

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

Date: 1st May 2022
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: New beginnings
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
What this means for us

last week we saw from Acts 1 that the **early church** – **AND** our **gospel work** in our **Diocese** - was founded on – **must** be founded on:

1. **Resurrection reality** – Jesus really did rise
2. **Holy Spirit Power** – power to witness to Christ
3. **Future hope** – ie of the return of the Lord Jesus – which means two things - assurance justice in the new heavens and the new earth, **AND** the certainty of coming **judgment**; which should give us an urgency in the cause of the gospel

Finally – the early church – and all our work here, must be founded on:

4. Constant **prayer** (they all joined together in prayer – first thing they did after Jesus ascended)

Now, following Jesus' **ASCENT**, we explore in Acts 2:1-13, the Holy Spirit's **DESCENT** and how the **first** disciples were **inundated** with **new life**.

Sudden, **unmerited, irresistible new life!** //

But that question that I like to ask all the time when studying God's word is: so what?

This is all seems such a **long time ago**...

What does it **mean**...? sounds all a bit fantastic – is it **far-fetched**...

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 **regularly** - once a month? (Weekly – it would be way less!)

Church attendance in Aust has declined by **48%** since **1976**... and **24%** of the church population nationally is over **60 years of age** – **that percentage way higher in our diocese**

And yet here we are longing to see new **life** in our **churches** – wanting to reach those under 60.., we are longing to see our churches **full** once **more**...

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Are we **mad**?? //

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

IF THERE WAS NO **HOLY SPIRIT** – that **may** well be the **case**...!

But God did send his Spirit and he empowers Christians today – and he empowers the work of the gospel and the mission of the church TODAY!

So let's look at Acts 2:1-13 and God's amazing **gift** of His Spirit, by exploring the significance of

1. The **Day**
2. The **Descent**; and then by asking
3. What does this **mean**?

1. The Day – the day of Pentecost

So ch 2 v1: *When the day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place.*

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

They were gathered there **50 days** after the **Passover** – and of course - **50 days** after the **crucifixion** of **Jesus** for a feast that was pre-existing in the life of Israel.

So Pentecost wasn't invented when the Holy Spirit came, Pentecost was a long-standing festival, otherwise known as the Festival of weeks

What was this feast about? - The very first time this day was called, was **50 days** after the Israelites had escaped from **Egypt**!

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

At that encounter they received the **laws** by which they, the chosen people should **respond** to God's **gracious** and powerful **rescue – redemption** - from **Egypt**

At that encounter, the people of God were **consecrated** – ie 'set aside for a special purpose' - set aside **as His chosen people** – to show the rest of the world the brilliant nature of being in a relationship with God.

So the **original** day of Pentecost, marked an **end** to the old time of being subdued by the Egyptians and under slavery, to the rescuing of the people where they were free to serve the Lord in freedom.

It was in itself, a day of **amazing** and real **encounter** with **God**. //

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! ///

It was both an **end** and a **beginning**; the leaving-behind of that which was **past (Egypt and slavery)** and the launching forth into that which was **starting (freedom to serve God in the land he was to give them)**

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The book of Jubilees, a Jewish text written 150 years before Christ portrayed this day as a ‘...pregnant moment in the life of the people of God...Pentecost/festival of weeks was seen as a moment when gestation ceases and birthing occurs...’

So it was already a day when new birth was celebrated – new birth as the people of God

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

And what a **great day then** 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**.

The beginning of **new life of service** in the service of the risen **Christ**

It was a **brand new day in the life of Jesus’ disciples**. It was in fact the **birth** of the **church**.

Now, as the **Passover festival** had been superseded by the **Lord’s supper**, so was the day of **Pentecost** was superseded by the **Gift of the Holy Spirit – a day we now celebrate annually – which we’ll do on 5th June!**
//

Let’s look secondly at:

2. The Descent

So the power **promised** by Jesus in Acts chapter 1 verses 5 and 8 and in Luke 24:49 now comes upon the believers.

We saw last week - it was a power to **witness** to the **resurrection** - and at Pentecost, this power emerged in an a **most wonderful way!**

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)

So what is happening here is that God is breathing LIFE into his people.

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

Those there who knew their Scriptures that day, knew that from time to time, the Spirit of God had **made himself known** in **visible, audible and tangible ways**. //

- **Moses** encountered God in a **burning bush**

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- The people of **Israel** were led by a cloud by **day** and **pillar of fire** by **night**.
- At Jesus' **baptism** the heavens tore apart and the spirit **descended** on him like a **dove**
- And at his **crucifixion**, an **earthquake happened**, a **darkening** of the **sky** occurred

So, God had made himself known at various times with **audible** and **visible** demonstrations of his **presence** and **power**.

Wind and **fire** – a sure sign God was at work doing something **extraordinary**...

This wind is the **breath** of **God**, and fire **here in this incident** is his **new life**!

Wind is Spirit – Spirit is wind... pneuma... you'll recognise the word

- 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 Elijah hide his **face** when the **wind** passed him **by**
- Did not Jesus **himself** declare that the **spirit gives** life?
 - So here now – on the day of **Pentecost** – His **Spirit comes** among **God's people**!
 - **Unmistakable** to the **discerning**... ////

But there's one **final** manifestation of the Spirit's **dramatic descent** into the **lives** of these **believers** is reported.

