

“The Holy Spirit: Essential for the Church”

7 February 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 161 Holy, Holy, Holy

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Acts 2:1-13

Sermon:

The Church waits in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. The Apostles and others are gathered and praying. All the different tasks have been completed to allow this final piece to occur: Jesus has commissioned them to be witnesses, Jesus has ascended into heaven, Judas has been replaced in obedience to the will and word of God and Matthias has been appointed. The Church waits for the Holy Spirit. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit comes on Pentecost, fifty days after Passover (hence the name) during what was known as the Feast of Weeks. This was a time of celebrating harvest and more recently associated with the giving of the Law (Torah) on Mount Sinai, which was believed to have happened fifty days after the Exodus. The Church waits for the Holy Spirit to be sent by God and He comes suddenly. Everything changes.

Now let us pause there, because I want us to think about the reality for the 120 people meeting in the large upstairs room. They have leadership, they are praying, they are listening to God, but they need the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, they will lack power, purity and be unable to proclaim Christ. These are things the Spirit brings.

Acts 2 is a familiar passage and it can pass over us without effect. It can be used to fuel controversy between our views on speaking in tongues, or we can say that was then and question its relevance for us today. In this series, I have been asking throughout, “What instruction has God for us, not primarily as individuals but as a Church?” And I believe the instruction from God to us is that ARPC needs a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I am not saying we do not have the Spirit, but we need a fresh outpouring to fill our jaded bones with life. The Holy Spirit is essential for the Church.

I. The Holy Spirit is Essential (Ezekiel 37:1-10)

Ezekiel in his vision of the valley of dry bones sees a demonstration of what the Church needs. Without the Spirit, literally the breath of God, the Church is dead, a macabre scene of activity without life.

1. The coming of the Spirit completes and confirms the saving work of Jesus, and spiritual life is given to the people of God. Without the Holy Spirit we are spiritually dead.
2. The coming of the Spirit equips the people of God with power to do all that Jesus asks of us. Without the Holy Spirit we are powerless, and the effective work of God is not done.
3. The coming of the Holy Spirit is for everyone (v1,4) - the whole church, Apostles, disciples, men and women, boys and girls - and it confirms our unity in the Spirit. Where there is disunity, the Spirit is grieved.

4. The coming of the Spirit brings about revival, even the appearance of many strange phenomena, but as the word of God is preached many are saved and added to the Church. ARPC needs a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

This is what the early church was praying for and I believe God is asking us to continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to come afresh on us. If we are to have power, to be pure and to proclaim Jesus, the Holy Spirit is essential.

II. Power (v.2): *“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.”*

Try to imagine you are there - you hear a sound. Your senses are aware of a blowing wind sound; it seems natural, but it is in fact supernatural, for it came from heaven. You hear the sound of a supernatural wind, the breath of God. The natural world reveals to us the power of the wind. Most of us have seen one of David Attenborough’s series in the natural world and the sheer power of the natural forces are an illustration, the Bible tells us, of the power of God through the Holy Spirit.

We might remember Jesus teaching His disciples in the Upper Room the week before His death. He promises the Holy Spirit and teaches them the Holy Spirit will convict people of sin, reveal to them the righteousness of Jesus and warn them of coming judgement. By implication, this is work we cannot do; we cannot make people see their sin or understand the word of God, see Jesus and sense the coming judgment. A fear of God is the Holy Spirit’s work. Only this power will bring people we know, people we work with, people in your area, to saving faith and sustain them in their faith. The power to become a Christian and live as a Christian is the Spirit’s work.

ARPC cannot bring anyone into the Kingdom of God unless the Holy Spirit is working. It is a resurrection power bringing life to the spiritually dead, and a sustaining power needed to live the life of a Christian. Now, if we believe this and understand this, then we will be encouraged to pray and pray specifically for people to know Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

III. Purity (v.3): *“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”*

Imagine you are there and you see “what seemed to be tongues of fire.” You see this image rest on the person opposite you, they see the same on you, and you are thinking to yourself, “What is this?” The Bible is clear in many pictures that fire purifies, in precious metals where the dross is removed or in the fire of judgement where sin is removed in the sacrifice. John the Baptist’s words come to mind about being baptised with water, but Jesus *“will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”* (Luke 3:16). This seemed natural - you see it - but it is, in fact, supernatural because you are not physically burned; you are spiritually cleansed.

This depends, of course, on the work of Jesus on the cross. He was punished for our sin so that we could be justified and imputed with His righteousness - declared righteous. The Holy Spirit sanctifies and sets us apart, purifying us for relationship and service. As I have said, when we pray and the Holy Spirit comes as He will, we are praying for purity, for a burning with the righteousness of Jesus.

Therefore, we are to expect a deeper conviction of our sin. We will become convicted, uncomfortable, aware of sin. You might recognise this as a still small voice of conviction, targeting areas of your life that you need to change. These may be areas known to you that

have been a problem for years - broken relationships, secret practices, anger at people or at the Church, constantly saying no to something that is good, a direction that takes you away from the revealed will of God. As your minister, I might perceive these and be right or wrong, for I do not see your heart, but God does and His diagnosis is always correct. God deeply desires to purge away your sin, through confession of sin and asking for forgiveness. This is the purifying work of the Spirit and it is a good work, valuable and indeed priceless. The Spirit recognises sin and burns it away through the work of Jesus on the cross and fills us with the fruit of love, joy and peace. We need the purity of the Holy Spirit.

