

The Greatest Download Ever (Pentecost)

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[0 : 00] Hi everybody, it's good to have you with us today, online or actually live in church, and to start by wishing you all a very happy Pentecost.

I realized that my education was incomplete when I heard one of my grandchildren say, behind my back, hoping I wouldn't hear, Granddad's got bingo wings.

I had no idea what bingo wings were, but slightly imagined it might have put me in the realm of Superman or something like that. But no, apparently bingo wings are when the muscle in your upper arm starts to decay as you get older and the skin becomes a little more saggy.

That's what's called bingo wings. As you know, if you spend any time bedridden in your life, one of the things that happens is that your body starts to atrophy at quite a high speed.

In fact, you don't have to spend too long in bed before, when it comes your time to get out of bed, the people in hospital have to teach you how to walk again.

[1 : 16] But I want you to ponder a question on this Pentecost Sunday. I wonder if you think that there's any danger whatsoever.

That given the church has not been able to express itself in its normal mode, whether or not you fear that the church itself may have atrophied.

I wonder what you would say to the question as you reflect on this lockdown period. I wonder what you would say if somebody were to ask you, how are you spiritually?

I guess most of you would use the language we nearly always use when somebody asks us a question like that, and we'd say, oh, fine. But is it?

Speaking personally, I found it really tough, despite the very best efforts of our church leaders to keep us in touch via this online content.

[2 : 18] I found it really difficult to keep going. I mean, one of the things I've noticed, and this may be just me, but generally speaking, I have a high level of self-discipline.

But during lockdown, this seems to have fallen apart whatsoever. However, I know that at the moment, much is being written and speaking to fellow ministers and people in churches.

There's a lot of fear around, and the fear can be expressed something like this. What do you think the church will be like when we all come back?

It's an interesting question, and none of us can answer that question with any great certainty. But this much we know, it won't be quite the same.

Well, I'm here this morning to tell you two things. One is that whatever happens, the church will survive. And secondly, I want to try and teach you this morning how it is that the church will survive.

[3 : 23] What I want to say to you is very basic as to what will save the church. Maybe the only thing that will save the church going forward, and that is that we need a movement of the Holy Spirit within the church.

And surely there's no better day than we can talk about that than Pentecost Sunday. But I hear you say to yourself, yeah, you know, yeah, the church definitely needs a move of the Holy Spirit.

But the church, of course, is people like you and me. And I wonder if you own up to the fact that actually, in the light of this lockdown, or maybe for the very first time, it wouldn't be a bad thing if there was a move of the Holy Spirit inside you.

And of course, to admit that takes humility and courage, qualities that very often we find difficult to lay hold of.

Our reading today takes us back to what has been called the birthday of the church, the story of the church's first Pentecost. A group of just 120 believers are gathered together.

[4 : 43] They're in Jerusalem. And after Jesus' ascension, I imagine there's a little fear and anxiety around. Certainly, life had not been easy for Jesus in the immediate run-up to his crucifixion.

There's always the danger that the authorities in Jerusalem might take a dim view of these Christians and do what they could to wipe them out. I imagine this was a time of great uncertainty and fear.

I imagine the early disciples saying to themselves, now what? Well, look, they were told certain things by Jesus.

And the amazing thing is, they just did them. The first thing they were told was that they needed to stay in Jerusalem, with all the attendant anxiety that went with that.

Second, they were told in chapter 1 of the Acts to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. But they weren't told how long that wait would be. They were told that they would receive power from on high.

[5 : 53] And then they're told that they would be Jesus' witnesses to the end of the earth. Their response, of course, was to do exactly what Jesus had asked of them.

They did stay in Jerusalem. And significantly, they prayed together, prayed constantly, says chapter 1 of Acts. They waited as they'd been directed for that power on high.

And they did receive that power. And they became multicultural witnesses. In verse 11 of chapter 2, we read that people heard about the amazing works of God in their own language.

I guess you come to an end of a reading like our reading today. And maybe think to yourself, why is the church not what the church could be?

Or to bring it a little closer to home, why is my life with God not what it could be? Why do I end up like St. Paul, doing the things that I want to avoid and not doing the things that I really ought to do?

[7 : 08] There's a simple answer to all those questions. But simple doesn't mean superficial. It's because we find it very difficult to believe that we can have a life in the Spirit.

