a rushing wind and like tongues of flame, but was not wind or flame only like them. It was a physical manifestation of the Spirit's presence.

On this occasion all the disciples experienced the same thing, which was the ability to speak in other languages, but it's obvious that the languages were known ones, because it enabled the gathered Jews from here, there and everywhere to hear God being praised in their own language.

The other "speaking in tongues" that the Apostle Paul writes about to the Corinthians was a different heavenly language allowing people to pray, praise and prophesy this is also a gift and work of the Holy Spirit...at Pentecost though it seems to have been known languages.

Which of course is a miracle but was for a specific purpose; which was to witness to and to speak to the gathered crowd about Jesus Christ.

And this is the point. The gift of the Holy Spirit is to empower disciples for the purpose of witnessing to Jesus Christ.

At the first Pentecost, 3,000 were baptised and joined the new church. The gift of the Spirit to us is for the same purpose, to serve Christ and to see His church grow.

Because the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (or outpouring, or filling or whatever term is used) can bring with it strange experiences it can be sought after in order to

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have those experiences, or it can be avoided as it all sounds rather scary.

But the reason Jesus send's His spirit to us in so that we (like the first disciples) can be empowered to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

There are things to note from the Pentecost story. They were all together. So dubious doubting Thomas was there, male and female were there and young and old were there. The Spirit was given to all.

When I pray for anyone to be filled again with the Spirit, I expect all people of whatever age to receive, because God promised he would send his Spirit.

Inevitably we manage to get quite a few hang ups about being filled with God's Spirit, so lets simply dispense with those.

You cannot have come to Christ without the Holy Spirit working in your life, so every single believer has already experienced the work of the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is as it suggests – more of what we already have experienced.

Some people experience physical sensations, or have an emotional response, others don't experience anything like that. The truth of being filled with the Spirit has nothing to do with what happens or if you feel it. The answer is always yes. So we should then look to see in what way God's Spirit empowers us to live as disciples rather than chase a particular experience.

Remember too God is love. The baptism of the Spirit is the outpouring of God's love to each of those who seek

more of him and like any loving Father God will give His love to each of his children as he sees best.

As we experience the work of the Holy Spirit our lives change and it's the story of our lives that will speak most powerfully into the secular, doubting, self-centred world we live in. Of course when miracles, signs and wonders occur they too can demonstrate to the reality of God's presence and power, but there is nothing like your genuine story of God's love and grace in your life to touch the hearts of those who are searching.

Pentecost comes once a year, but I pray every day to be filled with God's Spirit. I pray it when I sit to write, or to plan, or when I visit, or when I was wobbling about on a scaffolding tower fixing the lights.

The Spirit leads into truth as we read God's word, comforts those who mourn, counsel those who seek and reveals the Son to us as Advocate. The Holy Spirit is the reality of God indwelling our lives that turns faith from being head knowledge; to something that comes alive.

At communion today there will be the opportunity to be anointed with oil and receive a simple prayer, to be filled again with the Holy Spirit and if that helps then do come. But my prayer is that whether you come for oil or remain seated or are busy serving; like the first Pentecost all will receive a blessing of God's Spirit.

Then, at the end of the communion service a moment of fulfilment as we say together...

Send us out, in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.