As we think about that, let us take a moment to digress slightly. In v.4, the Bible says, "All of them were *filled* with the Holy Spirit". The language is important. When we read about the Holy Spirit, it is always a personal experience, it happens to us. In v.4, everyone is filled with the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that the language used to speak of this can vary, but it describes the same experience. So *filled*, *baptised*, *poured out* or *received* are different words that mean the same thing: a believer is given the Holy Spirit.

Now being filled, baptised, poured upon, and receiving the Holy Spirit refer as I said to being given the Holy Spirit, but the giving of the Holy Spirit comes to us at different times for different purposes: initially at conversion (9:17), given for a specific task (4:8), describing a Christian (6:13), or simply filling up in continuous giving (13:52). These words are used interchangeably. If you have admitted your sin and believed in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin, you have been filled, baptised, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on you or you have received the Holy Spirit. This is the universal experience of the Christian, an internal supernatural reality of having the Holy Spirit. As Paul said to the Church in Rome, "*if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ*" (Rom 8:9). If you confess Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you have been filled, baptised, had the Holy Spirit poured into you or received Him. To be (spiritually) alive at all, you must have the Holy Spirit; and to be more alive with power and purity, you need a fresh receiving of the Holy Spirit. That is what we are asking for as a church.

III. Proclamation (v.4): "*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*"

To start as we did with the other signs, the sense involved is hearing; the Apostles have moved out onto the street and those who had gathered for Pentecost hear them speaking in their own languages (v.4) as verses 6, 8, and 11 indicate. They are speaking the languages of the people they meet [that is, the languages of the nations listed in v.9-11 of the known world, listed from East to West; Persia (Iran) through Mesopotamia (Iraq), Asia Minor (Turkey), Egypt and North Africa, and then to Rome with the addition of Crete and Arabia.]

Again, imagine you are there. If you are an Apostle or Church member, you are amazed that when you open your mouth, you are able to speak the language of the person you are addressing, and if you are in the shoes of the one hearing these Galileans (who apparently were not known for their linguistic skills) you are bewildered, as Luke describes in v.6, utterly amazed (v.7), perplexed (v.12). Rightly, you begin to converse with each other and ask, "*What does this mean?*"

You will not be surprised to hear that there are many answers given. Some thought they were drunk (v.13), but that is refuted by Peter. It is a supernatural, Spirit-given ability to speak in other languages. Some argue that these were possibly the languages of heaven, of angels, and not national languages, referencing the idea from 1 Corinthians about tongues

and the need for interpreters. I trust Luke when he clearly states three times that these were national languages, and everyone was utterly amazed by what was happening. "*What does this mean?*"

It is a supernatural ability, a sign of the coming of the Kingdom. It reminds us of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10-11, where we read that the nations all spoke one language; yet, they used their great abilities to make their own rules and try to build their own way to God. So, God confused their language, "so they will not understand each other" (11:7). The gift of the Holy Spirit brings together the nations of the world; it includes everyone equally, united under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is the Church; it is ARPC.

The Holy Spirit allows us to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the world. They were so filled that they couldn't stop themselves speaking! They had a message from God and about God. "*We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues*" (v.11). This reminds us of Jesus' clear instruction to the Church: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). This was an initial sign given to the early Church and to the watching world, authenticating the arrival of the Holy Spirit upon them. We, as the Church today, have the same Holy Spirit dwelling in us -all who belong to Christ - and we have been given the same God-given task to speak of what we know of Jesus, to be His witnesses.

I and my fellow elders recognise that we in ARPC find it difficult to speak about Jesus publicly; so, we want everyone in ARPC to continue in prayer for a filling of the Holy Spirit in this period of restriction. In anticipation of days ahead when we will be physically freer to speak of Jesus. However, without the Holy Spirit we will neither desire nor have the ability to speak about Jesus. We need the Holy Spirit, so let us pray for the ability to proclaim Jesus.

Initially, Jesus says they are to speak within Jerusalem. They started with God-fearing Jews (v.5), people who were open to God and followed His directions, but hadn't as yet received the Holy Spirit. We want to encourage every member of ARPC to speak about what you know of Jesus, to speak of your life as a Christian; that is why we encourage you to join a 3D group, because we believe it is a great way to connect with each other and talk about your faith. We can see this as our beginning in Jerusalem, before we might venture further afield into our neighbourhoods, network of contacts or in the city centre. Being a city centre church gives us many possibilities to proclaim "*the wonders of God*" to all who will listen. We are also encouraging everyone during Lent to take some time to think about your faith and church life. To support you in this, we will put material on the website and send it to you through a minister's letter.

I realise these are difficult days for us, personally and as a church, but I am encouraged that we have the opportunity to pray and ask God to fill us afresh with the Holy Spirit. We need the power the Spirit brings to live the Christian life; we need the purity the Holy Spirit leads us towards through conviction of sin and repentance; and we need the ability to be witnesses of what God has done in our lives to others, starting within the Church. This is a supernatural ability; it is God's personal gift to us. When God does come to us and fill us afresh with Himself, either for the very first time or daily, it is life changing, amazing and often perplexing. Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to come in power, to purify and to help us proclaim Christ. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Praise: Spirit Of The Living God

Announcements

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: IPH 621 Shine, Jesus, Shine

Benediction: Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Discussion & Application:

Imagine yourself in the Upper Room. What strikes you about the experience of the Church in this passage?

Think/share about your personal experience of the Holy Spirit - His presence, His power, His purifying work or His aid in speaking of faith and Jesus.

How can we encourage each other to pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us (Eph. 5:18)?