**Sermon 1st August 2021, Trinity 9 at Annscroft by Rev’d Colin Hurford**

Ephesians 4.1-16

John 6.24-35

I’m afraid, like many people my age, I am going way back in time, to the early 1960’s in fact.  It was at this time that the Revd. Michael Harper, a curate of the very famous Evangelical Church, All Soul’s, Langham Place, London, prepared a series of Bible Studies on the letter to the Ephesians.  While he was doing this, he experienced a very real infilling of the Holy Spirit.  All week­end, he felt waves of wisdom and knowledge pouring in upon him — an experience that he described in one of his books.  After this, prayers seemed to be answered in a new way; worship be­came vital and real; and he experi­enced speaking in tongues, an intense awareness of Christ, and a new ability to help people.  However, the evangelical Rector of All Souls church was not impressed - we’re having none of that speaking in tongues here - so eventually Michael, with his wife Jeanne, left the church to found a movement known as The Fountain Trust.

In the nineteen seventies, I was fortunate to attend one of their four day conferences.  Again, forgive me for reminiscing about things I have already spoken about in previous addresses, but they are very relevant to what I want to say at the end of this sermon.  There are two things I remember vividly from that conference.  The first is the final Service.  It lasted three hours!  And none of us wanted it to stop, the presence of God was so real.  The service was a traditional Anglican Communion service but with a difference in that there were extended times for thanksgiving, praising God, using gifts of the spirit and for intercessions. Anyone could join in any of these times if they felt they had something to say or pray about.  In the thanksgiving, a missionary Doctor who had worked in China said, “Thank you God that no matter how old you are, there are still new things to learn.”  She was 82 years old.  In the intercessions, people prayed for problems in different parts of the world - fascinating to hear and to add my prayer to theirs.  My own prayer was for the church in Sabah, Malaysia which was undergoing a very troubled period and I simply prayed that they would come through the darkness to a resurrection.  As I prayed this, the very clear thought came into my mind - “That prayer is being answered.”  Six weeks later letters came from former students to say ‘how wonderful the Christian faith had become and how the church was growing.

The other outstanding memory of the conference was when, at a morning prayer time, Jeanne Harper, who didn’t know me at all, spoke a word - I don’t know if it was prophecy or knowledge - which directly related to a very vivid dream I had a few days before.  I asked for prayer about what she said and this, two or three years later, led to a vision of Jesus on the cross.

The Fountain Trust was eventually dissolved, having influenced many churches of different denominations in the UK and other countries.  But all that it achieved was started by a curate studying St.Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

The point of telling you this is that it is possible for the church today to be very like that of the church of the New Testament.  Those churches weren’t perfect, but their worship was filled with the Holy Spirit and the people exercised the gifts St. Paul describes in Ephesians and his other letters. “ some apostles,  some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints (that’s us) for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.”

So what has it to do with us?  I would like you to look at our churches in our benefice. We, in company with many other small country churches, are struggling to survive with the majority of us getting older - we’re all getting older, of course  but some are older than others.

Yet we are the body of Christ, in this place.  Graham and Emma are doing all they can but the future does not look too promising.  Do we really want to dwindle and die out?  Does God want us to dwindle and die?   What can we do?  Well, actually nothing in our own power and strength!  Fortunately God can do something and  I believe the Holy Spirit does have a plan for us.  But the Holy Spirit can only work through us if we actually want Him to.

So we have a choice - remain static, faithful Christians feeding on our Lord Jesus who is the bread of life and being content with just that.  Or become alive - as the experiences I have described show to be possible - under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.  That doesn’t necessarily mean three hour services!  But it does mean really wanting to go forward.  So, if you really want the church to change - and yourself to change with it - I invite you to do just two simple things.  Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring new life to us and our church.  And let Graham know that you are praying for this.

How to pray? - either use your own words or the words of the hymn “Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire”.  And perhaps think about the words of the prayer suggested by the Archdeacon of Hereford printed on page 18 of this month’s magazine.  Do pray regularly and sincerely in the faith that God will fulfil our prayers.

Rev’d Colin Hurford

**Intercessions by Mrs Sandra Earney**

In joy and hope and with hearts full of praise let us pray to the Father.

Joy in the wonders of your world, Hope that ways may yet be found to rescue it from the perils of global warming and in thanks and praise for your unending love to all your people.

We pray that your church, across the world, may be a leading force in the search for a solution to the climate emergency.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We ask for the guidance and the strength of your Holy Spirit for all the leaders of your church, and especially for Richard our Bishop, and Graham and Emma, here in this benefice. They both work so hard to lead us all, as we seek to do your will, to spread your love across this benefice, and to do our part in finding ways to reduce our carbon footprint.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We pray that you will disturb us all when we see the problems faced by so many people across the world and here in Britain, when we hear about people trafficking, about usually young women who are forced into slavery or sold for sex by unscrupulous criminals. We pray for strength for people like Sister Imelda who works tirelessly with these young women, offering help and support. We pray for those people who exploit these girls, that their eyes will be opened to the damage they are causing, and they will change.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We pray that you will disturb us when we learn of the conditions some people are expected to endure. When people are forced from their homes by poverty, disasters or violence

We pray for the time when all repent of acts of threat, violence and oppression. A time when wars and acts of terrorism are replaced by peace and understanding between nations. Especially we pray for peace between Israel and Palestinians; in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and parts of Africa.

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We ask that you disturb us, as perhaps Francis Drake was in the 16th century, when he prayed that we should not be satisfied with the way things are. Enable us all to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas, where losing sight of land we shall find the stars. We ask that You push back the horizons of our hopes and enable us to push into the future in your strength, courage, hope and love, and to do this in, and through, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Lord, your Son, Jesus, brought peace and calm to his disciples when they were distressed by the storms of life; bring peace to all who are distressed at this time. We pray in particular for all those for whom Covid restrictions have created trying circumstances – those whose mental health has deteriorated – those whose medical operations and procedures have been disrupted – those who have been denied social contact with family or friends - those who have lost loved ones – those who even though restrictions have been lifted are finding it hard to adjust to ‘normal’ social contact.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Lord, your Son brought healing and reconciliation to individuals and communities; help us to bring the wonder of your love into all our relationships. We pray in a moment of quiet for all those we know to be in need of healing, or those who are mourning the loss of a loved one. Surround them we pray with the power of the Holy Spirit and bring them peace *(Pause)*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Finally, Lord, we pray that the Holy Spirit will bring new life to us and to your church so that everyone, everywhere, will know your love.

Merciful Father,

**Accept these prayers**

**for the sake of your Son,**

**Our Saviour Jesus Christ,**

**Amen**