

Pentecost

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[0 : 0 0] So, my name's Tim. I'm one of the people on the leadership team here, and I'm really excited to be able to preach on Acts this morning. As I've sort of been reading and preparing this week, I find these passages in Acts really exciting, but if I'm honest, I find them really, really challenging as well. And so, as a disclaimer, I don't have this all down. I'm glad my wife isn't here. She's downstairs. She would have said amen at that point, probably louder than any other time in the sermon, and quite rightly so. So, my prayer is that God will challenge all of us. This is a really familiar passage, but my prayer is that he will challenge each one of us to open ourselves up to more of his spirit. So, thank you so much to Joyce and for Sam for reading that passage,

Joyce especially. Lots of unpronounceable names, which maybe I'll come on to later. So, a little bit of context. This is Acts 2. Jesus has returned to heaven, and the disciples are joining with lots of other Jewish people in Jerusalem. They've come to celebrate a festival that's called the Festival of Weeks, or help me here, Peretz, how would I say that? Shavuot?

Thank you, Peretz. I'm not going to try to do that again. And this is a festival which took place seven weeks and one day after the Passover, and that's where it gets its name Pentecost from, because in Greek, Pentecost means 50. So, it's 50 days after the Feast of Passover, and lots of scholars have linked. It's sort of like the Jewish Harvest Festival, or one of their Harvest Festivals, as far as I can see. And lots of clever scholars, I try to read a few, you know, I won't say books, websites, and lots of them did really clever things, linking together the grain offerings and the barley offerings with what went on. I'm nowhere near clever enough to do any of that. But I want to pick four aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit today. They don't even all start with the same letter, or are all-encompassing. But I want to think about four things that the coming of the Spirit meant for the church in Acts, and think about how we can apply them in our own lives and in our fellowship here today. So, I work at Guy's Hospital, and I find the English language a really funny thing.

I work in a department of infection and immunity. So, the word viral, to me, is a bad thing. Okay? It's something we want to avoid. And, you know, up until maybe 10 years ago, when somebody said something went viral, that was a really bad thing. Nowadays, it has another meaning. And actually, when you look before Pentecost and after Pentecost, I would say that one of the things that happens, is that this is the day when God's good news goes viral. I love that analogy, because a virus spreads between people. It requires something else, but it spreads between people. It requires some close contact. It isn't inherited. It's spread. And I love that picture there, because you see it spreading from different people. And at Pentecost, that is what began. And it was all the work of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no spreading of God's Word. And so, today, we're going to look at those four different things. And the first thing, so if you've got your Bible, please open it, if you've got an app on your phone, have a look, check to make sure what I say is really in there. I've got a big text Bible, because that's what I need now, and my glasses.

So, the first thing we're going to think about is that the Holy Spirit is powerful. The disciples needed power. Acts 2, unsurprisingly, comes just after Acts 1. And in Acts 1, or at the end of the Gospels, we see Jesus teaching his disciples. And he gives us this sort of challenge or mission that we sometimes call the Great Commission, where he tells them to go into all the world, making disciples, showing people God's good news. And he says that to people who've been following him for three years. And actually, if you read Acts 1, they haven't just been following him for three years, but they've had this sort of 40-day crash course, where Jesus has been with them. And after his resurrection, he's been teaching them about him and about God's kingdom. But they still don't have what they need to complete that mission. Jesus says to them, don't leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift that my Father has promised. And that gift was the Holy Spirit. And it says this, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And then there's that little funny, it's a semicolon,

yes?

[6 : 15] Which actually links two bits of a sentence together, which are sort of reliant on each other. That's why there isn't a comma there. Some translations actually put the word then in there.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Then you will be my effective witnesses in Jerusalem. And if we read the bit that we read in Acts 2, verse 2, it says this, it says, suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were all sitting. So we need the Holy Spirit, we need his power, and we need to acknowledge that it's a power that comes from outside. It comes from God. And that the disciples could only do what God had called them because the power came from outside of them. And the same is true for us today. This is one of my favorite books. I was shocked to find out that they don't actually give it out to all parents of newborns. I have a copy. Please, I'm not encouraging you to lie to your children.

