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# Pentecost

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 24 May

Psalm 110:1-4, Acts 2:1-13,



Let's pray, Lord Jesus, as we celebrate Pentecost and the fulfilment of your promise to be with us, and empower us by your Holy Spirit, may it be that we indeed live to your glory, and bear witness to the truth of your gospel, amen.

Pentecost. 50 days ago we celebrated Easter and the resurrection of Jesus. 10 days ago remembered the ascension, the time when Jesus returned to his place of glory with his Heavenly Father. Pentecost is often called the birthday of the church.

It's not a coincidence that the gospel writer Luke, also the writer of Acts, tells of the birth of Jesus in ch 2 of his Gospel, and in Acts 2 talks of the birth of the church.

It's no coincidence either that Luke finishes his gospel with Jesus telling his disciples that they will witness to the resurrection of Jesus and to wait for the power to come. And he begins Acts with Jesus telling his disciples that the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they will be his witnesses.

No wonder, or coincidence, then, that the first thing the freshly filled 120 did when the Holy Spirit came was to leave the house where they had been waiting and praying and join the people outside.

It's important we understand that the Spirit at work at Pentecost was a public event. The church grew that day not because outsiders came in. But because insiders went out.

Let's remember that way back in the salvation story, in Genesis 12, Abram was told by God that he would be the father of a great nation. A nation charged with making the message of salvation known to the world.

The people of God were chosen and blessed not to keep it to themselves, not to form a club of insiders. They were blessed to be a blessing. The plan was, as they lived in accordance with God's word and as God dwelt with them, the effect would be so positive and beneficial that the people of the world would say "look what happens when God is taken seriously". "We want that for ourselves as well". Blessed to be a blessing.

Let's recap a little by way of intro: The last couple of Sundays leading up to Pentecost, we've talked about the promise Jesus gave in the context of his impending death. Jesus assured his disciples that any separation was temporary. Following Jesus resurrection, and his return to his place of Glory, he would ask that the Father send the helper, the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth.

Then we unpacked the importance of truth in the context of the gospel message. We showed that to attack the very idea of truth, arguing that we can all have our own individual truth, makes gospel proclamation pretty challenging.

In effect, to undermine the concept of truth is to undermine the Gospel. To undermine the concept of truth is to undermine the one who said "I am the way, the truth, and the life". It is at heart a spiritual matter.

It is a part of the battle masterminded by the same one who countered the truth of God's word way back in Genesis. "Did God really say"

- Jesus spoke of his death and resurrection. It happened.
- Jesus spoke of his return to his Heavenly Father's side. It happened.
- Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit. It happened

Easter, the Ascension, Pentecost, all proved Jesus true to his word. Jesus also said in the context of these events, "you will be my witnesses." Blessed to be a blessing. Thank goodness for Pentecost.

One of the challenges in telling the Pentecost story, especially when many of us hear it year, on year, is how to capture, and translate how dramatic and dynamic it was.

Though the OT God had often appeared in what we call a theophany. A manifestation of presence. The Pillar of fire in the wilderness journeys. The burning bush that caught Moses attention. Fire and also wind were understood to represent something of God's presence in various circumstances. Just so Pentecost.

Let me try to bring alive what happened that day by imagining the following.

As most of you know, I only speak English. I would love to speak Te Reo. I only know a few words and phrases.

Imagine, the effect then, if as I was preaching as I am now, and a couple bus loads of fluent Māori speakers, happened upon our service and decided to come in. As they packed out the church, filling the pews, and every available space. Imagine the effect if all of a sudden I switched from speaking English, to perfect Te Reo Māori.

Then one of our congregation jumps up and says, that's weird, Andrew can't speak Māori. The travellers, as well as the congregation, would have to figure that something is going on.

Just so, on the day of Pentecost, at a time where hundreds of thousands of Jewish visitors from the nations all around, flooded into Jerusalem for the festival of Weeks, many hear the 120 speaking of God's deeds of power in their own native languages. This I think is not what is sometimes called the Heavenly language that we see happening in the Corinthian church and is known as tongues.

This, it very much looks like, is the Spirit of God giving the witnesses to Jesus the ability to communicate in a way that the hearer can understand. Even to the extent of making supernaturally bilingual. If you are ever lost for words when trying to communicate the Gospel, let what happened on Pentecost be an encouragement.

Also when thinking about people hearing about the deeds of God, as I noted earlier, to be closer to what happened on the day of Pentecost, it would not be a bus loads coming into the church.

