

Acts 2:1-21
Song of the Three
John 14:23-31

Acts 2:4 (ESV) "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

John 14:16-17 (ESV) "the Father...will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you....14:26 (ESV) and "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

1. Introduction.

a) 1974 was the year we moved to Thursday Island - the very top of Australia. I had been elected Bishop of the Diocese of Carpentaria. A difficult decision - remote, children's schooling, could be there for life - different culture - Islanders, Aborigines, cattle stations. Our lives were changed!

The conversion of the Torres Strait Islanders to Christianity was in 1871 - the Coming of the Light - a romantic story, bringing unity out of disunity, peace out of head-hunting, stability out of fear and uncertainty, a volatile, loveable, loving people - great singers!

We discovered a truth - applicable there, as it is here. This is it: "God has no grandchildren." It means that each generation needs to be, must be, converted to Jesus Christ as Lord. We cannot pass "faith" on to our children, only knowledge, example, experience. What they do with **that** is their decision. Look at your children, ask the question, "Where are they with Christ?" Then, examine yourself!

The Salvation Army story illustrates the same truth. The wife of the famous General William Booth, on her death bed, in 1890, said to her eldest daughter: "Katie, why is it that God can't keep a thing pure for more than a generation?"¹ That was only 40 years after the Salvation Army had started, with its sensational impact upon many lives, and yet - running out of steam.

It is not God that cannot keep "a thing pure". It is us! It is we who muck it up. What starts off so wonderfully, so beautifully under the grace and love of the Lord, can, within a very short time, turn into something that makes our Father in heaven weep, as His children stamp their feet and play their little games. It happens in every church. Somehow we lose focus, direction, energy, the impetus of living ἐν Χριστῷ - lose our first love² - we turn grace into law.³ We become set in concrete, stop being open to the Holy Spirit!

Paul alerted Timothy to the same issue, of those who have "the appearance of godliness but denying its power."⁴ Hear that, see that, take hold of it, because the enemy is there "like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour".⁵ And that, precisely, is what had happened in the Torres Strait. Routine, lots of appealing noise but spiritually asleep.

An evangelistic, renewal mission was held, at which many, Islanders, including Elly and self, experienced a massive change in our lives, attitudes. It was a mini Pentecost, when "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the

Spirit gave them utterance.”⁶ That was the beginning and radical, growth, transformation took place. God became more real, we became more expectant, seeking a fresh friendship; wanting to pray, to worship with songs of praise, longing to read Scripture, find out more of what God is doing amongst His children. Simply conforming to duty was left behind, had moved into passion! It happened in the early church - **why not now?**

Hands on, healing prayer, inviting people forward for ministry, witnessed to the Lord at work - for healing, wholeness, salvation, being filled with the Spirit! Our heart's desire was to see people move from death-culture to life-culture or as Peter puts it: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”⁷

Sense the movement? From darkness to light, from death to life, from the kingdom of the evil one, to the Kingdom of God, from me-centred to Jesus-centred. This is what Christianity is about. Process, growth, maturity, moving into the likeness of Lord Jesus, determined to do, and only do, His will. No wonder we call Pentecost the birthday of the church - let us rejoice and be glad - alleluia!

b) Our constant temptation is to get side-tracked, other matters intrude, which take our eyes off Jesus. Are we simply tacking our faith, in Christ, on to **our** list of activities? Have we missed the heart of what it is about, by not being alert to the Spirit - to take hold of us, wrapping us around with Father's ἀγάπη-love. As Kingdom people we operate within the Father's will. Go outside of that, we quench the Spirit⁸, lose our passion.

Jesus put it this way to Nicodemus: "... unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”⁹ It was something of this that we experienced in 1976. It not only changed our lives, but it also changed the way we approached, and did, ministry. God had lit a fire in the Torres Strait.

Such a movement of the Holy Spirit does not refute, deny, nor denigrate anything that happened prior to this experience, just as the disciples would not have denied their relationship and experience with Jesus, before Pentecost. We joined hands with the blind man who said, “One thing I do know, that though "I was blind, now I see!”¹⁰ - Once I was this, now I am that! Is this our heart's desire, of being open to where the Holy Spirit wants to lead us? Do we allow the Lord to have His way?

2. Pentecost

a) Cross, resurrection, ascension - the tiny church, had witnessed the Risen Lord - where to now, what next? Scared, apprehensive? No doubt! “Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind...it filled the entire house...divided tongues as of fire appeared to them...rested on each one of them...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”¹¹ The mission of the church had begun!

When Paul turned up in Ephesus he found a dilemma. Apollos had told them about Jesus, but nothing of the Holy Spirit. ""Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Did you take God into your mind only, or did you also embrace him with your heart? Did he get inside you?" "We've never even heard of that - a Holy Spirit? God within us?"¹² Pentecost was revisited. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”¹³ This is what Acts is about, picking up the three themes that Jesus hammered - the Kingdom of God, Jesus is Lord,

witnessing to God's kingdom, in word and deed, made possible by the **empowering** (hear it) of the Holy Spirit.

