

Pentecost

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Preacher: Aaron Eime

[0 : 00] We're really blessed this morning to have a guest speaker with us. It's the Reverend Aaron Imey from Australia via Jerusalem. And he is part of CMJ, which means the Church's Mission Among the Jews.

Sort of vaguely, you know, CMJ, just think Christian Mission and Jews, and then you've got, you know, the other little connector words can sort of figure themselves out. And it's a wonderful ministry.

It's the Christ Church, which is part of that in the old city of Jerusalem, the oldest Protestant church in the Middle East. And Aaron serves there. Lots of stories about evangelism and everything.

Next time he comes, hopefully it won't be the 9 o'clock service on the long weekend in May, but it's just really wonderful to have him with us. Aaron, how many kids do you have? Three. Three and one wife?

One wife. Okay, good. That's just... In the Middle East, you can never tell. Yeah, that's why I had to ask. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So one wife, three kids. How long have you been in Jerusalem? 20 years. 20 years.

[1 : 02] And so how well do you speak Hebrew? Tell us. Okay. I'm dangerous. A new miss will come. What's that? I'm dangerous. I speak Hebrew dangerously. Oh, you speak Hebrew dangerously.

Okay. But you can speak it. Oh, yes, absolutely. People understand it. Totally. Totally. And they're a bit surprised that a goy knows how to speak Hebrew? Yeah. I still have an Australian accent with my Hebrew.

I can't get rid of it. Well, at least it sounds like an educated Australian accent, not one of those, you know what I mean. I won't say anything. I've just put my foot in my mouth.

I won't say anything more. It's the first time in my whole ministry I've put my foot in my mouth, actually. At least the first time in the last minute. So you're going to tell us this in your sermon, but what's the Jewish feast that this all took place at?

It's called Shavuot. Shavuot. It's the Feast of Weeks. So they still celebrate that festival in Jerusalem? Yep. Celebrating it right now. Right now? Really? Right now?

[2 : 05] Right now. Oh, okay. Yep. Good. Well, it's just a blessing to have you. I'm just going to pray for him and for us as he opens the word. And then after this, we're going to have a chance to pray for him and other things as well.

So let's just pray. Father, it's your word, not ours. Jesus is the Savior, not us. You are God, not us. We are really thankful for that.

Father, you wrote your word. You know what you want to speak to us. We ask for the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon Aaron, that he might open your word to us, that he might draw us to Jesus, make us more open to the Holy Spirit, and create within us a desire to glorify you, Father, and bring you praise.

And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you very much. I really enjoy coming here. I like what you've done with the place. You've made it look like a theater.

Did you know that? And you have a great name, Church of the Messiah. So it's Pentecost, and in Israel today, it is Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks.

[3 : 12] Just from the story that we read, Acts chapter 2, better set the alarm so I know when to stop. It's Pentecost. We see the Acts chapter 2.

It's a very familiar story to us all. We read it quite a few times. I can tell you that I've actually celebrated this now 48 times in my life. It's the giving of the Holy Spirit, the start of the church, and for me, I get to operate in a mission five minutes away from where all this happened, which is a

privilege.

And Acts chapter 2, Pentecost, it's a great mission story for missionaries. I mean, you get the Holy Spirit, you have a captivated audience, you preach a very short sermon, and you save 3,000 people.

So it is a really good story. 3,000 in one day. It's fantastic. The book of Acts is sacred history. It's the sacred history of the church.

2,000 years ago. So how does it impact now? How does it impact us now? What does Pentecost mean for us now? How does the Holy Spirit, the giving of God's Spirit onto all flesh, impact and motivate us now?

[4 : 37] So Luke, who's writing this, has one eye on Pentecost and one eye on the Exodus, the first Pentecost.

Because let's remind ourselves when we pick up the book of Acts, this has happened before. In Hebrew, we call it Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks.

