

When I was a child and it was my turn to do some of the cleaning at home, and the carpets needed doing, I wasn't sent to get the vacuum cleaner – I was sent to get the Hoover. It didn't matter whether the current vacuum cleaner was in fact a Hoover or not – it's what we called vacuum cleaners.

In some ways something similar has happened to the word Pentecost. If the word Pentecost means anything to many people these days it will probably be something to do with the Pentecostal Church, a perhaps slightly wild sort of Christianity, very happy clappy, lots of arm waving and of course, speaking in tongues. But there is so much to the word Pentecost than that.

For the first century Jew Pentecost was the fiftieth day after the Passover. It was originally an agricultural festival. It was the day when the farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop, and offered it to God, partly as a sign of gratitude and partly a prayer that the rest of crop would be safely gathered in.

But for the Jew neither Passover nor Pentecost were simply agricultural festivals – they awakened echoes of the great story that dominated the long memories of Jewish people, the story of the Exodus from Egypt, when God fulfilled his promise to Abraham by rescuing his people. The Passover remembered the day when the Israelites were finally allowed to leave Egypt after the killing by the avenging angel of the first born of all Egyptians but the Israelite families were passed over from that dreadful fate. Then 50 days later, they came to Mount Sinai and Moses received the law from God on which the Jewish people then based their lives. Pentecost. The fiftieth day.

But then, all those years later, Pentecost suddenly had a different meaning altogether when the promised gift from God arrived – the Spirit of God. So was that a new thing only heard of in the New Testament? Certainly not.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1: 1-2). The Spirit of God made its appearance in the second verse of our bibles.

But it doesn't stop there.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. (Exodus 31 – and the creation of the decorations in the tabernacle). Those decorations were not going to be created by a human but by the Spirit of God. And then . . .

So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When Moses could no longer deal with all the issues arising in the Jewish people, he appointed 70 people to help him – with the Spirit of God.

And the mentions go on. Saul was anointed with the Spirit of God, as was David, who was to replace him when Saul did not do a good job.

The Spirit of God has always been around – but at the specific bequest of God. Now that is all about to change.

We have arrived at the end of this sermon series – the life and ministry of Jesus. Last week we celebrated the Ascension – Jesus returning to heaven to be with his father – to sit at the Father's right

hand – the most exalted place you can be in heaven. So that was surely the end. Why didn't we stop there? Last week I told you I would explain that this week – so . . .

The reason is not just the leaving present that Jesus left for the disciples – in fact for all of us disciples. It is more that the gift of the Holy Spirit was the reason for the life and ministry of Jesus.

One of the early events that we looked at in this series was the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Up until that point Jesus had been leading a normal life – or so we think happened, but I do wonder how someone who was perfect, was without sin, could really lead a normal life, but let's put that to one side. He had been leading this normal life for 30 years.

He had a childhood that was not uneventful – parents losing a child for a few days as Mary and Joseph did in Jerusalem can hardly be called uneventful – especially when he was found engaging with the great and wise people of the temple and then treated his parents as if they should have known where he was – “Why are you worried?” Perhaps parenting skills were not yet developed in the 12 year old Jesus.

But for those 30 years, as far as we know, Jesus worked as a carpenter to support his family – we believe that his father Joseph died at some point before Jesus was 30 so Jesus had to wait until his younger siblings could support their mother before leaving. There was no calling of disciples. There was no teaching about his Father God. There were no healings, no miracles, no arguments with Jewish officials.

And then Jesus was baptised. ‘and the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven. “You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased.”’ And then, and only then, Jesus’ ministry began. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was able to do what Jesus did.

From the start of his Ministry to the end, Jesus’ link to his Father God was through the power of the Holy Spirit. So it is the leaving of the Holy Spirit with his disciples, that Holy Spirit that enabled Jesus to do what Jesus did, and that Holy Spirit that is with all those that believe in him, that marks the end of Jesus’ ministry on earth – which is why we come to the end of our sermon series today.

We have already looked at the origins of this Spirit of God, so now let's look at what first those disciples, and then we, can do with it. But first let's remind ourselves of what is actually being given to the disciples. In chapter 1: 4-8 we have this

‘While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”’

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”’

So a couple of things from that passage. First, John baptised with water – that we know – but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, he was baptised with water by John, but then he was baptised by the Holy Spirit by God. The dove came down afterwards. It was like that was a real moment of transition. Those disciples, we assume, were probably also baptised by John or his disciples when Jesus was, and now they also will be baptised with the Holy Spirit. And then second, when they are baptised by the Holy Spirit, or when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they will receive power. To me what Jesus is saying here is that in order to God's work you need a form of power.

You can't ring someone up if your phone's battery is flat. You will get very weary very quickly if you don't eat. Your car will be unable to get you from a to b without fuel – whether that be petrol, diesel, or electricity. Those situations all need power in order to work properly.

And you cannot operate as a fully fledged disciples of Jesus without the power that the Holy Spirit gives you. That is why it is such an important gift for Jesus to leave behind – that power, that has always very selectively been available at, what often seems like God's whim, is now available to everyone who believes in his Son Jesus Christ.

And the first thing the Holy Spirit enabled those disciples to do was to communicate with people. But it was clearly not a gentle conversation – because of what happened, because of the noise (I assume from the wind and the flames), something drew a crowd. The arrival of the Holy Spirit on these now 12 disciples (Matthias has replaced Judas by this point) clearly made an impact on people and a crowd gathered. Was it just that the disciples could speak to people in their own language that made some in the crowd suggest they were drunk. That doesn't sound very likely. But I rather think it is the energy that these disciples are showing, the ability to do what they want, to draw people to them, to exude the power that they now must have created quite a showing.

No gentle conversations at this stage. No, 'excuse me, do you have a moment' type of introduction.

No they were showing that they were now different. And then, Enter Peter. And he preached his first sermon, and what a result. We don't hear all this in today's reading but by explaining that Jesus was the Messiah who was prophesied in their Jewish scriptures, Peter convinced 3,000 people to become followers of Jesus. Such a change in Peter, such a transformation in the man that asked so many questions of Jesus whilst he was alive, who frequently said the wrong thing, who denied Jesus 3 times when he felt his life was at risk. Such is the power of the Holy Spirit.

So this morning I ask you this. Do you feel the power of the Holy Spirit in you? Do we as a church generate such excitement in people that they accuse us of being drunk. How good are we at spreading the message of Jesus Christ. Are we good at enough at showing that being a Christian is not a dull, boring existence, but is what we were created to be, it is what fills that missing part in so many lives that more belongings, better holidays, can only fill for a short time before that gap appears again. These are the questions we constantly need to ask ourselves and my concern, my fear, is that we are simply not letting the Holy Spirit work in us in the way that it wants to.

Is it enough for us to sit in our churches on a Sunday morning and worship our God? Yes worshipping God should be, must be, at the centre of our lives. But the disciples didn't stay in that room after they had received the Holy Spirit. They came out looking for people. They wanted to share the good news with people, and that is what we must do. We must metaphorically remove the walls of our church buildings. We mustn't hide – people must be aware of what we as Christians, as followers of, and believers in, Jesus do – and it is with the power of the Holy Spirit that we can do that. Our worship shouldn't be considered dull and boring – we need to adapt to make it meaningful to those are searching. And the very act of trying to achieve these things should bring excitement to our lives. As it did to those disciples. And just looked what they achieved – without the Holy Spirit, without those Holy Spirit filled disciples, there would be no church today.

Amen