John's account of Pentecost, says. "When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."¹⁴ Even amongst the Gentiles in Caesarea - "While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the (Jewish) believers...were amazed...the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out **even** on...Gentiles...they were hearing them speaking in tongues...extolling God."¹⁵

These men and women were never the same...lives changed forever. Because of Pentecost the world has been changed. If Jesus had not breathed Holy Spirit into the disciples they would have got stuck in that upper room - knowing about it, without experience, as "education without God (the Holy Spirit) makes clever devils."¹⁶

b) May we, today, suggest that the church is full of men and women like Apollos. They know the stuff. They are highly trained intellectually, but lack the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Selwyn Hughes described Apollos this way. "He was effective to a degree, but not to the degree that he could be effective."¹⁷ Healing, deliverance, wholeness, reconciliation - what has happened to all that?

The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth, into the conviction that "Jesus is Lord,"¹⁸ - He rattles our bones! When we are led by the Holy Spirit we are people who look "to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,"¹⁹ to God, for all that we need.

Our strengths, our abilities, and our expertise, can, should, be handed over to God, so that He can use them for His purposes and not ours, for His glory, not ours. "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."²⁰

c) God wants us to be filled with Holy Spirit. That is the promise that Jesus had made before He ascended into heaven. But "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...."²¹ And it had happened! Sure, it can be scary, even messy, where will it lead us? So what? By playing it safe means that we miss it. Then we die - as people, as Christians, as an effective church.

We Christians often fail to grab what God is offering - His promises, His initiatives. I know it is true - it is true of my life.

The choice lies between cultured, formalized and institutionalized Christianity, and that which is led by the Holy Spirit. The kids call the institutionalized stuff "boring", and we often do the same by staying away. It is really the same choice as between death and life.

Some years back, we had time in Scotland, helping in a Parish. That Parish was held back by a minority, who wanted worship to be as it had always had been - no changes, no excitement no expectation - Dying, extinction. Amen.

But think otherwise. Imagine the Spirit speaking to us: "Oh my people! Do you really think I want a two-dimensional religion of forelock-tugging automatons, dull and dutiful? I call you to a life of the Spirit, within the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with uplifting music, sweet, passionate voices, praise blasting trumpets, a life of beautiful heart-soaring complexity, mystery, and yet touching simplicity. I call you to be creative, of graceful movement, to dance, to cook, to paint, to write, to build, to play, to caress the ball as it sweetly rolls over the turf...and to do it all, for Father God. The Spirit says to us: Come, my apprentices, come to me, you master craftsmen, and be my agents bringing healing, reconciliation, peace and ἀγάπη-love."²²

d) Father God is whispering to us, all of us, "I love you. Receive my Spirit". Holy Spirit open our ears that we may hear, may respond, "Abba, father?"²³

We do not worship a dead God, an absent God, a God who is distant, anonymous, aloof, from us. No. The Spirit brings us into His faithfulness, His forgiveness, His salvation, His freedom, His Presence, into the intimate relationship with Jesus, who "has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

3. Application.

One day sitting in an empty church building I was struck by the difference between "stillness" and "presence". They do not necessarily go together. Mental illnesses, stress-filled lives, abound in our society. Could it be that we are not listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit? We talk about the need for quietness, stillness, meditation - even classes teach it. But are we seeking only stillness, quietness without "presence" - the presence of the Holy Spirit - richer, warmer, embracing, empowering, pulling us up into the heartbeat of God, the rhythm of the Spirit.. That is the healing work of Holy Spirit.

You may be thinking that this is foolish stuff, over the top, something we do not need! But as Paul tells the Corinthians: "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute."²⁴

Do you want to be fools for Christ's sake? If so then let this be another Pentecost for this Parish, as God pours out His Holy Spirit, strengthens and equips us, bringing us into a deep relationship with Jesus, an intimacy, a friendship, which is real, vital, where Jesus is alive. "When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit"²⁵

We will know when we have been baptized in Holy Spirit for we, too, will desire to minister to others with the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."²⁶

"Oh dear God is it worth it? What will people think of me? Do you really want me to be a fool?" His answer is "Yes I do!" "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. Do not deceive yourselves."²⁷ "Oh Lord, forgive me for always trying to play it safe, and not being prepared to take risks for you. Give me the strength of your Spirit that I, we, may be as bold as Jesus was. Thank you."

Come Holy Spirit with "an outpouring of your creative power"! Decide to receive it, by faith.

Spirit of the living God, (on us)
Fall afresh on me (repeat)

Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me
Spirit of the living God,
Fall a fresh on me