

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Readings: Acts 1

Acts 2

Date: Sunday 15 May 2016

Theme: How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?

We have been working our way towards today week by week: we have asked some key questions as we got ready to celebrate Pentecost Sunday, the Festival of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the HS?

He is a person not a thing.

What does the HS do?

He produces fruit (character) and gives gifts (like playing cards to build up his church).

Today we are asking two questions:

What does it mean to live a Spirit-filled life?

How can we be filled with him?

We have heard the story of the first Pentecost, that day when, after years of promise, of looking forward and of expectation, the Spirit comes upon the disciples. He comes with power. He comes with tongues of fire, he comes with the sound of the wind and he comes with strange languages.

Something quite extraordinary happened that day. You could see it. You could touch it. You could feel it. God had shown up in a truly remarkable and completely unmistakable way.

In Village Prayers, we have been reading on in the first part of the book of Acts, where Luke tells us how the coming of the Spirit radically transforms the lives of timid, fearful men and women, those who thought they might be next for the same kind of treatment they had seen meted out to Jesus their master and friend. It's the coming of the Spirit which gets them out of their locked rooms and onto the streets, speaking boldly about him, seeing the world through his eyes and making the kind of difference political parties can only dream of.

The history of the church is well known in all its ups and downs and ins and outs. And in spite of the attempts of the newspapers and the media moguls of today who seek to keep Jesus off the front page, his followers out of the headlines and the church on the back foot, there are good news stories to tell. God is not mocked. He is sovereign and he rules and reigns over all. The work of the Spirit continues today and in our generation. And we have the huge privilege of being part of that work.

Back to our key questions:

What does it mean to live a Spirit-filled life?

How can we be filled with him?

What does it mean to live a Spirit-filled life?

We saw in the pages of the OT, how the Spirit came upon individuals at particular times, in particular ways for particular tasks:

Gideon, to give him courage
Samson, to give him strength
Bezalel, to give him creative gifts of design and artistry

When the Spirit came at Pentecost he came in power on all people everywhere, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel 2:28:

Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

The coming of the Spirit on all people everywhere is for them to have the power of God himself inside them.

Let's not forget, Jesus had come to the end of his earthly life. He had promised that he would not leave the disciples comfortless. They would not be alone. As we saw last week, as Sue reminded us so helpfully, they had to wait for the coming of the Spirit. And it's on the day of Pentecost that he came. And he comes with power to fill them up from the inside out so that they would have the Spirit of Jesus in them at all times and wherever they happened to be.

In inviting the Spirit to come into us, we are asking for nothing less than asking Jesus to live inside us, to produce his character from within us, to bring to life the gifts he has given us, and to change us day by day ... so that more and more we see the world as he sees it, we have the

compassion he showed for those in need and we have confidence to speak up for him and out for him in all kinds of different contexts and places.

This is something of what it means to live a Spirit-filled life. To be radically different from those around us:

in the choices we make,
in the way we choose to live,
in how we spend our money
in what we do with our time

Those early disciples that day and in the days that followed were literally on fire for Jesus. He had gone, but they were going to carry on the work, fuelled and sustained by the power of his Spirit within them.

Proverbs are little phrases which stick in the mind amazingly well, aren't they?

A stitch in time ... saves nine
People in glass houses shouldn't ... throw stones
Pride comes before a ... fall

In the same kind of a way, TV ads are very memorable, aren't they?

A Mars a day helps you ... work, rest and play
Tesco: every little ... helps
L'Oreal: because you're ... worth it

I don't know whether you remember the TV advert for the Duracell Battery. Here the ad speak to us not in words so much as in an image ... a little toy going on and on and on way beyond its inferior and (fair to say cheaper) rival. The Duracell Bunny, created as far back as 1973, has become an image which speaks of power, of continuity, and of endurance. And of course it's the battery not the Bunny that is important here.

Please don't get me wrong: God the Holy Spirit is not a bunny ... but he is the power inside us to make us what he wants us to be, to help us to live for him, to help us to speak for him, to give us all that we need, all that he needs us to have to extend his kingdom and bring greater glory to his name in the world we live in.

Now of course, the problem with any illustration is that it only takes you so far ... we all know that however amazing Duracell is there will come a day when Bunny stops his moving and all goes very quiet.

Not so with God the Holy Spirit, he really does (as the song says) go on and on and on and on.

And here is a second illustration to help us be confident about that.

When we become a Christian and say yes, we want to be a follower of Jesus, God puts his battery inside us and begins his transforming work.

But from time to time we need a top up, a sense of refreshment or renewal. We sometimes need to feel the breath of the Spirit afresh, for him to blow on us and through us again, to remind us he is there and to assure us of his presence.

Someone has said that we can't see the wind and, of course, that's true – but we know it's there.

Outside my study window it's there gently blowing the Rambling Rector – that the name of a rose, in case you were wondering.

In the yacht races on and off the Isle of Wight, it's there in the billowing of the sails.

On the M4 near Reading it's there in the elegant single turbine by the hard shoulder.

On the top of Windsor Castle or at The Racecourse when the Queen is present it's there in the flying of the flag.

You can't see the wind, but we know when it's there. We can see its effect and we know and appreciate its power. So with the Spirit of God, when he comes we know it and we feel his refreshing and his renewal.

These are some of the things we can know and experience when we are living a Spirit-filled life. And all this in addition to:

A heightened sense of the closeness of God's presence in worship;

A keener sense of his creative genius in the beauty of the work around us;

A love for people and a desire to meet their needs when we can, to reach out and touch with the love and compassion of God himself.

So if these things answer the first question: what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? What about the second question:

How can we be filled with him?

The simple answer is this: we just need to ask.

Some of us will have been filled with him for many years. We became a Jesus follower some time ago and in putting out faith and trust in the man who lived and died for us, we received the gift of the Spirit God the Father was longing to give us.

Others of us may not have heard of God the Holy Spirit spoken about in quite this way before. Maybe we are newer in the life of the church and just getting to know a little of what it means to be a disciple ourselves. Maybe we find Jesus attractive and want to know more?

I am going to pray a prayer in a moment which is a prayer we can say or a prayer we can repeat wherever we are on that journey.

For those who know and love Jesus we are underlining that again today and simply asking him to refresh and renew us.

For others we will be asking the Father for the gift of the Spirit for the first time today ... we will be saying in this prayer that no longer want to live in our own strength and on our own, we want him to be part of our lives, never to leave us or forsake us and today, 15 May 2016 is where that journey begins for us, right here and right now.

In a moment we will stand and pray together ... you may feel something tangible, as if God is physically near you or with you. You may feel a warmth or a sense of peace and calm. You may feel nothing especially at all. But I am going to ask us to put out our hands as if we were receiving a gift and am going to invite the HS to come ... how can we be filled or refreshed in the Spirit ... we just ask.

Let's pray ...

If you have sensed something this morning, please do tell someone. A few weeks ago someone sat in my study and described what they had felt God had given them at the Alpha awayday. It was very moving to know that God is there, that he is for us and that whatever we are going through he knows us and he loves us all the same.

When you come to Communion as you return to your seat, there will be a gentle breeze from a fan blowing ... you may just want to stand still for a moment and feel the wind, on

your hand or on your face, knowing that God is God and that he has good things for you in the gift of his Spirit.

Our next song is ...