

Pentecost 2007
Christ Church Kenilworth
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This is of course a very well known story. I can remember my Sunday schools working hard on this on. I can even remember colouring pictures of this event. It's great that the church takes such care to teach us of this wonderful moment – but – it makes it hard to preach on. What can I possibly say to you this morning that you haven't heard most years of your Christian life in order to make this sermon interesting? And if I do say anything new – then it'll probably be a bit dodgy. If I've thought of something that no-one else did in the last 2000 yrs then I'm off the mark.

But when I was thinking and praying about this I realised that the issue that I needed to address was not what happened or why or what it meant – but how we feel about it. And this is not new either – but it felt important that we look at it today.

Because although inspiring and uplifting - this reading can also be intimidating. For some of us instead of being encouraged by this we feel discouraged. If we haven't had that sort of experience of the Holy Spirit when we ourselves became Christians – we can find ourselves asking - did we ever in fact fully receive the HS? We can start to wonder if we are second rate Christians. Are we good enough? Without doubting the existence of the HS we can find our selves asking how much is he in here? We can doubt the fullness of our experience.

Feeling inadequate in itself may not be a bad thing – goodness knows we have to cope with it often enough

and it keeps us humble and dependant after all. But the problem comes when we see ourselves as not only inadequate but ill-equipped for Christian life. I heard an old quote the other day and the truth of it keeps resonating with me - 'those who say they can and those who say they can't are almost always right'. What this means for us as Christians is that if we are not confident that we are fully filled, then we run the risk of living our lives on half power. If we believe we haven't been fully equipped with the Holy Spirit, then we won't have the confidence to step out in faith – we won't grab the gift . and then we are limiting God's work in our lives and in the kingdom. This is a great sadness – it's a huge loss to us and to the church and ultimately to the world. So this is a very important issue to address.

So this is a sermon about knowing it, claiming it and using it.

What I want to ask is, are we fully equipped Christians even if we didn't feel dramatically filled.

And if we are – what next?

1.

Lets look at the events of that day.

The exp of the 120 disciples that day is fundamentally different from that of all other Christians before we even get to the special effects.

They were the only people converted before the ascension. Never struck me before. Maybe I oughtn't admit these things – I'll get myself fired. JC promised that he would send his HS – but this was only after he ascended. The 120 were the only ones to be converted before the Holy Spirit was sent for the purpose of filling us as individuals. So for the disciples conversion and receiving the HS had to be 2 separate events. There is a practical issue - it was important for the disciples to know

that the HS had come. The physical manifestation was necessary or they'd still be waiting. Their infilling of the spirit had to be dramatic so that the waiting could end. And so that they could go forth. So we have this wonderful amazing event.

Now - as a result, when we talk of Pentecost, if I asked you what happened I suspect many of you would think of these 120. But in fact 3000 others were converted that day – with no wind or flames. Do we know they received? Yes – Peter promised. V38. The 3000 also, without a shadow of a doubt, received the HS at that moment. Just playing the numbers game – 120 with fire and wind and 3000 without – which is the more typical NT experience? If we have believed and repented, we have received just like the 3000.

All of you NT scholars are thinking `there are other times when the HS was received in a visible way' – but as with the 120, for good reason.

Briefly:

Philip went to take the Good news to Samaria. A very brave step. Not want a good Jewish boy should be doing at all. JC said you shall take it the ends of Samaria and Philip did. When the disciples hear of this they send Peter and James off to check it out. This can't be because they doubted Philip's message – they didn't check up on him at any other time – but because they had to see it with their own eyes and report back to the other Christians. Once they lay hands on the Samaritans the physical outward appearance of the HS falls on them. The outward evidence of the gift. This was evidence of the genuine conversion of the Samaritans and meant Peter and James and therefore everyone was convinced that these people were now part of the Kingdom too. So it was important that everyone knew the HS had been received.

The other experience occurs when Paul goes to the Ephesians and finds some that call themselves Christians. Something in their behaviour made him suspicious and he asks them if they had received the HS they don't know what Paul is talking about. It transpires they had received the baptism of repentance as in John the Baptists baptism. Paul explains the Gospel to them fully and baptises them in the name of Jesus, and they receive outward evidence of the gift of the HS. Again it was important for there to be physical evidence. It proved to Paul and to the Ephesians that their baptism was complete.

But these are exceptions not the rule and we should get doctrine from the rule. Peter and Paul consistently taught that we receive the HS when we believe and repent. We receive the gift not as a result of our good works but by accepting the Good news at our conversion. [Public health warning – I'm about to make an awful analogy between a cell phone and the HS - this will really test the extent of God's capacity to forgive]: I recently decided to be grown up and get a contract. Spending 2 hours in Cellucity on a Saturday morning has left me deeply scared and I am now having to find religious significance in it. When I finally signed the final form – I got a huge gift and a free phone - not cause I'd been a good customer [but because they're knew they'd make huge profits from me shortly] and they wanted me to get using the service. God gives the HS totally for free – not because of anything we've done, or how first rate we are, but because he wants to equip us for ministry.

The point of this is that it is without a doubt - we must not feel that we have had a 2nd rate gift of the HS because our hair didn't catch fire. Its useful to think about Paul's [Saul's] conversion on the rd to Damascus. I don't doubt the reality of my belief just because I didn't end up blind and in jail – personally I'm grateful that it happened very discretely on the school bus and half an hour later I was home having tea. The fact an event isn't dramatic does not make it any less real.

The HS was promised to us all even from the OT. And it shall come to pass that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh' [Joel 2:28] amongst many others. John the B: I have baptised you with water but he will baptise you with the HS. [Mk 1:8]. Jesus in Jn 14: ` On that day you will realise that I am in the Father, and you are in me and I am in you.'