Okay. This is a great book. Anyone wants to look at this later on? There's some great things you can say in it. These are some of my... Oh, I was hoping it would show you some of them.

Some of my favorite ones are, you know that zigzag sign, the danger sign on the road? It says you should tell your children that. That means sit quietly in the back of the car. Or one that I did try with my children once, and then Alison told me I should not, which is if you put your hand all the way down the U-bend of the toilet and wave, people can see you in Australia. Or there's another one which says, wine makes mummy clever. If you look at our book, that one's actually got the page turned over. Not sure why. You can ask Alison about that later on. But you know, we say things to people sometimes that aren't quite true. And we don't just lie to our children, or encourage people to lie to our children. But sometimes we say things to ourselves and to other people that aren't true as well. And I realize it's, you know, I'm a little bit worried now because I'm going to be upsetting some people when I criticize a recent famous theologian who is called Barbie. So I understand, having not watched the film.

[9 : 15] But this is like a sort of strapline for a lot of Barbie's things. You can do anything. You can be anything. Anything you need to be what you want to be is inside you. And the Bible tells us that that is not true. Sort of, the world tells us that the problem is out there, and all the solutions are in here.

The Bible tells us that the problems are in here, and that God's power and his spirit are the answer, if we will let it in. And we need God's power.

First of all, for life. Laurent, how many weeks ago was it? Four weeks ago, I think. Wonderful service here. Baptized his daughter and preached on John 3, where Jesus speaks and meets Nicodemus. And he says to Nicodemus that you must be born again. You must be born of the spirit. That all of our life, all of our true life, all of our true connection with God can only come about through the power of the Holy Spirit. But it's not just a one-off thing. It's really easy, I think, to think, to think, to think, to think, I've got the spirit. I have life. But actually, the Bible tells us that we don't just need it for life. We need the power of the Holy Spirit for living. Jeremiah 17, this is a verse which is on a poster in our house, because it shows two different ways we can live. We can rely on ourselves and our own power, or we can rely on God and his power. So this is Jeremiah chapter 17, where God says this,

Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands. They won't see prosperity when it comes. They'll dwell in parched places in the desert, in a salt land when no one lives.

That's what happens when we rely on ourselves, our own power, what we have inside. But it goes on to say this, but blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence or power is in him. And this is probably why I have it at home. For those of you that don't know, my surname is Tree. It said, but those who trust in the Lord, they will be like a tree planted in the water that sends out its roots into the stream. It doesn't fear when heat comes. Its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought, and it never fails to bear fruit. The Holy Spirit is powerful, and we need it for life and for living. The next thing is that the Holy Spirit is personal. It says this, they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated on them and came on each. So in the Old Testament, fire pretty much always symbolizes the presence, the power or the holiness of God. We can think about times when Moses approached the burning bush and was told to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground because God was there. The Israelites in the desert as they were moving, God guided them and protected them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire, his presence by night. Well, that final one there, the fire of God resting over the Holy of Holies in the

tabernacle when the Israelites were moving through the desert, showing [13:46] God's presence and power with them. And it used to be that people could not approach that fire. It would kill them if they did, and we see this in the Old Testament. But Jesus changed all of this, and it started when that temple curtain was torn in two, opening up the Holy of Holies to anyone. And God didn't actually wait for us to go.

He came to us. And it says this, it says that tongues of fire came and separated and went on each of them.

It says that the whole room was filled, but it was personal. Each was touched with a tongue of fire. And it wasn't just personal. It was individual as well. It says it came upon each one. Now, I've sort of deliberately picked what I think is an awful picture for the coming of the Holy Spirit there. Lynn, can you see why it's...

I don't know if you... So basically, they're all men. They're all old. They're all white. And I counted, 90% of them are bald, and 95% have got beards. That's not what it was like. We think that about...

[15:25] There were about 120 people in that room. And it wasn't that... You know, the tongues of fire came. And, you know, and it was like, okay, so it comes through the window, and the apostles are lined up.

