

**4 June 2017**

**I will pour out my Spirit**

**Acts 2.1-21**

**John 7.37-39**

Today we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

Let's begin by looking at the

IMAGES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ... that we find in Scripture.

Three different images are drawn upon in our two readings today to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit:

1. Wind

Luke tells us that the sound like the blowing of a violent wind filled the house.

2. Fire

Then Luke says that they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire separating and coming to rest on each of them.

3. Water

Then in John 7, Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me ... streams of living water will flow from within him."

There are some remarkable similarities in each of these symbols of the Spirit.

1. They all convey the image of movement

Movement is all that wind is about – you only know that the wind is blowing because you feel the movement on the air on your face or in your hair ... or see the leaves or trees blowing in the wind.

The flames of a fire or candle are in constant motion. There is something fascinating about looking at a fire ... and some of that is the unpredictable dancing of the flames.

Although water does not need to be in motion ... the water that is used in Jesus' image here is a spring or natural fountain of water. This is all about fresh, cool water bursting out of the ground, sparkling with life and movement.

There is energy and movement in each of these images ...

... and they speak of the energy and movement of God in our lives.

2. These are all things that are difficult to contain

You can shelter yourself from the wind; you can harness the energy of the wind (windmill, sail on a ship), but you can't capture it and contain it. There is something elusive about the wind.

There is also something elusive about fire. You can't just capture a flame on its own and put it in a display cabinet – the flame itself is momentary.

We can learn to control it. But if we ever try to contain it – literally put it into a container ... then all we are likely to do is to extinguish it.

And springs of water are much the same. Children love playing in fountains, especially those where they can try to stand on the fountains. But the water just keeps on coming and coming. They can change the direction of the water, but it will keep on flowing.

And we cannot contain the Spirit of God. There is something elusive, mysterious about the Spirit's movement in and through our world and in our lives.

Much as we can only ever talk about the wind by seeing and feeling the effects of the wind – you cannot see the wind – so we can only ever talk about the work of the Spirit of God, by speaking about the effects of the Spirit on our lives and on the lives of others.

3. All of the images can be both powerful and restorative

Wind can be frightening in its power and ferocity – if you live in the hurricane zone all you can do is batten down everything as best you can and head for safety in the hurricane shelter.

Yet wind is the very breath of life – and indeed the NT can use the same word for wind, breath and spirit – all are possible translations of pneuma.

Similarly with fire – it can be terrifying in its power. Yet its power can be used to purify metals. And when controlled brings warmth and light to our world.

Water can also be powerful – the power of flood and high tide can sweep all else away. It's power can be captured in turbines and tidal energy. And yet water is life-giving, refreshing ...

If you look on YouTube you can find countless videos of each of these images in its dual role.

YouTube loves the dramatic – and so you will find videos of hurricanes and tornadoes, of forest fires out of control and of floods and storms.

But you can also find countless videos of the refreshing side of these images as well:

10 hours of the relaxing sound of wind blowing through trees; 8 hours of a fire burning; 9 hours of a stream flowing over rocks.

These are images that can convey both enormous power and restorative, life-giving energy.

And there is something of that in the Spirit of God. The Spirit of the living God comes to us with all of the awesome power of the creator God ... and yet he touches our lives in ways that restores and brings life and purifies.

We have looked at the images of the Spirit conveyed in the passages, let's now turn to the

## IMPACT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 1. Domestic impact of the Spirit

Where does this take place?

Luke is quite clear that it takes place in a house – v2.

There has been plenty of discussion among commentators about how realistic this is, given the scene that follows. A huge crowd is drawn to the commotion ... eventually we hear that following Peter's address three thousand become followers of Jesus and are baptised.

It is suggested that the only place where such a crowd could have gathered is the temple or somewhere near the temple.

And so some have suggested that when Luke refers to house in v2 this is shorthand for 'house of God' ... and all of this took place at the temple. But if that's the case, then they wouldn't have been sitting there, which Luke is also at pains to tell us. You don't sit in the temple, you stand.

Now I suspect that there has got to be some movement out of the house into a public arena eventually, which Luke doesn't tell us about. But I do believe that the events begin in a house – and that's what Luke wants us to understand, because that is part of the impact of the Spirit, that makes the Spirit's presence so transformative.

We need to remember that this took place at the feast of Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost – so called because it follows seven weeks and day (= 50 days) after the feast of Passover, began life in Israel as a harvest celebration, celebrating the first harvest of the wheat.

By the time of Jesus the feast of Pentecost had also come to mark the giving of the law to Moses on Mt Sinai.

This was the event that marked off the people of Israel from all the other nations. God had given his people his law. And so they celebrated this event in which God had encountered Moses on the mountain top in fire and cloud and mystery.