We've seen the wind, we've seen the fire, but what about the different languages these people were speaking?

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*

Remember what Jesus had promised power to be witnesses in Ch 1 ? *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 of people who without a doubt had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Pentecost or festival of weeks, now hear **proclaimed** in their **own** language, words of **witness** from the **120** gathered **together**.

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

A clear sign God is doing something remarkable.. //

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They are enabled to speak different languages so that those who gathered from so many different parts of the surrounds – the names and places are all laid out there – and everyone can hear the disciples speaking in their own languages

...and this was absolutely **strategic** /// for all of those people who had come from different places would go back to where they had come from and speak of what they had seen and heard.... And of the news of Jesus who had died and was raised from the dead ///

Finally

3. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

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

That’s a **great** question to **ask!**

It’s a great question for **US** to us this morning – what does this **mean?**

The wind **comes**.

The fire **rests**.

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

120 people....

3 clear signs.... /

something **remarkable was happening!!**

Yes - God’s Holy Spirit had been released - **unleashed!** - in the lives of all God’s people!

But *‘what does this mean?’* for us???

It means simply this::

The Spirit has come...! //

The Spirit came upon the **believers that** day... and came upon **all believers since**

Everyone who **repents** and **believes in Jesus crucified and risen, 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 in those **first believers...!** ///

We have an advantage 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! Courage!**

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

...we're shy, **awkward // embarrassed** when it comes to saying anything about the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

We fear being **misunderstood**

or being labelled a **Bible basher**

or being asked a **question** we can't **answer**

or being challenged with an intellectual **argument** for which we won't have an easy answer....

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

No – we're not all called to be **evangelists**...

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

In other words, people are to see in our lives by the way we live, by the way we react to people, by our generosity, by the things we do for others, by our involvement in the local church and the people of God; they're to see that we are radically different... and when they see that we're radically different – that we have joy and hope and peace and assurance and comfort and a perspective on life – they will ask us: “how come in the face of everything that is going on around us in the world right now, you're keeping calm, you have a certain joy, you have a perspective on life that allows you to keep going; why is that??”

Will you have an answer??

First – can I ask – IS your life so radically different from those around that they are likely to ask that question?? – “Why are you so different?”

And when they do, will you have an answer?

Will you say something about Jesus?

We ought all be able to say – “I'm a **Christian**”

Three words – can you say that?

Three words! We all ought be able to say that!

We **all** ought to be able to say

“Jesus is God who came to visit us as a human being”

We **all** ought to be able to say **“through his death and resurrection, I know I have forgiveness and eternal life”**

Can you say that?

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We all ought to be able to say that our relationship with God is something that changes our life everyday and impacts us everyday

Are you able to say that?

...friends, the Holy Spirit **empowers** believers to **witness** to the **resurrection reality!**

...back then... and here right now.

If 120 of them on that day could speak **other languages** to tell the **wonders** of God... is it not possible for us - empowered by the same Holy Spirit, to tell just **something** of the wonders of God in **English?** //

Brothers and sisters - there are **great** signs here that God's **Holy Spirit IS** at work among us....

There's new life among us... there are **new Christians in some of our churches**... a **new** congregation at the Cathedral.... new **clergy** in some of our **churches**...

I feel that there is a fresh **hunger** for the word of God

A feel that there **IS** a desire now to reach people who do not know Jesus... with the saving news of Jesus...

God **IS** at **work** here **by his Holy Spirit**... //

many among us **long** for God to be at work by His **Spirit**... **in** and **through** us... to bring **many** more people into relationship with **him?**

Many of us long for people to **hear** the **wonders** of God – **see** great **signs** of God -- and start asking **“what does this mean?”**

Do you actually **believe** in the power of the **Holy Spirit** to **work in** and **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 God's **work** in your life? – to witness to your **experience** of **Jesus??** //

Then... don't hold **back!**

Walk **closely** with God by his Spirit – and pray for **opportunities** by his **Holy Spirit** – to tell others **something** of the reality of Jesus.

Allow God's spirit – to give you **boldness** and **courage**...

Pray you'll be given **wisdom** and **clarity** – to know **when** to say something about **Jesus** and **how** to say **it**...

And **pray** with me – that through the **empowering** of God's **Spirit**... **many** of us... will be **released** from our **shyness** and **fears** – to become **confident** in who we are as **believers** – so that **more** people will ask us why we are people of **joy** and **hope**.... //

Our world is facing **massive challenge**...

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Two years of **COVID and massive disruption**

Upheaval in political leadership in our **own** nation

And international **turmoil** unmatched in recent **years**

Many people are looking around for some **assurance** – some **answers** – some **comfort** – some **perspective...**

And we have **masses** of **all that** to **share...!**

Joy and life and assurance and hope and comfort and promise of a new future is found in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ...

Pray that all of us who are Christians in central and western NSW – will increasingly **share Jesus** – so that others will find the **life** in **him**, **WE** have been **blessed** to **find!**

The Spirit has **come!!**