You know, sort of Peter, John, James, down to the other ones I can't remember. Thaddeus.

Thaddeus, you're at the end, because no one will ever remember your name.

And the biggest flame surely went on, you know, Peter and James and John. Or the flames just went on the men. Or they went on in age order.

Or an experience order. That's not what it says. It says there were tongues of fire, and they went on everybody. And that was God's way of blessing and empowering his church.

And the same thing is true for us. The Holy Spirit can live in each one of us.

[16:30] I love that passage in Romans 8, 11, where Paul says, The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in you.

In every individual who has put their hope and trust in Jesus. And just like that fire, which maybe convicted Moses and made him take his sandals off because it was holy.

Or maybe comforted the people of Israel and protected them, guided them through the wilderness. That same power is in us and can guide and protect.

And it is for all people. I love that bit. So when Peter is explaining to the crowd, and he reads from Joel 2.

And he says, And actually, if you read the word that I didn't read, which comes before that whole bit.

[18:03] Joel is talking about a time. And it's easy for us, I think, to think those days were those days, not these days. But Joel starts with one word, which says, afterwards.

And what that means is, from that point onwards and forever. God is pouring out his Spirit on individuals.

And just like at Pentecost, there's no gender test. There's no age test. There's no IQ test. There's no training period.

He poured out his Spirit on all individuals. The Holy Spirit is personal. And for each and every one of us. And it's described as a gift, which each of us must accept.

And thirdly, if you look at this passage, I think the Spirit invites and includes. Jesus has already sort of given the Great Commission at the end of the Gospels.

[19:16] And then in Acts, he tells them, again, this invitation. He says, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.

And I can imagine the disciples going, yep. In Judea, okay. In Samaria, if we must.

And to the ends of the earth. And they must have gone, how are we ever to do that? But right at the beginning, at the birth of the church, that's a pretty inclusive invitation, isn't it?

The ends of the earth means absolutely everybody. Every nation. Every person. Every person. I read something this week that was written by one of the Church of England's archbishops.

And he said, you know, if we were planning this worldwide mission, and we had the kind of power that God did at his disposal, I think we might have done it differently.

[20:25] He wrote this. He said, surely getting everybody to speak the same language would have been the best way forward. Wouldn't that have just been easier?

It's almost certainly what I would have done if I'd been in charge of planning. But the Holy Spirit does the absolute opposite. Not the whole church speaking one language.

But the church speaking every language. And it amazed all of those people that gathered together in Jerusalem.

They said, how can it be that every one of us can hear the good news just the way that I need to hear it?

And this is something that God enabled the disciples to do. It said, they spoke as the Spirit enabled them. Not forced them.

[21 : 27] Enabled them. They had to take part. All people from different cultures and countries learned and heard about the good news in their own language.

In a culturally appropriate way. Here, first of all, it is to God-fearing Jews. And thank you so much, Joyce, for reading all of those names.

I'm glad I didn't have to do it. I did hear someone read this once. And instead of saying Cretans, they said Cretans. Which is what I'm fairly certain I would have done.

But I put it to you, they were invited as well. Even Cretans. But it was really clear that those God-fearing Jews were all invited.

But later on in Acts, don't forget that the invitation goes even broader than that. If you read in Acts 10, Peter has a dream.

[22 : 33] I saw a good youth version of this where it was called the original pigs in blankets. Which I kind of like. Where God showed Peter animals that Peter considered to be unclean.

And God says to him, no, you eat those. Because what I have made clean, you don't call unclean. Anything I have made pure.

And Peter ends up saying this. I now know that God does not show favoritism. But accept all who fear him. And does what is right.

And that doesn't mean obey all the commandments. It means seek God. And the same thing could be true for us, I think. This is a picture.

Does anyone know? That's actually a painting. I took that on my phone. And I actually texted it to someone. Does anyone know? So that is a picture of Jesus rising again.

[23 : 37] Does anyone know where that picture is? It's actually in the Vatican Museum. So I took this picture. And I sent it to a friend of mine. And can anyone guess what I said?