Now God comes to meet his people, not on the mountain top, not in the temple ... but in a house – and he pours out his Spirit upon his people, so that his laws might be written not on stone or papyrus or paper, but in the hearts of his people.

This is why I want to talk about the impact of the Spirit as domestic. God in all his fullness comes even into the home and makes his dwelling among us.

This is not to domesticate God – to tame God and bring God under control, like we domesticate animals and treat them as our pets.

This is rather God making sacred and holy even the most ordinary and everyday.

This is God upsetting the way we like to order the world – separating off the world of the secular from the world of the sacred. God by his Spirit now invades our homes.

The impact of the Spirit is domestic, because God is encountered in his fullness in the everyday world in which we live.

## 2. Democratic impact of the Spirit

I use this term slightly loosely to describe the way in which the Spirit is poured out on everyone equally.

v1 They were *all together* in one place – presumably means all 120 or so of the followers of Jesus that Luke has spoken about in chapter 1.

v 3 - Notice how the tongues of fire separate on 'each of them'.

v 4 – They were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then Peter quotes from the prophet Joel

v17 – I will pour out my Spirit on *all* people.

And then goes on to talk about young and old, he includes the servants, and emphasises that it is both men and women who are included.

And Jesus uses similarly all-inclusive language when he says, "*Whoever* believe in me ..., streams of living water will flow from within him."

The pouring out of the Spirit of God is on *all* who follow Jesus.

- the Spirit who leads us into all truth
- the Spirit who causes us to cry out 'Abba, Father'
- the Spirit whose harvest in our lives is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control
- the Spirit who intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express

This Spirit is poured out on all who entrust themselves to Jesus.

I think that we are still learning what this means after 2000 years of church history, because the church hasn't always been that good in living and acting as if this is true.

Before the coming of Jesus there was an acceptance that some people were more filled with the Spirit of God than others. God would pour out his Spirit on certain people at certain times to equip them for special tasks. In particular the prophets were seen as filled with God's Spirit.

This created an acceptance of a natural hierarchy, in which some were more filled with the Spirit than others.

But that has kind of stuck with the church and hasn't entirely been lost. And I think there is a constant human temptation to think in this sort of way. And too often ordained ministry and leadership has been associated with an idea that some people have a fuller measure of the Spirit of God than others.

And that has been, and continues to be how power is exercised in the church in an unhelpful way.

The New Testament is very clear – whatever may be the calling on those who are called to be leaders within the church, that calling is not based on the idea that some are more filled with the Spirit than others – the Spirit of God is poured out on all ...

The New Testament talks about each of us having different gifts of the Spirit, and therefore a different role in the church and in the world ... but that the Holy Spirit is given to all.

And in our life together, and our life in the world, we need to learn what it means to live out this extraordinary fact of the Christian way.

### 3. The demographic impact of the Spirit

The story of the first Pentecost Sunday lays down a marker for the way in which the gift of the Spirit will impact on the world.

If you put all of the different people-groups that are represented in Jerusalem, you will see that they cover people from all parts of the then Roman empire and beyond.

- Parthians
- Medes
- Elamites
- residents of Mesopotamia
- Judea
- Cappadocia
- Pontus and
- Asia

- Phrygia
- Pamphylia
- Egypt
- and parts of Libya near Cyrene
- visitors from Rome
- Cretans
- Arabs

And the work of the Spirit is to build bridges between all of these people groups.

In this story the miracle is that all of these people heard the apostles speaking in their own tongues ...

And the story of Acts is the story of the Holy Spirit making community between people of all nations and backgrounds ... eventually reaching out beyond the Jewish community to embrace people of all nations.

The demographic impact of the work of the Holy Spirit is always that of building community between disparate peoples and groups – drawing all into the community of God’s kingdom.

The Spirit at work at Pentecost and beyond, is the Spirit of the crucified Jesus, who gave his life to re-build community with God, and to re-build community between people. He is the Spirit of the reconciling God.

So we will want to stand with and for all that binds people together, all that builds understanding between people, all that encourages a strengthening of community.

And we will want to stand firmly against all that seeks to divide; all that builds barriers between people; all that separates people into us and them.

It is a divisive spirit that is at the heart of the extremist ideology that has led to yet another terrorist atrocity in London last night.

We must respond to that divisive spirit by drawing on the resources of the reconciling Spirit of Jesus – refusing to be drawn into a view of the world that divides and separates – instead building a world built on trust and togetherness.

Which means that we will refuse to allow these terrorists to define for us how we relate to those of Muslim faith, but will want to build a community of

understanding with the vast majority of Muslims for whom Islam is a faith that works for peace in the world.