

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 8th June 2003

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27

Began with ex tempore comments on the NT readings, including

- the historical post-Ascension Pentecost events,
- a statement from the OT prophet Joel prophesying a time in which the Spirit would be given in a new way,
- and a statement that (although the Spirit has come), the whole creation groans in expectation that the fullness of God's redemption will be revealed.

We know what Pentecost celebrates:

- It was an important religious feast for Jews, 50 days after Passover
- Hence, amongst the new Christian community, 50 days after Easter, just after Ascension – 40 days after the Resurrection
- The events as recorded in Acts...
- ...God giving God's Spirit to all who seek after God, in a more real way than had ever happened before – in fulfilment of promises to do so

Summing up the New Testament evidence, there seem to be 3 reasons the HS came upon the church:

- To be God, dwelling with God's people – those accepting Jesus
- To give spiritual gifts in order continually to build up the community of God's people
- And what has been described as "The push of the Spirit" – giving a boldness and strength to enable God's people to give witness to the things of God, and to draw others into relationship with God. The Spirit of God sends us out, not to make Jesus the King, but *because* he is the King, and we are sent in Jesus' name on Jesus' mission to accomplish Jesus' purposes in God's world.

Covenant:

- The Spirit of God was present from before creation and at creation, involved in creating all things
- The Spirit came upon a few people in a special way, whom God chose to use – people whose hearts were pliable, not in a weak, wishy-washy sense, but in the sense of being willing to learn about and from God, and to be obedient to God. The Spirit caused them to speak in God's name, do things on God's behalf. There are many biblical examples, perhaps Moses and the great prophets are best known, but there are many other people whom God used in specific ways.
- In time, there were promises of pouring out the Spirit in a new way...
- Ezekiel: (read from Canticle 4, page 344 in An Anglican Prayer Book)
(Ezek. 36: 24-28)

- God is a God of covenant: Promise, contract, and relationship with people;
- Two-way, yet God always kept God's side of the "contract"
- History of this covenanting is the story of the Bible... God establishing covenants, and people either keeping to them, or quite often not keeping to them
- The example of God supremely keeping covenant is in sending Jesus, who was God and from God, to be with us – arguably the most profound act of God's alongside that of creation!
- To keep God's side of the contract.
- To reveal to us the God of all things, and who God is like.
- Jesus, before and after his death, made promises about not leaving us alone, nor as orphans
- Comforter (Greek: parakletos) / Advocate / Spirit of God
- And then the time came for the Spirit to come in this promised new way – PENTECOST.

Results:

- Just as promised!
- Not just for own pleasure, but to proclaim Jesus, the King
- The rest is history ...

(Not time this morning to summarize all that the Spirit did or caused to happen)

God keeps promises / covenants

Two Main Points:

- God keeps promises. We live in a time of lack of trust, faithfulness, failure to keep to contracts; each person does their own thing, based on the thoughts, "what's in it for me?"

People often say, "God let me down" - esp. when tragedy or crisis strikes, or a particular wish list is not answered in prayer, at least not in a way that we wanted or expected. But God is faithful, the God of covenant.

God as close to us as being inside us! That is mind-boggling, if you stop to think on it. Not in temples, or in special religious buildings following special rites. It is the natural progression of the incarnation – that seldom-used word that says God became one of us, came in the form of human flesh; this same God comes to be in and with us at the deepest level possible!

Through the Spirit, we are assured that each person who is in relationship with God through Christ has the Spirit of God dwelling in him or her. In addition, God gives a gives special

filling of that Spirit, in the form of particular gifts, to those who ask and for the fulfilment of specific godly purposes.

- If God keeps promises, do we keep ours?

Easy to point fingers at “the world” – and to add all sorts of adjectives (dreadful, immoral...)

But what about the Christian community? Do we keep our contract? We know what happens when we break a legal contract – there are consequences (marriage, business, political). Even if we are in the “right” in a particular case, it has consequences, usually negative; if a relationship of trust breaks down, if a business partnership ends...

Do we keep our contract with God? Obedience, faithfulness, witness; commitment to the relationship, expressed in our lives, in various forms of prayer and worship, for instance?

That’s potentially a negative point on which to conclude. I’m just asking the question, fully aware that often, people of faith have failed to keep contract with God; we all have “ups and downs” and struggle in differing ways. I am sure that God is more deeply saddened by unfaithfulness than we can imagine.

Amazingly, God remains faithful always. Proof of this, is that God persists in pouring the Spirit upon the Church collectively, and on God’s people individually.

Our God keeps covenant forever, and has placed the Spirit in us as a seal on that friendship, like a “legal seal” on our contract. It is even the Spirit who gives us boldness and power, courage and strength to keep this covenant relationship going and strengthening.

End with Canticle 4, said together...