

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 23 May 2021
Services: *Across the diocese*
Series: *one off for Pentecost*
Title: Spirit descends
Passage: Acts 2:1-13
Aim: To explain clearly the background, purpose and phenomena of the gift of the Holy Spirit and to challenge us as to whether we believe that we are indwelt by the one and the same Spirit and whether we draw on His power to witness to the resurrected Jesus.
Outline: **The Day**
The Descent; and then
The Difference (this makes)

It's Pentecost... what a great day remembering that God has actually **taken up residence in each one of us by his Spirit...**

Acts 2 is where we'll spend our time this morning, where we read about the descent of the Holy Spirit and how the first disciples were inundated with **new life**.

Sudden, unmerited, irresistible new life!

What does it mean... sounds all a bit fantastic – and... all such a long time ago...

And does it have anything to do with **me** and the church **today?** //

Did you know that while 88% of Australians say church is beneficial for the community, only 15% (1 in 7) attend church monthly?

Church attendance in Aust has declined by 48% since 1976... and **24%** of the church population is over **60**

And here we are trying to start new **contemporary** services in several places; trying to get new young clergy out to serve in the west!

Are we **mad??**

Are we setting ourselves up to **fail?** //

If there was **no Holy Spirit** – that **may well be the case...!**

But the work of the Spirit is to empower us to **witness** to **Jesus** and **equip** us in his **service...** so we **press on**, knowing that **none** of what we try to do do we do **alone** / or in our **own strength!** //

So let's look at God's **staggering gift of His Spirit** by exploring this Acts 2 passage this way:

1. The **Day**
2. The **Descent;** and then
3. The **Difference**

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1. The Day

So ch 2 v1: *When the day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place.* (Also known at the Festival of weeks)

All together: how many? – 1:15 – 120 (not the sum total of believers... you'll recall in 1 Cor 15 – Jesus appeared to more than 500 at one time)... but the total in **Jerusalem**.

They were gathered there **50 days** after the **Passover** – and of course - **50 days** after the crucifixion of **Jesus**.

Deuteronomy 16:16 required all Israelite men to “appear before God” – 3 times a year - Festival of **Unleavened Bread**, the Festival of **Weeks** and the Festival of **Tabernacles**...

this meant making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for each of these.

But the **inception** of **this** festival (of unleavened bread) may be a clue for why the gift of the Spirit happened on **this day**.

The very first time this day was put aside was **50 days** after the Israelites had escaped from **Egypt**.

It was the celebration of **Moses** and the **chosen people** encountering God on **Mt Sinai**.

At this encounter they received the **law** by which they, the chosen people should **respond** to God's gracious and powerful rescue from **Egypt**. //

The people of God at God's command were '**consecrated**' – ie 'set aside for a special purpose' -

Set aside as His chosen people!

So.... this day of Pentecost was right from the **start**, a day of **amazing** and real **encounter** with **God**. The promise made to Abraham of a nation of people was being fulfilled! //

It was a day when people celebrated and God celebrated with them by saying:

“I will be your God and you will be my people!”

They left behind the past (Egypt and slavery) and the launched forth into freedom to serve God in the land he had promised them.

So this day was to be seen as an occasion of **new life** – ne life for all the chosen people.

And it was **that** which the 120 Jerusalem believers were gathered to celebrate

And what a great day for the Holy Spirit to descend and **once again** bring an end to the **old** and a **beginning** of something **new**. To **commission** his people once **more!**

End to **slavery to sin and death**. Beginning of **new life** of **service** to the **risen Christ!**

It was a brand new day in the life of Jesus' disciples.

As the **Passover festival** had been superseded by the **Lord's supper**, so the **historic** day of **Pentecost** and its former relevance was superseded by the **Gift of the Spirit**.

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2. The Descent

So the power promised by Jesus in Acts chapter one verses 5 and 8 and in Luke 24:49 now comes upon the believers.

Look with me at verses 2-3:

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”

The original language will help us to understand what those present would have understood – for the Greek word used is translated elsewhere as ‘**breath**’ (Acts 17:25)... you will recall John 20:22 – where Jesus **breathes** on his disciples and they receive the Holy Spirit (although another word is actually used there)

And these tongues of flames were not just **sparks** or a **small flare** that is often portrayed in classical art - they were a **mighty flame** and it **separated** and **rested** on each of those **present**...

And among the people of God who knew their Scripture they would remember that from time to time the Spirit of God made himself known in visible, audible and tangible ways.

- Moses encountered God in a burning **bush**
- The people of Israel were led by a cloud by day and pillar of **fire** by night.

Wind and fire and other signs – indications God was at work doing something extraordinary...

This wind is the breath of God, and **there** is new life!

