

Epiphany 2 9th Jan 2022

Acts 8:14-17 Luke 3: 15-17; 21-22

We talk a lot about the Holy Spirit in church but not many of us really understand him/ her/ it? We pray, baptise, bless in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit but what do we really understand the third person of the Trinity to be? Are we referring to some ethereal being? Are we just hedging our bets hoping this is the way we can know God now since Jesus has ascended?

At Confirmation services there is a great deal of emphasis on the Holy Spirit. *'Confirm O Lord, your servant X with your Holy Spirit'* - as if it's some magic ingredient to make your life better and that does seem to be the inference from our readings. John baptised with water, but Jesus will send the Holy Spirit - it must be better surely? And if it is, how do I get the Holy Spirit and what difference will it make to my life?

I don't remember any magic moment at my Confirmation. My 12-year-old self was just pleased to get a new outfit. I do remember giving my life to Jesus sadly at Villa Park and not St. Andrews and things certainly changed but it wasn't powerful zap. However, there have been moments when inspirational preachers have made me want whatever they have, and I've asked God for a top up and I've felt what John Wesley described as *'strangely warmed.'*

At my Ordination I remember crying with tears of happiness as I felt fulfilled, that this was what I was meant to do. Some would say that was the Holy Spirit and I believe that too. But it's certainly not all been mountain top experiences since. In fact, most of my life is pretty ordinary and yet there are those special moments when you feel, and it is a feeling and not everyone is comfortable talking about this, you feel as Jesus must have - *'You are my beloved and I'm pleased with you'*. Maybe it's a sense of security, wellbeing, that everything will be ok even when it feels your world is falling apart, because if you have given it all over to Jesus and asked for his help, he does send the Comforter the Holy Spirit to takeover when your own human resources run dry. I don't want to go into more details here as they are deeply personal and private moments, but the Holy Spirit does make a difference.

It's what the Youth Emmaus booklet describes as the difference between a black and white and colour TV. Seeing in glorious technicolour makes you appreciate that previously something was missing.

A missing element can make a world of difference. When something crucial is missing it can have devastating effects. If you don't believe that ask the mechanic that is working on your car and discovers that the last big bump you hit caused a part to fall off. The missing element can cause you to have major car problems. Or ask the person who has worked for hours on the jigsaw puzzle only to discover that the last piece is missing. The missing element can make a huge difference in your life. And with this thought in mind, I would like to suggest today that Christ Church and many other churches have a missing element. There is something that has been lost. Is it:

Worship – No, we have not perfected it or gone as far with it as we should, but we have more training, and more music than you can shake a stick at. Every contemporary music singer seems to be offering worship albums. We are not short on worship.

Prayer – No, although we could all probably kneel longer, we have had more teaching and preaching on prayer than perhaps any other generation. With the Thy Kingdom come and 24/7 prayer movements in particular.

Programs – No, most churches have more programs, committees, organisational skills than we have ever seen before. The additional of technological advances has greatly enhanced this in recent years too.

But it is evident that there is a missing element. It is evident when you discover that less than a third of Christians shared their faith with another person in the last 12 months. It becomes apparent that we are missing something when you understand that there is no difference in the way that Christian folk live their lives compared to those who are not Christians.

However, we are not the first to miss this crucial ingredient in our Christian life. After Jesus' crucifixion the disciples are quiet, reserved, scared, in hiding, and hampered by a survival mentality. They were missing something. But suddenly they become a revolutionary force that changes the world! If we are going to impact our world and our generation

it is imperative that we discover and secure this missing element in our life.

The missing element in most of our lives is the Holy Spirit. Paul came into contact with some Christians and immediately addressed their deficiency. He was in their face about their need of this element in their life.

Why is it so crucial for us to have the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is crucial because it enables and empowers us to witness. The Holy Spirit is not just about goose bumps and other tongues. Its purpose is to give us that extra amount of courage and desire to share the gospel with others. It wasn't natural ability or boldness that caused that intimidated group of disciples to become great witnesses. It was after they had received the Holy Spirit that they were able to get out of their little clique and comfort zone to reach out to others. Acts 1:8 tells us from the very beginning that we will receive power to witness when we receive the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Holy Spirit isn't just for you it is really about those you are called to reach. Most of us are just too reserved about Jesus. It is time for us to get so filled with the power of the Holy Spirit that it can't be contained. So full of the Spirit that we won't be intimidated or embarrassed to open our mouths and be a witness.

The Holy Spirit is also essential because He is our comforter. I am aware that some of us are facing some trying times at the moment, the Holy Spirit is the comforter that can help you stay calm, cool, and collected in any situation. Even facing the hardest situations, you can have peace and comfort in your soul.

The Holy Spirit is our direct pipeline to the Father. When we pray in other tongues, we are praying in a special prayer language that allows us to communicate with God and we pray what we should pray even when we don't know what we should pray. I don't understand how, it is a language that only God can understand. It is icing not the whole cake.

Finally, it is important for us to have the Holy Spirit because as I mentioned earlier there is no difference between the way many of us live and how non-Christians live. The Holy Spirit is the difference. She is the one who will convict us and cause us to live righteously.

So, if this element is so important how do we obtain the Holy Spirit?

God has offered us a gift. To receive a gift all we have to do is accept it. We can't earn it, nor do we need to beg for it. Peter's instructions on the Day of Pentecost are still good. Repent and receive. Simply accept. You don't have to be in some emotional euphoric state to get this gift. You simply have to believe and receive. (Luke 11:11-13). *'How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?'*

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, then we will see changes in our actions and in our speech, but we must open our mouths - Acts 2:4. *'all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.'* It is the Spirit that speaks, but it is your voice. The early disciples had to open their mouth and use their voice and then the Holy Spirit took over. We must open our mouth. We need to understand that every time anyone in the Bible was filled with the Holy Spirit they had to speak. We must understand that out of our praise in our own tongue the Holy Spirit will take over and give utterance. The water is flowing but you are the outlet. You can open or close the spout.

Can you make it without the Holy Spirit? Yes, but without it is much harder. It is like having a car with no keys. If Jesus thought, it was important for the disciples that should let us know that if we are missing this element also, we aren't complete. If it was the first thing that Peter and John prayed for the people of Samaria it must have been important. So, I ask you the same question today? Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit? If not, you are missing a very vital, crucial, and important element. The good news is that you can get it and all you have to do ask, receive, and use it! We might be commemorating the Baptism of Christ but as with all baptisms they are an opportunity for new starts, and new life, a renewal of previous promises so that we too can receive the Holy Spirit if we wish.

Let us pray: *'As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O Lord.'* (Psalm 42:1)

O Holy Spirit of God - come into my heart and fill me:

I open the window of my soul to let you in. I surrender my whole life to you.

Come and possess me, fill me with light and truth.

I offer to you the one thing I really possess,

my capacity for being filled by you. Of myself I am an empty vessel.

Fill me so that I may live the life of the Spirit,

The life of truth and goodness, the life of beauty and love, the life of wisdom and strength. But, above all, make Christ to be formed in me, that I may dethrone self in my heart and make him King.

So that he is in me, and I in him, today and forever Amen.