

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection**

**The Holy Spirit**

**Pentecost, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020**

**Reflection**

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I was very happy when I saw that I was assigned this Sunday's reflection. Whitsunday as we used to call it.

The reason for my joy is that it is an opportunity to tell you about a very dear friend of mine. A friend who is closer to me than anybody I know. A friend who knows me better than anybody else in this world. In fact, my friend has known me since before I was born. My friend has been with me all my life but it took an act of acceptance on my part to confirm the relationship. This happened when I was fifteen years old when I accepted an invitation to give my life to Christ. I was sitting in the balcony of a church when I accepted the invitation. I had to go down to the church office to sign a form and I could hardly walk. When it came to filling in the form my hand and body were shaking so much, I could not do it. The Holy Spirit had overpowered me. The next time that the Spirit forcibly made his presence felt was when the family were holidaying in Sarasota, Florida in the mid-80s. I was walking down the shopping mall repeating over and over in a loud voice "I serve a king who rides a donkey". I got some strange looks but people mostly just steered away from me. But the best time of experiencing the Holy Spirit was on my first Alpha programme when I accepted an invitation to be filled with the Holy Spirit and I was filled to overflowing.

So, let me tell you more about my friend the Holy Spirit; who he is, where he comes from, what he does. I'll tell you as much as we have time for.

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is one person of the triune God that we Christians worship. Now I know the concept of the Trinity is hard for us all to grasp. I have heard many attempts to explain the relationship but none of them are totally satisfactory. The Trinity remains for me a mystery.

We know that Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit as a person not an impersonal force (gravity/magnetism). The Holy Spirit has human attributes; experiences, emotions. He has an intellect and a will:

- Speaks: who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says (Revelations 2:29 & 3:22)
- Leads: The Holy Spirit said to Philip go up to the Ethiopian's chariot (Acts 8:29)
- Intercedes: we do not know how to pray but the Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Romans 8:26)
- Testifies: The Holy Spirit will witness/testify to me (John 15:26)

And the Holy Spirit can be grieved, lied to, insulted, and blasphemed.

Throughout the Bible it is clear that the Holy Spirit is God himself as His attributes/characteristics are those of God himself:

- Eternal/Is not was: alive yesterday, today and tomorrow. Pre-existent before the world was created. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2)
- Omnipotent: in announcing to Mary that she was to have a child, the angel Gabriel said the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you (Luke 1:35);
- Omnipresent: where can I go from your spirit, where can I flee from your presence (Ps 139:7)
- Omniscient: no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:11)

The Holy Spirit is called God: why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, not lied to men but God? (Acts 5:3&4)

Oddly, in John's gospel alone we have three versions of who sent the Holy Spirit to be with us:

- Jesus said God will send the Holy Spirit in my name. (John 14:26)
- But Jesus also said 'if I go away, I will send him (the Holy Spirit) to you (John 16:7)
- And six verse later John says 'when the spirit of truth comes' suggesting the Holy Spirit gave and sent himself (John 16:13)

We are much clearer as to how the Holy Spirit was sent. Visibly as a:

- Dove at Christ's baptism (John 1:32)
- Shining cloud at Christ's transfiguration (Matt. 17:2, Mark 9:2)
- Breath, as David told us two weeks ago, 'Jesus breathed on them and said "receive the Holy Spirit"' (John 20:22)
- Tongues of fire (Acts 2v3)

Aurally: at the first Pentecost the disciples heard a sound like the blowing of a violent wind (Acts 2:2)

And almost invisibly as a "breath".

How has the role and scope of the Holy Spirit's work changed from Old Testament times, when Jesus was on earth and post-Pentecost?

In the Old Testament there are many references to the Spirit of God but only two to the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10). Prior to Jesus coming to earth the Holy Spirit only came on particular people at particular times for particular tasks. Three quick examples: Bezalel who made the articles for the tabernacle (Exodus 31:3), Samson in his fights with the Philistines (Judges 14:6, 14:19 and 15:14 and Saul, the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 10:10) and most tragically departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16v14).