So we can be confident – we have ALL received.

2/

So – is that it then? We're all done and dusted lets go home. Not much need to come to church surely? Before you all rush off -

No -afraid not. As with my recent cell contract – we'll need top ups.

Throughout the NT we are urged to remember what we live by and are recalled to it and urged to live by it. We need to appropriate the blessing that we have been given and keep it a topped up. Its like having a cell phone in your pocket that's out of airtime. Our gift cannot be lost [unlike most cell phones which continually walk] but it can be rendered useless. If it's not topped up we can't use the gift and we become robed of our right.

The Christians at Corinth are a salutary reminder of this for us. They had been baptised, had received the HS and had been enriched with Spiritual gifts but Paul refers to

them as Carnal Christians and babes in Christ. They were suffering jealously of one another and arguments and they were not growing in their likeness to Jesus. In fact far from it. If they were spirit filled, their fruit would be ripening. It was not. They assumed they were ok and went about using their gifts – but they were not building one another up but breaking one another down. They were gifted but not spirit filled.

Paul tells us clearly in Ephesians 5:18. to `be filled with the spirit'. There are 4 things to note and learn from this text

1. its not a tentative suggestion. Paul was one of JC's chosen apostles and he makes it clear that continuing to be filled with the HS is not an option but obligatory.
2. John Stott in Baptism and Fullness, explains its in the plural – this infilling is for all of us – not just a few
3. its passive `be filled' let the HS fill you – it is the work of the HS but we must drink [more on that]
4. its in the present tense – now here Stott goes off on a long explanation about how in the Greek the imperative and the single action and the present imperative etc etc.... where I got totally lost – but the gist is that although Jesus told the man and the wedding to fill the jars once as a one off event, here Paul is meaning continually.

All this is further backed up where Paul talks about people that have been sealed with the HS but not all remained filled. The letter has a prayer in which Paul prays for them to be enlightened, filled with knowledge, to grow in faith and in experience. As new Christians we become enlightened – but we often fail somewhere between knowledge and faith. Hence the prayer, `i believe help my unbelief'. We are all in danger here.

So we are all filled, but we need to keep on being filled -

3/

So HOW do we keep being filled???

This ought to be the biggest section of the sermon but it's so simple it's the shortest. No fancy complicated formula. Very simple - John 37: If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink'

Come to me..and drink. It's time with Jesus and readiness to drink – to receive his spirit. Take it in. so simple that we can miss it. He then talks about Streams of living waters being poured out to quench the weary traveller and the land. We make the time – he produces the goods. It's very simple and quite personal – you know how best spend time with Jesus – your responsibility is to do it. Perhaps the hard bit is that we must also expect to receive. At the risk of sounding like some advertising campaign – expect more!. Horrible thing about doing sermons is that you find another area in your life where you are lacking! – when I look at myself I don't expect too much. Oh I know he's there and he's doing his thing – but I don't expect to be filled and brimming over. I realise that I am therefore limiting the activity of the HS in my life.

4/

What are the results of the HS in us?

The main work of the HS is to reveal Jesus to us and to form JC in us so that we grow in knowledge and likeness. Anyone else squirming at that part? Am I getting more and more like Jesus? We often don't feel that – we focus on the negative - our sin. Great Pink Floyd line referring to an incident when some nice 'normal' people meet some Christians. Roger Waters writes that they were shown how to feel good and told to feel bad. How often do we do that. We focus on how to feel bad. But our faith isn't only about seeing our sin – it's also about the positive blessing of the HS to regenerate and transform us! Forgetting that is like focussing on Good Friday and forgetting Easter day.

We focus on the sin – see that as further evidence that the HS is not really within us and then don't own the promise of the HS being there to help.

One of the reasons that I can't watch soapies is that people don't change [ok –I'm addicted to Desperate Housewives – and this is the one thing that irritates me on it] Soapie characters go round and round making the same mistakes over and over again. I haven't watched the Bold and the Beautiful [or rather the Bitchy and the brassy] for years for years but Brooke is probably just about to marry or divorce Ridge [or his father or one of his brothers] again. But we don't have a script to stick to. God has given us free choice , and the help of the HS to enable us to make the right choices – the ones that are live giving.

Sometimes we forget that – we deny that power and, therefore, restrict the healing power that can help us grow to be more like Jesus.

We must expect to grow in likeness to Jesus. We are equipped with more than our feeble selves.

There is so much more of the HS that God wants to pour onto us. There are all the wonderful gifts of the spirit but that's another Sunday. What I want to focus on now is 2 activities of the Spirit that are not amazing out there miracles- but the everyday work that sustains us.

Because when I thought about how the Pentecost reading applied to us here at CC today I thought about 2 things: busyness and pain. As a community we are suffering much grief and illness and pain here.

When preparing I was reading about Paul being freed from jail by the spirit – and of how the spirit was always before him equipping him for ministry. Jesus wants to do that for us too. It doesn't make life rosie – Paul's life was

hard – but he knew and accepted the help of the HS in his life. And allowed the HS to help.

2 testimonies that talk into this.

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As I said – this is a sermon about Knowing it claiming it and Using it.

I want us to go out today knowing that we too have fully received the gift of the HS. God wants us to claim this wonderful gift as our own and to keep it in good working order by spending time with him, drinking in the Spirit, in full expectation that he wants to give us more.

Thus - equipped and full of confidence, we will be able to benefit from the power of the HS within us. He wants to minister to us in our pain and he wants to empower us to go about our daily lives and to do his work for the glory of the kingdom.