There was some football being played at the time between different nations. I said, finally, evidence. Jesus is supporting England.

See? St. George's Cross on the flag. But the church and the good news isn't the property of one nation.

Or of one group of people. Or of one culture. Or of one tribe. Diversity is God's idea. And we see that at Pentecost.

And my way is not necessarily God's way. My preference isn't his preference. In churches, we have very different ways of doing things.

[24 : 42] I'm sure at Pentecost, when all of those nations, who were only temporarily gathered in Jerusalem, went to their own countries, the way in which they worshipped God was different.

And it was the way that God was blessing them. And the same thing is true for us. So maybe some of us, when it comes to music and sung worship, like something a little more choral.

Bells and smells, we'd call it. Maybe like me, you like something a little, you know, I like not smells, I like smoke and lasers and loud electric guitars.

Maybe when it comes to praying, some of us, our preference is hands raised, voices raised. A bit of spit coming out of the mouth is a bonus.

Maybe others prefer quiet, thoughtful prayer. When it comes to preaching, maybe some of you like PowerPoints and sermons where three, you know, there's alliteration.

[25 : 56] So far, what have I done? Oh, powerful, personal. I tried to get two Ps for this. I just gave up. But maybe some people prefer a preaching style that is more thoughtful.

Maybe people prefer a preaching style that is more vivacious. But the spirit can be in all of those. And I think we need to be very careful that we don't assume that the style that we like is the style that God wants us to be using.

God can be in all of our worship if he is at the center of it. And Jesus prayed that we, as the church, as his followers, might be one.

In John 17, as he was praying, just before he was going to be arrested, he prayed that we might be one.

[27 : 09] And he prayed that, I think, because the tendency is that we're two or four or eight. And he wanted his church, through the power of his spirit, to be one.

Because the verse goes on to say that they might be one and they might be in us. And through that, the world would see him.

The Holy Spirit invites and includes all people and asks us to do the same.

And finally, the Holy Spirit transforms. The disciples and the followers didn't stay in the upper room.

They didn't stay there and get goosebumps and wind in the hair.

That wasn't the purpose of the spirit coming. It came to transform them and through them to transform other people's lives.

[28 : 14] For them to bear witness. And I find it quite interesting that the assumption was that this change in behavior, and there must have been a change in behavior, for the people to think they must be drunk, must have been quite interesting.

I don't know if you've ever thought about that. Why did they think they were drunk? They must have been behaving differently. Now, when I was at university, others may have drunk too much.

And there were some phrases that we used to use about how people behaved when they're drunk too much, and they all had the word beer in front of it.

For example, we might say, and I'm looking for some help here, you might say somebody was wearing a beer jacket. Or beer anorak.

Does anyone know what that means? They didn't feel cold? Don't worry, I am going somewhere with this. Or you might say they were wearing beer armor, which means they weren't afraid to voice their opinion, even though it may have been a hostile environment.

[29 : 35] Chelsea supporter in a pub full of Manchester United fans, for example. Or they were wearing beer goggles, which means things and people looked different.

often in a positive manner. Now, I actually think that the way in which Peter and the disciples start to behave is a bit like that.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not condoning drinking too much. Paul makes it very clear, doesn't he, when he says, don't get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery slash stupidity.

Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Changing your behavior, but in the right way. To start with, Peter wasn't afraid of being cold, if you like.

He wasn't afraid of being outside of the crowd. Peter changed from being a man, who if you remember, on the day before Jesus was crucified, was warming himself around a fire with others.

[30 : 49] But it says that when the Spirit transformed him, he stood out and stood up with the eleven. He wasn't afraid to take himself away from the fire, if you will.

He was not afraid to be distinct and be different. And he, he was wearing armor. He, he was not afraid to speak the truth.

He spoke and in his sermon he says, let me explain this to you. He was transformed from a man who was afraid to admit to a single servant girl that he even knew who Jesus was into somebody who could speak boldly.