- Did not God’s spirit – his **breath** - **move** over the **deep**?
- Did not God **breathe life** into the **nostrils** of **Adam**?
- Did not Job state that the **spirit** of God has **made** me and the **breath** of the almighty gives me life?
- Did not Jesus himself declare that it is the **spirit** that gives **life**?
- And here now – on the day of **Pentecost** – His **Spirit** came among us and entered into **every believer**!

But that was just one aspect of the HS coming...

Have a look with me – v4 *all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them*

Back in Ch 1 Jesus had said: *You will have power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you... **and you will be my witnesses**...*

Then – ch 2 – **immediately** the gift is given... the crowd who had journeyed to Jerusalem for Pentecost now hear proclaimed in their own language, words of **witness** from the **120** believers.

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What an **incredible** thing to have been a part of!

What an **amazing** experience for those gathered to have felt and known!

God giving his **own Spirit** to every **believer**....

You'll remember in Genesis 11 – when the people built a tower to establish themselves as the great power of the universe – God confused their language and **scattered** them...

Now – he **gathers** people from the four corners of the earth and unites them as **one** as they hear the wonders of God in their own **language**.

A **remarkable miracle of God**... and absolutely **strategic** so that when these people returned **home** after the **festival**... what will they take with them? The **news** of the **wonders of God**...

So the promise that the disciples will be given power to be witnesses / was now upon them in an **abundantly clear way**.

Finally

3. THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

v12 – amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this **mean**?”

That's a **great question**!

It's a great question for us – ‘what does this mean’?

The wind **comes**.

The fire **rests**.

...and the crowd hears the disciples speaking in their own language.

Luke even lists the places where people had come from; so **clearly** does he want to portray that this is **no inner mystical experience** – but an outpouring of God's spirit that touches **every single life present**.

Some want to make light of it – ‘they've had a bit much to drink mate...!’ ...but the retort comes in the following passage – it's **only 9am!** //

The wind, the fire, the languages...

3 clear signs

120 people....

No – this is was something **remarkable !! //**

God's Spirit had been unleashed! ///

But let's for **our part now**, ask: ‘what does this mean?’ ...all these thousands of years later?

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The Spirit has come...!

The Spirit came upon the believers **that** day... and on **all believers who followed since!**

Everyone who **repents** and **believes**, receives God's **Holy Spirit**... it's not possible to **BE** Christian without the **Spirit**.

That **same Spirit** is empowering **US** to proclaim the wonders of God as it did those **first** believers...!

We have an **advantage** here out here in the **west**...

Just about everyone speaks **English!**

We don't **need** God's miraculous work to **change** our **speech**.

But we do need him to give us **boldness!** //

Many of us are so **shy** about our trust in **Jesus**...

...we're **awkward, embarrassed, ashamed**.

We fear **ridicule** and **rejection**

Fear being **misunderstood**

Fear being labelled a **Bible basher**

We fear being asked a **question** we can't **answer**

We're scared of being a **challenged** with an **intellectual argument** for which we don't have a **comeback**.

So we don't say **anything**... we keep everything **safe** and **nice**...

Of course not all of us are called to be **evangelists** – please don't hear me saying that...

... but with the **Holy Spirit's help**... **each** and **every one** of should be able to say – "**I'm a Christian**"

And we are called upon to have an **answer** ready for anyone who asks us for the **reason** for the **hope** we **have!**

We should be able to clearly say:

"**Jesus** is God's **Son**"

"**because** Jesus died again, I have been **forgiven** and **reconciled** to **God**"

"I know I have **eternal life**"

...for the Holy Spirit empowers believers to **witness** to the **resurrection reality!** /

If 120 of them on day 1 could speak other languages to tell the wonders of God... is it not possible for of us to tell just **something** of the wonders of God in **English?** //

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There are great signs here that God's Holy Spirit is at work among us....

Three new **ministers** as of the end of last year

A gifted **ministry consultant** who will help parishes think through what they're doing

A seminar in Parkes the other weeks on God and suffering where 120 turned up

Parish councils working through long term issues in the church...

More conversations happening with potential candidates for ministry...

More people hungry now for the word of God and open to change in the way we do things...

A greater **clarity** about the gospel **itself!**

I **rejoice** in these signs of God's work //

Are we in the first stages of a genuine **awakening?**

Are there are many among us who **long** for God to be at work by His Spirit... **in** and **through** us... to bring many **more** into **relationship** with **him** – and are praying to that end!!

Do you actually **believe** in the power of the Holy Spirit to change people's lives?

- in **YOUR** life...?

Do you believe you are **indwelt** by the **Holy Spirit** and have been given **power** to **witness** to the power of **Jesus** in your life??

If you are a **believer**... the HS **HAS** taken up residence in you!!

Submit yourself to his **transforming power**

And **draw** from his power to **witness** to **Jesus**...

And pray that his power... would bring refreshment and new life in our Diocese... revival in our diocese... to the glory of God!!