So after we finish Passover, we count 49 days, seven sevens, a week of weeks. And on the 50th day, we get together and celebrate another festival, the Festival of Shavuot.

Well, initially, this was an agrarian culture, we celebrated the wheat harvest, but we celebrated the idea of us journeying out of Egypt, coming to the footsteps of Mount Sinai, actually meeting God for the very first time, which is a big deal.

What did we know about God when we were in Egypt? Nothing. We didn't have a priest, we didn't have a prophet, we didn't have the temple. But we get to Mount Sinai and God reveals himself.

[5 : 51] It was a really big event for us as a people. And God spoke to us and he gave us the Torah. And the tradition these days is to sit around for the next 24 hours and read the book of Ruth.

So Jewish people are gathering in their synagogues and the passage read, obviously, is not Acts chapter 2. It's the book of Ruth. And there's lots of themes in there that are amazing and powerful.

You've got themes of Jews and Gentiles coming together, which is what you had at the Exodus story. Who came out of Egypt? Yes, Israel did. But who else came out?

The mixed multitude. There were all kinds of people. So you have Jews and Gentiles in the book of Ruth coming together. You've got Redeemer figures. People are engaged in the act of redemption.

You even get a character that appears called the Goel, the Redeemer, a type of Messianic figure.

You have converts, these people who are actually coming and embracing the history of God and the Jewish people.

[6 : 59] And it's about a community that was once excluded from Israel, the Moabites, now becoming part of the community. So it's a great book to start reading around at the time of Pentecost.

For our context, we have, in the time of Acts, we're under Roman occupation. We have a distinct lack of leadership in the Jewish community.

We haven't had a good leader for quite some time when we get to the book of Acts. We've got pretty poor shepherds. And they're all fighting each other over who's got the correct interpretation of the Torah.

We've got Sadducees who jealously guard the temple and its environment. We've got the Pharisees who always point their finger at how bad they are. We've got these rabbis who are always on the fringe.

We've got people who are embracing Hellenism, Greek theology and assimilating into that culture. We don't have any prophets. No one's speaking into our community.

[8 : 05] No one's getting up delivering powerful sermons. And we don't have an independent nation. For some reason, that seems to be quite an important thing for some people.

So what are we left with? We're left with the Bible. We're left with the Torah. And so we leap into a study of the Torah, the study of the Bible, to try and find out God's will.

If we haven't got good shepherds, we don't have a good temple structure, if it's all gone corrupt, if we don't have any prophets speaking into us, we don't have any kings that can give us direction, then where do we find our direction?

So for a couple of hundred years prior to Acts chapter 2, we leapt into the Torah. And we made the giving of the Torah a very special event.

So Shavuot, the giving of the Torah, when God actually came down on the mountain and spoke, that became known as hachag, the festival.

[9 : 11] So when you read in the Gospels, sometimes you'll see Jesus went to Jerusalem for the festival, or for the feast. But I won't tell you what feast it was. It's Shavuot. It's Pentecost.

It even became more important than Passover. Like it was the big thing because the Bible became important. It was how we discerned from the will of God.

And we read at the beginning of Acts this sort of shaking of nature, of lightning, of thunder, of wind. And the disciples are together and they're of one accord. And our passage opens and it stresses that they were as one.

It stresses unity. This actually is a Jewish insight into the text. They were united as one.

[10 : 11] They were not united with the corrupt temple. people. They were not united with the corrupt religious leaders. They were not united with the Roman occupation.

What were they united with? With each other. They were a community. Stopped fighting each other about who was going to sit on the right hand of Jesus.

Who was going to be the best of the disciples. They were of one accord. One heart. One mind.

Sharing their possessions.

Selling things and making sure that everybody had enough. Giving together each of their material wealth. Dividing up divisions of labor to make sure that who could do the teaching, who could do the serving, who could be the warden, who could do the music.

They were getting themselves together, meeting together, praying together. Acts says that they were getting together for the prayers.

