

**Introduction**

Imagine for a moment that you and I are walking together Down the High Street and we pass a crippled man begging for money. I have no money with me but I turn to the man and say, "I do not have Silver and gold. But what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Imagine for a moment what effect it would have on you, on the passersby and on the ministry of this church if the man got up and began to leap around praising God.

Ministry styles have changed somewhat in the past two thousand years but why is that? If the message we have to proclaim is the same message that Peter and John preached why is it that we no longer accompany the Good News with signs of God's powerful ability to transform our lives? Is it that they are no longer appropriate? Is it that they were only needed in the early years of the Christian church and that these days the message speaks for itself, not needing to be accompanied by the powerful intervention of God's Holy Spirit? Is it that we don't have the faith or courage of Peter and the early disciples or is it that we have lost the vision and somewhere along the line forgotten the plot? - I myself suspect it is the last of these reasons

In my opinion Jesus was probably the best teacher we have ever seen. His style and manner of teaching has been copied over the years and never bettered. He taught by word, proclaiming his message and helping people to understand by telling stories as well; stories that resonated in people's lives and whose vivid images brought the message home. He taught the people that God's Kingdom was going to be established on earth and that as a result people would gain freedom from sin and its effect in their lives, disease and illness would be conquered and people would be able to live to their full potential and in close relationship with God their Heavenly Father. And he showed that his teaching was true by accompanying his message by powerful signs. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and released people from the power of evil spirits.

So as he taught, he demonstrated his message, having done so he told his disciples that he was giving them the power and authority to do the same things as he had. Having watched and learned from Jesus they now had to proclaim the Good News themselves in word and action. "He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick" (*Luke 9:2*) and having learned from the master himself we read "*So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.*" (*Luke 9:6*) Having shown that his closest followers could proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom in word and deed he sent out a further 72 and when they returned he debriefed them, hearing about what they had done and using the opportunity to teach them more.

So throughout Jesus' ministry on earth the disciples worked alongside him, learning as they went and sharing Jesus' ministry to the poor and needy, the sick and sinful. After his resurrection from the dead we read in Matthew that Jesus gave some instructions to the disciples. Instructions that we now commonly call "The Great Commission" He said this to them *Read Matthew 28:18-20* .

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

He told the disciples that they were to go and make disciples, that they should baptise them and that they should teach them everything that he had taught to them.

He gave the disciples the commission and authority to carry on his ministry on earth. They were to tell people that God's rule was going to be established on earth and in their lives and they were to accompany their teaching with signs that God was at work. In the Acts of the Apostles Luke tells us that Jesus commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised anointing by the Holy Spirit. He makes it clear that the Holy Spirit will give them the power they need to bear witness to him by their words and their actions.

And as we read through the Acts of the Apostles we see the transformation that the Holy Spirit brought about in their lives. They were no longer afraid but were able to preach powerfully and clearly. The simple proclamation of the Gospel brought people to faith in Jesus not in ones and twos but by hundreds. *Acts 2 end* They were able to heal through the power of the Spirit and they were able, in the same way that Jesus had done, to recognise where God was working and be there ready to co-operate with him as he commanded them to (*Philip and Ethiopian eunuch*). There was the inevitable strong reaction from the rulers and authorities, I think it is fair to say that wherever the Gospel is proclaimed it will meet with opposition because it challenges our worldly standards and viewpoint and there will always be those who want to resist the challenge. So the disciples were persecuted and scattered and in the very scattering their message was preached more widely and people came to see the power of God at work in their lives.

*Read Acts 8:4-8* It s interesting to note that it was the miraculous signs that Philip performed that made the people pay close attention to what he said. They saw God working powerfully through Philip and so wanted to

hear what he had to say. As they listened they responded and many of them came to faith in Jesus Christ. Then we read that something interesting happened. *Read Acts 8:14-17* . There clearly was a special anointing by God's Holy Spirit. They had come to faith in Christ and had been baptised by Philip but they hadn't yet received the fullness of anointing that the apostles received at Pentecost and that Jesus himself received at his Baptism by John in the Jordan.

