

Pentecost

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[0 : 00] Are you suspicious of free gifts? Maybe we've been made suspicious by the power of advertising, you know, free phone, free data, free internet access. After all, we all love a bargain, don't we? But at the back of everyone's mind, I guess there's that question of where's the catch?

That can't be free, can it? And that can make us not only suspicious, but it can make us cynical. Is any gift really free? Well, today we recall one of the biggest free gifts that we were ever given. It was promised by Jesus to his followers and they were waiting and they were expectant for something to arrive. And it did. Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit for all people, not just a few, but for all people. What's the catch? There is no catch. The gift, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is poured out for all people, for you and for me. And yet, sadly, sadly, many Christians dismiss God's gift. They accept everything else, the hymns, the songs, the robes, the buildings, the traditions, the fridge magnets with the Bible verses on. That's fine. But often they dismiss this tangible and life-changing gift. You see, I strongly believe that being a Christian without having accept the gift of the Holy Spirit is a bit like owning a car and then not putting any fuel in it, or if it's electric, not charging it up. It looks good on the drive, you can polish it, but it doesn't really do anything or go anywhere. It just sits there, maybe looking good, but at times often gathering dust. And that was my story for many years. That was part of my Christian faith, sat parked, inactive on the drive of my life. I never realised the potential, the power of the Holy Spirit and what that could do for me and through me. In our reading today, Jerusalem was teeming with people. People were packed into Jerusalem. Jesus said to his disciples to wait, wait for this gift that's going to come. And faithfully, they waited until this day. The people in the crowd knew the disciples. They had seen them. They had seen them with Jesus. And when that gift came, they saw the difference. The disciples had been radically changed. The power of the Holy Spirit was present with them and in them.

They had come alive. They were exuberant, bold and courageous. And that was the struggle, you see, for the establishment and for some, because they pointed the finger and said, oh dear, tut, tut, tut. They must be drunk. No, they haven't. They're just filled and exuberant because they've been freed. They have been freed to speak about Jesus. They've experienced the grace, the love, the peace, the presence of God, the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

As Bishop Peter said, you know, the gifts were stirred up in them. They were freed. They've been freed from all that bound them, from the fear, the doubts, the insecurity.

[3 : 30] They were empowered to speak out the good news in the power of the Holy Spirit. And maybe you are longing to be set free from something in order to share Jesus with others. Just ask today and receive.

Many years back, I remember there was a move of the Holy Spirit. It was a large move of the Holy Spirit across the land, but it started in a small church in Toronto. And people were so ready to point the finger. They pointed the finger at John Wimber, Reverend David Watson, David Bishop, David Pitches, so many, and said, oh, you know, it's all hype. No, it was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It's amazing how we can all get cynical and suspicious when God reminds us of something that was just as fresh today as it was 2,000 years ago. You see, God often sends a burning bush into our lives, fire to seize our attention. Listen, get warmed up, the Spirit of God saying, I am here. It was true for John Wesley as we celebrated his celebration last Sunday. You know, that great move of the Holy Spirit in his life that transformed the church and the movement in this country. This is for all people. Have you experienced that? In these times of social distancing, the doorbell rang last week. And as I opened the door, this was left on the doorstep.

[5 : 07] It's for you. Now, I didn't know what was inside until I opened it and explored all the gifts that had been sent for Mandy and I. Someone had taken a lot of time, a lot of love, a lot of care, and

there was quite a bit of cost involved as well. And surely it's courtesy to open the box, to receive the fullness of what it is and give thanks and thank you for the gift. It would be a waste, frankly, and quite rude to just leave it unopened on the doorstep.

I was one of those people, a Christian who failed to open that box for years. And in fact, sometimes I was one of those who mocked others who had opened the box for their exuberance in worship and praise, how wrong I was. Because I remember the day very clearly, my Pentecost day, when I received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into my life. I asked and said to the Lord, am I really special to you?

And there was this outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And wow, it's a day that changed and transformed my life. Ask me and I'll happily tell you the story. Pentecost encourages us to receive and be filled with the Holy Spirit afresh today, to break any suspicion or cynicism that we may have over the gift that Jesus promises and as it was delivered and will be delivered as and when we ask.

It is there for us as we pray to stir up the gifts in us that will empower us to not only shape us, but to shape the lives of others in the community that we serve.

Have you opened the box and explored the gifts? How do I do that? You say in Ephesians 5.18, it says be filled with the Holy Spirit. And that filling means just being kept on, being filled. This isn't like Oliver Twist for us to go and beg with a bowl of God and say, give us some more. No, this is freely poured out again and again and again for all of us, for all believers. I'd invite you to do that now, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because I could do with that now. An advertiser said, I think, it's the gift that just keeps on giving. So maybe this morning with me, maybe just hold out your hand as though you're expectant, as we all are, in readiness to receive. And shall we pray together?

[7 : 58] Father, on this Pentecost Day, Holy Spirit, would you come into our lives? Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. And thank you for offering that gift to me now. I accept all that you have for me. Come into my life, that I may experience you as comforter and friend of all. And stir up the gifts in me. Stir them up to overflowing with your love, your peace and your power. And may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.