[11 : 16] This actually is a Jewish comment because unity attracts the presence of God. What was the purpose of the Exodus? Why did God with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm reach down into a nation that didn't know anything about him that were slaves and redeem them?

It wasn't, the purpose of the Exodus was not to get a bunch of Hebrew slaves into the Holy Land because if it was, God would have given Moses better directions.

He would have said when you get out of Egypt, you turn left. When you hit the Mediterranean, you turn right and you can't miss it. The purpose of the Exodus is to bring the people to Mount Sinai.

The purpose of the Exodus is so that they can hear the voice of the Lord. The purpose of the Exodus is for God to reveal himself and to become king.

And so if that's so important, why did it take 50 days? If it was so important to get the children of Israel to Mount Sinai, why does it take them so long?

[12 : 27] What's the issue? And so for Jewish people, Jewish commentators, they read through the Bible and they look at every word individually with a little minutiae looking and they discover that every time Israel wanders around the desert, the verb to camp, yachanu, is in plural.

They camped, a group of them. That's actually good grammar. But then all of a sudden in Exodus 19, the verb switches to singular, which is grammatically incorrect.

But it's in the Bible. And they go, that shouldn't be there. What does it mean that they were camping as one person? And then they say, wow, unity attracts the presence of the Lord.

We were so concerned about whose camel was stepping on who else's camel and whose tent was too close to everybody else's tent and who was getting a bigger share of the manna and the water resources.

But all of a sudden we said, no, we're together in this. And God came down. And when they read the text, they discover that when God spoke, you could actually see it.

[13 : 43] When you read Exodus 20, verse 18, it says in Hebrew, Vokol Ha'am and all the people, well, who are the people?

Remember, Israel is now made up of Jews and Gentiles. When they leave Egypt, there are Jews and Egyptians came with them.

They are together. Kol Ha'am, all the people, not Kol Ha'udim, Kol Israelim, not all the Israelites, all the Jews, Kol Ha'am, Ro'im, they saw et Hakolot, they saw the voices.

Now, in my English translation, it says, all the people saw the thunder and flashes of lightning. But the actual Hebrew says, all the people saw the voices.

The, very next word, the et ha'lepedim, and the torches. what did they see when God spoke? They saw fire.

[14 : 53] They saw fire and they heard lots of voices. And they heard et kol Ha'shofar. They heard the sound of the shofar, the big horn that signals and invokes the presence of the Spirit in Jewish tradition.

You go to Israel and you get all these Christians coming along blowing shofars all the time. Completely inappropriately, just so you know. You don't blow shofars whenever you feel like it. It has a particular purpose. It's designed, you blow it to invoke the Spirit of God and to wake you up. When you read the Psalms that said, sleep or awake, you were supposed to blow the shofar. Wake up! The Spirit of God is here, we've got to do something. So they saw the voice of the shofar, the Edha Hashem, and the mountain of the smoke, and the people were afraid, and they kind of retreated.

It was a bit scary for them. And you see the very same thoughts. That's why Luke's got one eye on the Exodus because that's exactly what happens again when we have Pentecost.

[16:05] we have the Holy Spirit coming down, we have the sound of the shofar where the church is woken up and there were tongues of fire.

You could see it and you could hear it. So the Torah that was given to the people, those same people were now being given the Spirit of God.

And oddly enough, this was declared in a prophet, the prophet Joel. He had actually said this before. He said that this was going to happen, that the Spirit of God was going to be poured out on all flesh.

One of the beautiful things about reading the Psalms and reading the prophets is we actually discover that God is the God of the world. For God so loved the world, not just the Jews, salvation was always going to be universal.

When God was going to pour out His Spirit, He was going to give it to all flesh. Males, females, old, young, rich, poor.

[17:16] This is frightening stuff for totalitarian dictators and kings. There was going to be no difference. God was going to give His Spirit to everybody and what were they going to do?