This special anointing was something that was open to all believers and which the apostles clearly felt should be made available to everyone. The anointing was also clearly obvious because when Simon the sorcerer saw its effects he wanted to buy it for himself. It is this anointing by God's Holy Spirit that gives us the power to live transformed lives, that enables us to conquer the sin and failure in our lives and that heals our damaged nature. This anointing also enables us to recognise what God is doing and to proclaim the Gospel powerfully in word and deed.

But it is also this anointing that we hear very little of in the way that we teach and preach our faith. The past thirty years have seen a renewed interest in the Holy Spirit and a greater expectation in many churches that God wants to work powerfully in people's lives but it is an aspect of our faith that has been largely ignored and our expectation levels have been very low, both in what we expect God to do personally in our own lives; - we accept a continued struggle with sin and failure as totally normal and get used to mediocre standards of witness; and also in what we expect God to do for other people. We are often slightly surprised when people come to faith in Christ rather than expecting it as a regular and exciting occurrence and we have no certainty when we pray that God will answer our prayers..

I became a committed Christian when I was 16. I went to a free evangelical church and when I was 17 went as a leader on a summer camp where I received an anointing by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues. It was the norm in that environment. Many of the people there did speak in tongues and received other gifts of the Spirit. It seemed to me a totally normal but very enriching gift that deepened my prayer life and my ability to worship God. I also found that he was working powerfully in me to deal with my sin, failure and hurts. Then when I was eighteen I left home to train as a Nurse and started to worship at a large evangelical church in London. There I received a thorough grounding in the Christian faith and owe a great deal to the leaders for giving me a love and knowledge of scripture. But amongst the other things that I was taught was a completely different understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individual Christians.

I was taught that the Gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy, tongues, healing; I was taught; had been given by God for a special time in history in order to advance the message of the gospel. But now that the church was established we didn't need those gifts any longer. God didn't need to speak to us directly any longer he would speak to us through his written word, the Bible. I believed that teaching and so I stopped speaking in tongues and stopped expecting to hear God speak to me directly as he had often done in the past. I thought I had been mistaken.

Nearly ten years later I was talking to a good friend of mine and discussing the struggle that we often have with sin and failure in our Christian lives. We were discussing the gap between the experience of the early Christians, who had their problems there is no doubt, but who expected to see God act directly in their lives, and our own experience which seemed to be a daily struggle with mediocrity. My friend said that he had been studying the Bible and had found no evidence in it that God had given his gifts for a limited time. So he had started to pray that God would anoint him with his Spirit and give him the gifts he needed as an ordained minister to preach the Gospel in power as the disciples had done. He had found God answering his prayers and beginning to intervene directly in his life and in the lives of those he worked and prayed with.

I thought a lot about this and wondered about my own experience. What had happened to that anointing of the Spirit I had received twelve years before? Had I lost it or had I simply suppressed it and put it aside as irrelevant. As I thought I began to pray and I asked God to reawaken in me the expectation that he could and would intervene directly in my life. I asked him to increase my faith in him, increase my expectation of what he could do in my life and I asked him to reawaken those gifts he had given me and which I no longer used.

As he always does, God responded directly to my prayer. He enabled me to start bringing things to him to deal with which in the past I had no expectation that he would. I found that he did reawaken the gifts he had given me and graciously along the way he has given me, from time to time, anointing to perform certain tasks for him. Occasionally when great faith is needed I find that he has given me a certainty that he is going to act in a certain way, sometimes I have prayed for people and seen God heal them physically, often I have found him giving me the wisdom to know what he is doing in someone's life and the ability to pray in ways that help them to wholeness and healing.

God has given us the marvelous gift of his Holy Spirit within us to equip us and enable us to do his work and proclaim the coming of his Kingdom

**Readings****The commission and equipping of the disciples****Acts 3:1-10****Foxton/Fowlmere****Luke 9:1-6**

here in the Four Church benefice. It is up to us if we choose to use his gift or not. If we wish we had more of his presence in our lives and want to see him work powerfully through us all we have to do is ask him to. When we begin our healing services in a few weeks time you may want to come forward for prayer to receive God's anointing and the fullness of his presence in your life. You may want to talk more to me about it. I know there is a gap between our lives and experience of God and the lives and experience of God the first disciples had. I also believe that there doesn't have to be.