The coming of the Holy Spirit was foretold by the prophets, e.g. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, but their prophecy was unfulfilled for 300+ years. The Holy Spirit becomes more active around the

time of Jesus birth but still given to particular people for particular tasks. During Jesus life the work of the Holy Spirit centred around the person of Jesus Christ who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, baptized by the Holy Spirit, anointed by the Holy Spirit, led by the Holy Spirit, offered Himself as an atonement for our sins by the Holy Spirit, was raised by the Holy Spirit.

But the spirit had not been given to anyone else or even the disciples (John 7:39), that is until as David told us two weeks ago, Jesus gave the disciples the Holy Spirit. John also tells us that Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come after his ascension (John 14: 16). As it surely did fifty days after Jesus resurrection as we heard in today's reading (Acts 2:1-4). From this moment on the Holy Spirit was no longer reserved for particular people at particular times for particular tasks but the Holy Spirit is for all people, for all of the time for everything we need in our lives.

What is clear is that we are no longer living in the time of promise and expectation but in the time of fulfilment. We are no longer waiting for the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is waiting for us. The promise of Jesus has been fulfilled. The Holy Spirit is alive today and I am very happy to say that the Holy Spirit is available to all of us. The Holy Spirit is for everyone who believes in Jesus. I need Jesus for my eternal life. I need the Holy Spirit for my day to day life. For me the Holy Spirit is the active person in the Trinity. I liken it to the active ingredient in a drug, the ingredient that is biologically active and works to bring about a desired result.

So, what does the Holy Spirit do? First and most critically, the Holy Spirit gets us started on our Christian journey. If we do not start on the journey then all of the other things that the Holy Spirit does are not relevant to us. There are three things that the Holy Spirit does to get us started on our Christian journey.

- Convicts us of our sin (John 16:8) – helps us see that our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are meaningless at best and destructive at worst
- Convinces us that Jesus is the answer – gives us insight, understanding and realisation that what Jesus taught and lived is a better way
- Converts us to the Christian life through a rebirth – a supernatural act that we cannot do alone but which the Holy Spirit does when we indicate our willingness and our readiness to believe and follow Jesus

And the good news about the Holy Spirit is that the work of the Holy Spirit does not stop there. There are many other things that the Holy Spirit goes on to do in the lives of those who believe including: He comforts us, guides us, sanctifies us – sets us apart for sacred use, makes us holy – and helps us in our infirmities. He is my constant companion.

I want to touch briefly on the fruits of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit in our lives, we come in time to bear what are called the fruits of the Holy Spirit; David's favourite topic which he talked about two weeks ago. I will not go over these again except to summarise that the nine fruits mentioned can be divided into three groups of three, with each group defining different relationships:

- Love, joy and peace speak (our relationship with God)
- Patience, kindness, goodness (our relationship with others)

- Faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (our inward relationship with ourselves)

And this is what authentic Christian living is – God first, others second, and ourselves third. The Spirit works in us so that He might work through us. How desirable are those fruits? When we are what we should be inside, we will bring forth fruit, much fruit and more fruit.

And what about the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Here when we say gift, we mean a talent or a capability that is given by the Holy Spirit to be used for building God's kingdom here on earth. There are three separate lists of the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament: Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and Ephesians 4 v 11 (There is a fourth listing in 1 Peter 4:10 and 11 but this duplicates the other lists). From the list of nine gifts in Corinthians, the first three gifts are personal attributes – wisdom, knowledge and faith – and then we have the six so-called 'sign gifts' because they are outward indications of or signs of the working of God in our lives. They are healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between good and evil spirits and the speaking in tongues and the interpretation of that speech.

We all have received one or more gifts and we are to use them. We are given gifts for the common good! They are not for our own selfish/solitary use as all gifts are essential for the full and proper functioning of the body of Christ that we belong to.

In closing, we should recognise that not everybody has the Holy Spirit in them and Paul tells us that if we do not, then we do not belong to Christ. I hope you have learnt enough about the Holy Spirit this morning to want to know more about the Holy Spirit and if you haven't asked the Holy Spirit into your life then I hope you will think about doing so.