***Sermon for Pentecost Sunday 2020* – Revd Graham Phillips**

Readings Acts 2.1-13, 1 Cor 12.3b-13, John 7.37-39

I wonder what your thoughts are of the Holy Spirit? Do you see it as something unusual, a bit weird, perhaps frightening, or even worse to be avoided at all costs, with images of ghosts and lack of control coming to mind?

The spiritual side of life is a reality. God is spirit and his presence and action in this world manifests itself through the third *person* of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. So rather than refer to the Holy Spirit as “it”, we should say “he” or, if we were to follow the female hebrew word for spirit, ruach, we should say “she”; and as with any name, we should say Holy Spirit not *the* Holy Spirit. So I shall try and say that in future to remind us that Holy Spirit is a person, a person who wants us to know her.

Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism, in the form of a dove and this symbolises the peace and harmony into which Holy Spirit leads us, as both comforter and guide, peace that we can know even in the most difficult of circumstances. In the gospel reading, Jesus refers to Isaiah “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” This echoes his conversation with the woman of Samaria at the well. In both he is pointing to the constant revitalising infilling of Holy Spirit.

The tongues of fire which we heard in our first reading speak of God‘s refining power, reminding us that his peace and harmony are the product of a process which disturbs and challenges us. We are called to repentance and fullness of life through the shocking death of Jesus, and God in his love for us does not want us to remain in the darkness of our sin, but to be renewed and made whole, transforming day by day into the people he has created us to be.

So this is a fire that consumes the dross in our lives, giving lustre to the soul, a purifying fire, not a destroying fire, imparting to us God’s incredible grace and love.

This cleansing, this infilling of living water, is an ongoing process. A lifetime of self reflection, of drawing closer to the Father, and Holy Spirit teaches us and leads us in this journeying ever closer to the truth of our status as adopted children of God.

On the day of Pentecost, the immediate consequences to the disciples of being filled with Holy Spirit, was a breaking down of barriers and a connection and understanding between people who had been separated by language, unifying them under one common purpose - a connection to the divine, God himself. Our loving heavenly Father joining all together into one family, reversing the story of the Tower of Babel. What a miracle of connecting all to himself, making all things new. 3000 people were added to their number on that first day and they went on to form communities in which all was shared, in which they were totally dependent on God for all their needs.  They trusted God, they knew God’s love and their response was to share it with others.

Many of us have been praying for 5 people over the last 11 days, praying that they will also know and receive God’s love, will receive Holy Spirit in their lives and be set on the path of holiness and righteousness. The path of love and joy. The path of fullness of life. In our prayers we are sharing God’s love with others, wanting them to know the peace, love and security we know, wanting God to change their hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, warming them to the love of God.

In this praying and indeed in the purifying process and the unifying effect of Holy Spirit we need Holy Spirit to help us, to guide us, to strengthen us. In the epistle reading we heard of the spiritual gifts that are available to us - Christ’s disciples - gifts which help us grow in our knowledge and understanding of our status as children of God and how God calls us into furthering his purposes, his desires on earth. This is the heart of praying Thy Kingdom Come. We are calling into being what God wants, aligning ourselves to God’s purposes and the gifts of Holy Spirit are given to us to empower us to do this.

This last week I have been in a handful of prayer meetings and several of us have had pictures and words from God, given to us by Holy Spirit. These have been hugely encouraging and insightful in understanding what God wants in a particular situation, to bring about his will, and have been a great blessing to us.

Luke records Jesus as saying: “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Holy Spirit and the gifts of Holy Spirit come from our loving heavenly Father. Do not be afraid of them. Instead ask for more of Holy Spirit in your lives. Ask for gifts of Holy Spirit, receive these gifts, open them, take them up and practise using them. To help us in this I invite you to join me on Tuesday and Thursday morning at 10am when we will talk further about the gifts of Holy Spirit. It will be an opportunity to ask questions, express doubts and ask God for gifts of Holy Spirit. Tuesday and Thursday morning at 10am.

We live in a spiritual world, we worship a God who is Spirit, we worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Holy Spirit and her gifts are given to us to help us learn to be dependent on this amazing God, to unify us into one body, revitalised, purified and made whole, and to empower us to present and reveal God’s redemptive love to the world. That is our calling, that is our reason for living.

So I encourage you, go forth in the power of Holy Spirit to bring others under the umbrella of God’s redemptive love. Amen.