That in the end, many of us in our modern society, and maybe throughout the ages, we do not live lives of supernatural empowerment.

Of course, big question there as to why that might be. There are a whole number of factors that come into play. Fear. Maybe frightened that if I live life in the Spirit, that people would write me off as some kind of weird religious fundamentalist.

Or unworthiness. I imagine there'll be some people listening to this message at home or in church who kind of think to themselves, all this talk of the Spirit is not for people like me.

I'm too sinful. I'm too unworthy. Or it may be ignorance. I was interested that when Paul wrote in Corinthians about the gifts of the Spirit, he said, we don't want you to remain in ignorance, brethren.

[8 : 30] Maybe we just don't know enough about the Spirit. Or indifference. Somebody said that the attitude of a lot of Christians in the Western church is simply whatever.

that kind of indifference. Or faithlessness. Or maybe we've had a damaging experience at the hands of people who claim that they have been touched by the Holy Spirit.

Or maybe we're growing a root of something destructive within ourselves, like unforgiveness or bitterness. I tried it before, and it didn't work.

Somebody said that should be written outside every Church of England church in the country. And all this stuff, of course, is highly damaging because it means that we will never be what God wants us to be.

And I want to ask you today whether or not you can rise above those things that pull you down. Are you willing to do what's necessary?

[9 : 42] And I want to end by suggesting what might be helpful based on this reading that we had in Acts chapter 2. Firstly, I wonder if today you would be prepared to commit maybe just for two minutes a day to pray intentionally for the Holy Spirit to fill you.

Just two minutes. Do you think you could spare that and maybe in your heart covenant with God to do that?

Pray that God would fill you with the Spirit. Second, ask God to show you the one thing that holds you back. Maybe an obsession with sex very current in our present society.

An obsession with sex that traps you into lust and a pornography addiction. It may be that root of bitterness or envy or unforgiveness.

And maybe it is that you need to start to believe that if you embrace what God has for you that your life would be different.

[10 : 59] God sent his Holy Spirit to the church interestingly. Not that we might sing a little more lustily or wave our arms or jig around in worship or metaphorically swing from the chandeliers.

Not that I have any problem with any of that. But God sent the Spirit to empower to empower you in your Christian life in your walk with God to do what?

Well, the Bible teaches us Romans 5 that when the Spirit fills us God's love is shed abroad in our hearts.

It helps us to know that we're never alone that God is always present with us. It convicts us of right and wrong so that our Christian mind is working well and thus we can walk more closely with Jesus. And it gives us a new confidence with God to believe that with him maybe all things are possible. And it fires up our hearts for witness.

[12 : 14] I wonder if today you might be willing to be open for what God wants to do in your life. I watch those programs on television or those card games when there comes a moment of decision.

Will you stick or will you twist? Will you take the £64,000 home that you've won or do you want to answer some more questions and get £128,000?

Do you want to stick with the hand you've got or do you want to twist and add some more cards? Will you stick or twist?

Means do you want to go further or do you want to stick with what you have? I think that's a very critical question for people like me and for people like you.

And so as we see the finishing post for lockdown in sight I believe that God wants to ask his church us do you want to stick or do you want to twist?

[13 : 29] Stick with what you have or take a risk in order that we might experience the abundance that God has for us.

there is much talk currently in our churches about resets and relaunches and restarts and I don't criticize any of that in any way but I put this to you that unless there's a fresh download a download of the Holy Spirit on the church I think much of what we attempt as we so to speak come out of hibernation or just be flat today the day of Pentecost in our Bible reading we recall the most amazing download that ever happened that kick started the church on that first day of Pentecost and it would be hard to argue that today's church doesn't require a similar download so I ask you will you stick or will you twist that is the question let's pray together

Lord we realize that the life of your church has been to some extent impeded in these recent months Lord we want to say that we've missed meeting together we've missed being able to open our mouths in worship and sing praise to you we've missed coffee with friends before and after the service we've missed each other and Lord we understand this that very likely coming back to church will never be quite the same as it was but Lord we want to pray on this Pentecost Sunday that it might be better that we might have more of you in our lives and you might have more of us and so we pray come down

O love divine fill thou this soul of mine and visit it with thine own ardor glowing O comforter draw near within my heart appear and kindle it thy holy flame bestowing Amen