It would be more like a great Hui of many tribes gathering on our front lawn, and all of us gathered here this morning went out declaring the deeds of God

in the various dialects of the tribes gathered. It would be pretty clear to us and to them that God was at work both by Spirit and by Word.

That is what I want to try to try to capture this morning. The way that the Spirit of Jesus, and the Word of Jesus work together. The living Word and the written Word if I can put it that way.

When we talk about Pentecost we often focus don't we, on the spiritual, the supernatural aspects of what happened that day. The wind, the tongues of fire, the supernatural languages.

We could argue though that the proclamation of the gospel by Peter, and the result, 3000 people convicted and converted, is in itself a significant and supernatural event.

So if you remember nothing else from what I say this morning remember this. We need the Spirit of God and the word of God working together when it comes to our witnessing to Jesus. We need the Spirit of God and the word of God if there is going to be any positive response by those who hear.

Signs are seen and heard. Questions are asked. What does this mean? Time for proclamation. Peter the apostle, one who had denied Jesus three times around the time of his crucifixion, Peter having been restored to ministry, and given the charge to feed and lead the flock through the proclamation of the gospel.

Peter now stands and gives a bold, courageous, uncompromising summation of the gospel story as it is weaved through through the Old Testament. Peter tells how the people of God had largely rejected the words and works of Jesus finally crucifying him.

As the Gospel of salvation though Christ is proclaimed, and as the Spirit is at work, many are brought under conviction, and make aware that they too have a hand in the death of Jesus, given Jesus died for the sin of all.

They asked the best of all questions. What should we do? Peter answered, repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven and, you too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They did, as in they repented, and were baptised, and they did, as in they received the Spirit. The church grew that day from 120 to 3120.

Let me simply say. When the Word, the Gospel, the truth about who Jesus is, why Jesus, came and what that means for us, as that is proclaimed, and the Spirit of God is at work in our hearts things happen.

It would be true to say that one of the unhelpful things that sometimes happens in the church is when the focus is put on either the Word or the Spirit, as compared seeing how they work together.

I can think of some contexts where the focus is on preaching and teaching. But supernatural things are viewed with suspicion. I can think of other contexts where there is great openness to the supernatural, but it's all a bit experiential and somewhat lacking when it comes to the Word shaping and directing things.

One of the sayings I remember from the 80's when the charismatic renewal was happening and there was an effort to be maintain the balance of being open to the Spirit and be guided by the word.

Here the saying, I found it helpful "the word without the spirit and you dry up." "The spirit without the word and you blow up." Balance. The Spirit of God and the Word of God working together.

It needs to be that way because when it comes to Spiritual truth, we can't really work things out just by our senses or intellect. We can only discern spiritual things with spiritual eyes if could put it that way.

For example. On the day of Pentecost, as the signs were observed and heard, it's clear that people came to different conclusions. As some asked what does this mean? Some answered by saying they have had too much new wine. New wine can make you a bit crazy you know.

Let's say at this point, just as the Spirit of God and the Word of God work together, so too, generally it is true that when God is working there will be opposition or even persecution.

As 120 were declaring the wonders deeds of God, even though it was obvious that something extraordinary was going on, especially in the ability to speak different languages. Yet as this supernatural proclamation was happening, some misinterpreted and mocked. This is not God working. They are out of their heads. Off their faces. Not in their right mind.

Where God works so does the enemy. But let's never forget it's not an equal battle.

This mocking and misinterpretation is the first thing Peter addressed. Peter standing with the 11 raises his voice and address them. Men of Judaea, and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to what I say. Indeed these men are not drunk as you suppose.

It's only 9 o'clock in the morning. No this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel. Peter then unpacks what was happening according to the plans, purposes, and prophecies, or advance warning of God.

Some sensed the Spirit of God might be at work. Others thought the spirit was of an alcoholic variety. The Spirit and Word must be working together if folk are going to come to a right and true conclusion about who God is, what God is about, and what that means for us.

Peter preaches one heck sermon. People are convicted. They ask what they need to do. Peter tells them. They do it. 3000 people are added to the 120. So what happens next. We will look a little more into that next week. It makes for encouraging, exciting if not somewhat challenging reading.

For this week I simply give the encouragement and model set for us as the church burst into life. We need the Spirit to enable us. We need the word to guide us. From there we see what kind of community is formed as the Spirit and the Word is free to work. That's for next week.

By way of response and as something of a concluding and ongoing prayer, let's take on board what this next song is asking, that we would be filled with the breath, the life, the presence, the power of Jesus by his Holy Spirit.

Song.... Every Promise: Stuart Townend