

## **Sermon – Pentecost**

### **John 20: 19-23, Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104**

May our meditations be pleasing to you, O Lord, as we sing praises and rejoice in you. Amen.

It's Pentecost! A day of celebration! Our colours are different today, red, reflecting the tongues of fire that appeared on the day of Pentecost as described in our first reading when the Holy Spirit filled the people. Pentecost is often referred to as the church's birthday. The Jewish community had gathered because it was the festival of Shavuot, celebrating the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. So, in a way, Pentecost celebrates the movement of our faith from that of a chosen people in covenant with God, to a universal faith open to everyone, wherever they come from, Parthians, Medes, Elamites or even people from Lara and Little River!

Luke, the writer of Acts, gives us a detailed and dramatic account of the events at Pentecost. There was a violent wind, there were tongues of fire, there was speaking in many languages. And there is even humour! In response to the accusation of these people being drunk, Peter says it can't be so, it's not yet 9 o'clock in the morning! Apparently people 2000 years ago were also expected to be sober in the morning!

So, today, I want us to focus on this Holy Spirit that came down, the Holy Spirit which for many of us is our guide post or our strength, but let's do this through the lens of the Gospel reading from John. These five verses don't make for a long reading but are profound within themselves and provide us with a very clear direction about our mission as Christ's disciples, as his gathered and sent out church.

Well, many commentators say that chapter 20 of John's Gospel is actually his original conclusion and that chapter 21 was subsequently added. If you read through to the end of chapter 20, verses 30 and 31 certainly sound like a conclusion. And John also includes the Holy Spirit, and in these 5 verses, he provides us with three key learnings: that the Holy Spirit is with us in the most difficult times, that the Holy Spirit is Jesus' breath, and thirdly that we are sent out, equipped with the Holy Spirit. Let's take a closer look.

Our reading opens on the evening of Jesus' resurrection with the disciples locking themselves inside a house in fear. They are in a state of anxiety and confusion. The man whom they had lived with, prayed with, journeyed with over this three-year period of ministry, has died an inglorious death, through the conniving of the religious authorities. When close friends or family die, it's hard not to confront our own mortality, and experience so many mixed emotions. Added to this, some of the women had reported seeing Jesus in the morning, which only added to the confusion. Into this very human, insecure mess, steps Jesus. "Peace be with you", he says, not once but twice. And he breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit". The Holy Spirit comes to us in our frail humanness, in our fear, our confusion and anxiety. Jesus gets through those locked doors, he gets through the locked doors that we create within ourselves, and as his disciples, in whatever state we are, we receive the Holy Spirit.

So, in this rendering of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is Jesus' breath. It is his presence in his physical absence. When I read this passage earlier this week, it reminded me of that other passage in Genesis in which God breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of the first man, and he became a living being. God's breath is the source of life and on this first day of Jesus' resurrected life, on this first day of new creation, Jesus' breath offers a new life to the disciples, in all their pain and confusion, a restoration and peace

with God. This breath is the giving of life, the giving of love. Jesus died for us, that great sacrifice of love, and then rose again, giving us new life. Jesus' breath, his holy presence in his physical absence, the Holy Spirit.

And then of course there is the punchline. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". Well, that's a pretty clear mandate. And it's a mandate for all of us disciples. We are to continue Jesus' ministry as the body of Christ; we are sent out, empowered by his breath, the Holy Spirit. We are sent out to tell of the good news of Jesus Christ.

It's something of a challenge though isn't it? Our world is not so receptive to the message is it? The bold approach probably doesn't work does it? Perhaps you've tried in the past to be direct and enthusiastic, and you've just received push back. But the opportunity is still large. We live in an area surrounded by young families and people, many of whom are facing complex challenges in life, anxiety or fear, and into this space, the message of hope and support provided by Jesus, the presence of the Holy Spirit and a loving church community, can be a real and tangible benefit. But how do we reach people and effectively deliver our message? Well I think there are four parts to it.

The first element is prayer. Building church only comes through prayer and the movement of the Holy Spirit. And we must be active and intentional in our desire to grow. And growth means more than just numbers of people sitting in the pews. It also means growth in our own personal relationship and commitment to Jesus. It also means growth in service to our local community. You might have noticed that I have included the missional prayer again in the pew sheet. It's also over there in our prayer corner. I'm hoping that it becomes part of your daily prayer, this intentional desire to grow and for the Holy Spirit to work among us.

The second element is Presence. Having good presence within a community is also necessary for recognition and awareness by new people. And I think we do this pretty well. In Lara our presence is known largely because of the Op Shop. We would have at least 100 people coming through our site across the week, if you include the Food Relief program. We're currently working on improving our signage and I'm hopeful our new signs will be up in the next month or so. In Little River, Christ Church is known because of its heritage value, beautiful gardens and signature events. Having presence makes it easier for you to have a conversation with your network about us, especially when we have a range of social events outside of church-going which are comfortable for people to come to. Think Games nights, Wine and Cheese nights, High Teas and Pancake Night. These events give people the opportunity to get to know us away from the worship space. They enable us to build relationships with people who don't yet know Jesus.

The third step is Proclamation. This is providing people with the opportunity to hear the good news and also to be able to respond in a setting that they feel comfortable in. This might mean letting go some of our traditions some of the time. Typical examples of Proclamation events include Messy Church, Family Christmas programs, Back to Church Sundays, and specific women's or men's events. These services or events should feature a clear and attractive proclamation which touches the heart and offers the opportunity to respond.

And finally the fourth step of effectively reaching people with the Good News is Persuasion. How many of us have jumped straight into Persuasion and wondered why it didn't work? Perhaps we didn't preface it with prayer, presence and proclamation. People, particularly today when we are surrounded by those who didn't grow up in worshipping families, are in all sorts of different stages in their understanding of Christianity and what it

means. To go straight into persuasion mode is not necessarily meeting people where they are at. So it's important to build relationships and get to know people before jumping into persuasion. And I also think that persuasion is often best left to those who are really gifted in this area. That's why I'm such a big supporter of Alpha which is a program specifically designed for people who are seeking answers that Christianity might provide.

Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

How do we respond to this? At a personal level we pray. We pray that the Holy Spirit will fill us and open the hearts of people around us to hear the message of the Good News. We pray that we ourselves will grow in our love and commitment to Jesus. We pray that as a church, we will be able to provide the appropriate events and opportunities that proclaim the Good News and persuade people to consider Jesus. And we pray for wisdom to know who to ask and invite to these events.

So let me finish with our Missional prayer.

God of Mission,  
Who alone brings growth to your Church,  
Send your Holy Spirit to give,  
Vision to our planning,  
Wisdom to our actions,  
Joy to our worship,  
And power to our witness.  
Help our church to grow in numbers,  
In spiritual commitment to you,  
And in service to our local community,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.