And finally, I think he had a different pair of glasses on. He looked at people differently. He went from being a man who tried to use a sword and kill someone who was trying to arrest Jesus into being a servant who pleaded with people who had, were involved in crucifying Jesus.

that's what he says in his sermon. You joined together with wicked men and crucified Jesus. But because he now sees them through different eyes, he pleads with them.

[32 : 21] And the spirit can transform us in the same way. He can help us go a different way when he calls us to.

do. We've been thinking about that sometimes in the story of Daniel. How Daniel chose when to stand up and be different.

And he chose when to serve in the government that he was in. The spirit can transform us. The same spirit.

He can help us know how to speak. He can help us not to stand on a stage and speak but to bear witness which just means explain to somebody else what God means to you.

Explain to someone what God's done in your life. That's what bearing witness means. It means telling the truth about something you've seen or experienced. And I love the way in which Peter puts it in his epistle where he says if someone asks about your hope as a believer.

[33 : 29] Always be ready to explain it. But it goes on to say this. But do so with gentleness and respect.

And I think we need the spirit to help us to do that. And finally the spirit can help us to see others as Jesus does. Not as projects to sort out but as members of his wonderful creation.

just like Peter had to be shown that the gentiles were people that God wanted to reach. I wonder who the gentiles are in our society today.

I wonder who the prostitutes and the tax collectors and the sinners are who in this place God is calling us to bear witness to.

so the Holy Spirit can transform us. And actually as Emily mentioned over the next few weeks we're going to be thinking about some transformations.

[34 : 38] Some transformations happen quickly but not all transformations are sort of jack in a beanstalk. You know plant the seed grown overnight or my favorite book when I was a kid James and the giant peach.

Massive fruit overnight. Some of the transformation of the Spirit isn't like that and over the next I think it's eight weeks we're going to be thinking about as followers of Jesus through the power of his Spirit how we can be transformed.

How we can grow and be more like Christ. So as I come to an end the Spirit can give us power.

The Spirit is an individual personal gift. The Spirit invites and transforms and the outcome in Jerusalem was incredible.

Three thousand people put their faith in Jesus that day and were baptized. baptized. I don't want to think about the three thousandth person to go through our baptismal pool.

[35 : 59] I'm not sure the filters would manage but wouldn't it be wonderful if we had that problem and if we want to be like that early church in London then if we in London want to be like that early church in Jerusalem then I think we need to look at their posture and if you look at three things that have characterized this story then the early church was obedient.

Jesus told them to go and wait in Jerusalem and so they did it. They did not run in front. They did not lag behind.

And in this time of not having a pastor maybe God's calling us to be obedient to listen to him and to wait. They were together. It's said that they gathered together and tonight we will gather together to pray.

I love the fact that when you read about them gathering together and it's in Acts 1. It doesn't just say that they gathered together.

It goes through and actually names some of them. They said those were there were Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus.

[37 : 24] Each individual mattered and each individual matters in this church too. and it also says that they were unified.

If you read at the end of chapter two, it said they had everything in common. Individuals weren't seeking their own way in the church.

They were a united people and if we want God to bless us through the power of his spirit, we need to have that same posture. Now I said at the beginning I found this quite challenging this week and one of the reasons why is because I heard someone speak and they said we know that in order to have life, in order to be a Christian, you need to have the Holy Spirit in your life.

And he used this phrase though, he said, but it's really easy for us to be pilot like Christians. I love hot air balloons, but in order for them to soar and to be what they're meant to be, they need to have power.

And actually in a hot air balloon, when you stop pulling on that power, a pilot light is still going, but it's not roaring all the time.

[38 : 50] And this week I've been challenged by God. to think about how open I am to all of the power of his spirit. And as we close, I'll leave you with that thought, that God wants us to have his power.

He wants us to soar and be the people that he made to be. So let's just bow our eyes for a moment. think about where you are. Pilot light or full burner.

Father, we pray that each one of us will know that you have given us your spirit, that the power that raised Christ from the dead lives in us.

Help us to let you transform our lives and use us as passionate, on-fire individuals and as a passionate, united people to reach those who are far off.
[40 : 23] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.