**Sermon on Pentecost Sunday 23rd May 2021 Rev’d Graham Phillips**

Acts 2.1-21

John 15:26-27, 16:14b-15

Pentecost is the birthday of the church, the empowerment of the first disciples as marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as we heard in our first reading.

It comes from the Greek word meaning 50th and it refers to the 50th day after Passover, when we celebrated Easter. Christmas - Bethlehem was God with us; Easter, Calvary - the cross was God for us; Pentecost is God in us. Pentecost is the celebration of God’s desire to empower us and dwell within us. It was the fulfilment of a promise that Jesus make to his disciples before he died - I will ask the Father to give you the advocate, the counsellor, the helper to be with you forever, the spirit of truth. And this same Holy Spirit is available to us today.

Let us look at the Ministry of the Holy Spirit by looking at the images of the Holy Spirit given to us in the Bible.

First - Wind - at the creation of the heavens and the earth, divine wind, the Holy Spirit, swept over the face of the waters, over chaos, and together the three persons of God created light and all that we know. He also breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life. This divine wind brings life, heavenly life, Godly life. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

And at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 we have heard read, “Suddenly from heaven there came the sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Holy Spirit gave them ability.” Wind speaks of the creative, renewing, life giving, invigorating power of the spirit of God.

Second - Fire - God was referred to as a consuming fire in Daniel and Isaiah. In the new Testament Jesus speaks of his mission on Earth by saying “I have come to bring fire on the Earth”. John the Baptist said of Jesus in Luke, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” John was saying that the fire of God’s spirit would purify the believers and burn away all the dross, the rubbish in the lives of the believers. What would be left would be wholesome and good. This is a purifying process that all believers go through. How we need that purifying, that cleansing, that remoulding into the holiness of God.

Going back to our first reading in Acts, “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” At Pentecost, the Spirit ignites the fire that Jesus came to kindle.

Third - Water - the imagery of the Holy Spirit being poured out like water is found throughout the Bible. We read in Isaiah chapter 44:

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land,

    and streams on the dry ground;

I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,

    and my blessing on your offspring.”

In Psalm 42 we read,

“As a deer longs for flowing streams,

    so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God,

    for the living God.”

Water revitalises. The Spirit revitalises. Just as our physical thirst is quenched by water, so our spiritual thirst is quenched by the holy spirit.

Jesus spoke to the woman at the well and in John 4 we read, “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

Only the Holy Spirit can quench our inner thirst because only the Holy Spirit can fill us with God’s love, can satisfy that deep need to be known, to be loved, can assure us of the promise of eternal life.

We need the creative wind of God’s Holy Spirit, we need the cleansing fire of God’s Holy Spirit, we need the revitalising water of God’s Holy Spirit and fourthly we need the oil of God’s Holy Spirit.

Fourth - oil. Anointing someone with oil is a physical act that leads to an action by God.  In 1 Samuel we read “Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him and from that day on the spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.” In Acts chapter 10 we read, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.” All of us were anointed with oil at our baptism, a new birth took place. Priests are anointed with oil at their ordination - a new empowerment by God.

The disciples anointed sick people with oil for healing and in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 we read, “He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” God anoints us by placing part of himself in us, as a guarantee, for our future in heaven. What a gift from God, a passport for heaven, imprinted within us now, written into our DNA.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is not an optional extra for Christians. The prophet Ezekiel speaking for God, tells us, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances, my laws.”

The New Covenant, the new agreement with God, means that it is impossible to enter it apart from the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained that to Nicodemus. Any new birth is impossible without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Wind, fire, water, oil and fifthly the dove.

At the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist said, “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.” The dove represents purity and peace. Peace is such a necessity- peace for the present, peace for the future. Deep inner peace and assurance that all will be well even in the midst of awful circumstances. This peace can only come from Jesus who said: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” We all need this peace that surpasses all understanding, this peace that guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

In our second reading we read of Jesus saying that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth. How wonderful in this distorted fractured world to know what is truth. God’s truth.

We profess in the creed “We believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the Prophets.”

Let me ask you this question: Do we, do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

The Bible contains warnings which are a challenge to us. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit,” found in Ephesians; “Do not quench the Holy Spirit” in 1 Thessalonians, “Do not resist the Holy Spirit” in Acts chapter 7. We must not resist, we must not grieve the Holy Spirit. We all need the counsellor, we all need the helper, we all need the advocate.

We may need the Holy Spirit to come as wind, to create and breathe new life into us. We may need the Holy Spirit to come as fire to cleanse and burn our dross. We may need the Holy Spirit to come as water to revitalise and refresh us, to be a spring of living water within us. We may need to be anointed with oil in the power of the Holy Spirit to heal us in body, mind or soul. We may need the Holy Spirit as a dove to purify us and fill us with peace, to empower us.

All of us are called into relationship with God, God who is Spirit, we need the Holy Spirit to know the fullness of that relationship, the fullness of that love.

So I encourage you, if you have uncertainties, fears, misgivings about the Holy Spirit. If you have heard or seen things which have frightened you - speaking in tongues, loud emotional behaviour, laughing or quaking in the Spirit, talk to me, talk to others about these things. Talk to God the Father about them. Be honest. Be open. Acknowledge your feelings. And remember the warnings - Do not grieve or quench the Holy Spirit.

There is a refrain: God is good, all the time, all the time, God is good. God is not here to harm us but to give us fullness of life. So hand over your fears to him, trust that He knows what is best for us and give Him permission to come upon you, empower you, fill you, be in you, just as he did with those first disciples. Remember our liturgical year: Christmas, the birth of Jesus - God with us; Easter, the cross - God for us; Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, God in us. Let God be in you.

Amen.

Rev’d Graham Phillips