They were going to roll over and bark like dogs. No. They were going to prophesy. Somewhere along the line, we've switched that word because we've now just so busy concentrating on the tongues aspect that that's only like halfway through the Acts 2 passage.

It keeps going. Stuff happens. People get saved. The community starts to act in a certain way.

That's where the bit I'm going to get to. But the prophet Joel says, I'm going to pour out my Spirit on all flesh and you all prophesy.

It might be great to speak in tongues. It might be wonderful to roll on the ground barking like a dog, but that is not the point. That is not the final conclusion.

And everyone in the world was going to get it. And the world, let's be honest, is a very hostile place. It's hostile to the gospel.

[18:32] It's hostile to the church. It's hostile to the truth. It's just like the wilderness. It's dry. It's dangerous. It's the abode of demons.

And yet, that's where God calls his heroes. He doesn't say, I'm going to get you saved.

You're going to become my disciple. Let's sit under a really nice tree by the lake of the Galilee, chew some gum, and wait for the rapture.

He takes his heroes out into the desert. Abraham's in the desert. Isaac's in the desert. Moses is in the desert. The people of God are in the desert. The prophets will run to the desert.

Jesus goes to the desert. John the Baptist says, I will prepare a place where in the wilderness, that's where God's going to speak. That's where he's going to encounter.

[19:29] That's where he's going to meet his people. He's going to meet them in the world. He's going to meet his people in the world. For God so loved the world. It's hostile.

It's dangerous. But God is going to make it better. He is not going to leave it dry. He is not going to leave it barren. He's not going to leave it alone. He's going to come and leave heaven.

He's going to come down and dwell. He's going to make it better. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord is going to be saved. This actually should wake us all up.

This really should motivate us. The Holy Spirit isn't given to us so that we can have goosebumps, as nice as goosebumps might be. It's not given so that we can have eschatological experiences and then write them on Facebook.

It isn't so that we can just run around and learn mystical languages. As nice as that is, it is given for mission.

[20:36] And I'm going to say that not just because I'm a missionary. I'm going to say it because that's what God gave it for. So that anyone in the world who calls on the name of the Lord will be

saved.

The Holy Spirit is given to the people of God, to Jews and Gentiles, for the task of making the world a better place. For the task of going out into the world and sharing the love of God.

To transform the wilderness into something that's bright, cheerful, colorful, full of flowers and beautiful. A place that would all like to live. It's to put the will of God into practice.

That's why we get the Holy Spirit. It is given as a gift so that we give it away as a gift. And so we actually have to hear that shofar too.

And if we had one, I'd say let's blow it today. Okay? And I would say sleeper awake. We the church, we need to wake up. We need to make sure that we take today, we take, we retell the story of Pentecost every year.

[21 : 46] We're supposed to get ourselves reanimated and reexcited and remind ourselves, I mean that really is the job of preachers, to remind us of the story that we already know. To refill ourselves with hope and vision and remind us that we're supposed to be having dreams and visions, that we're supposed to be engaged in this world, not alone.

I do it with you and you and I get to do it together and we have the Holy Spirit, the presence of the God. It was a really good prayer that George said this morning where he said, Lord, you know, somehow it was better that Jesus went away and the Holy Spirit was given.

I don't get it. And it's so true. It would be really nice to keep Jesus. But for whatever reason, and he knows the best plan, he gave us the breath of God himself.

And this is not something we take sitting down. It is not something that we take and keep it in our little prayer closets. It's something that we get motivated.

We are all supposed to be motivated. You, me, our families. There is a world out there that's hostile and God wants to make sure that when we go into it, we are safe with him, we are protected by him, but we have something that can help us through all the challenges.

[23 : 07] So, brothers and sisters, Pentecost, the readings that we read this morning, our prayers, they challenge us to hear the shofar, to see God speak in action, to put it into practice so that everyone, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And that's good news.