

The Spirit of Truth and Power

Readings: Acts 2:1 – 21, John 14:8 – 17

Author John Eldridge reminds us that the early Celtic Christians called the Holy Spirit 'the wild goose.' They call the Spirit that because the Spirit is untameable. One way Jesus described the new life the Spirit brings was like this:

You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God. John 3:7 – 8 The Message version

We've never been able to contain, tame, limit, direct or predict where or how God's Spirit will show up, now or at the time the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost.

Let's go back and revisit that time:

Remember Jesus' followers were told to go and wait together for the Holy Spirit to arrive. They were still weak and afraid about what had happened with Jesus. They'd watched him go up into heaven and been told "Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" What on earth did that mean?

So here are this group of confused men and women and perhaps some children. They are probably not looking for any supernatural experience, simply waiting on God in worship.

Then comes the unpredictable, untameable Spirit. The Spirit of truth and power simply falls on them and they are changed forever.

Instead of being timid and afraid they are filled with truth and power and they can't contain the wonder of Jesus and his love for all people. The Spirit pushes them out into God's world as they speak out the Good News in the languages of the people around them.

As I read and re-read this passage, I was struck again by how the people around them could understand what they were saying.

Also, they all spoke out. In other words they were all witnesses to Christ. There was no sense that only those with the spiritual gift of evangelism spoke out. No, they all spoke out the Good news of Jesus.

Our Minister's Association gets to submit a column each week for the Waimea Weekly. You have probably all seen 'Just a Thought'.

It is such an amazing privilege to be able to do this. We have freedom to speak into people's lives – a real gift in today's world.

Sometimes we forget who we are writing to and write in Christianese. Christianese makes no sense to anyone but church folk and even that is debatable.

Last week at another church, I asked the folk to explain what being 'redeemed' meant. (I did that because the Prayer Book service we used was entitled 'Creation and Redemption'.) The folk there could not explain 'redemption' in normal language.

Jesus' followers would probably also have struggled to explain the Good News to the people around them as well. But the Holy Spirit did the explaining for them.

First the Spirit enabled them all to speak in other languages. The people could hear the Good News of Jesus for themselves.

Some people got it and yet there were still some who didn't. Some misunderstood, thinking they were just drunk!

It reassures me that some people didn't get it. The Spirit powerfully intervened and the disciples were still misunderstood. When we speak out some will misunderstand us too. That is ok! When people judge us wrongly we are in good company!

At Pentecost of course, there was someone else, also full of the Holy Spirit, who followed on from the general witnessing. That was Peter. He had the spiritual gift of evangelism.

Peter quotes the first (Old) Testament prophet Joel reminding the Jews specifically, but all those present, that this weird and wonderful experience they are having was prophesied long ago.

Joel says all of God's people will prophesy. "Prophesy" as he uses the word, simply means, speak out God's word.

We are all called to speak out God's word. We are all called to prophesy and to be mini-evangelists. God said that would happen. At Pentecost and in our day too, there is the expectation from God, that all Jesus followers will be filled with the Holy Spirit and that we will speak in languages that the people around us can understand.

Speaking out might involve using the spiritual gift of tongues – that might be a scary thought! It seems we neglect this gift quite a bit.

Speaking out might also mean simply speaking in the language of those around us, without using Christianese, to share Jesus' Good News.

The most important reminder in this story though, is that their speaking was the outworking of being filled with the Spirit. Speaking out is an overflow rather something we have to strive for.

So what does that look like?

In John's Gospel, Jesus tells his followers that w the Spirit will come and live within them. The Spirit is with them now, alongside them, but later will live within the core of their being.

Saint Augustine once prayed “O Holy Spirit, descend plentifully into my heart. Enlighten the dark corners of this neglected dwelling and scatter there Thy cheerful beams.”

To the church in Corinth, Paul wrote “Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” I Corinthians 3:16

Are some Christians Spirit-filled, and some are not?

Does the Spirit work in some from the outside while working on some from the inside?

You have probably heard some talk about being ‘baptised in the Spirit’. Is this a second experience that only some have had but that all Christians need?

Simon Ponsonby, who is a Spirit-filled and respected Anglican theologian/preacher, in his book ‘God inside out’ says not. His book about the Spirit is very helpful. He talks of the Spirit sealing us when we come to Christ, cleansing us, giving gifts, clarifying the Word for us, helping us worship and equipping us for mission. It’s a great book and when I’ve finished it, I am sure I will understand and experience more of the Spirit.

Andrew Murray, in his book *The Spirit of Christ*, likened the life of the Spirit within us to the Jewish temple with its three courts: the outer court, the inner court, and the Holy of holies. He suggests our bodies are like the outer court. The inner court is like our mind, our will and our emotions. But inside of us is the Holy of holies where the Spirit of God dwells. The Holy Spirit dwells inside our spirit. So inside you and inside me is the Holy of holies. This is a nice analogy but I don’t think it’s adequate.

It seems to me that the life of the Spirit in us is more like working on an onion. We allow the Spirit to penetrate one layer at a time. Some of us let the Spirit penetrate more than others do for a whole variety of reasons. Each layer the Spirit does penetrate means a deeper work in our lives and we become more like Jesus as each layer is penetrated.

While I don’t get everything about how the Spirit works in our lives, I am clear that he wants to fill us to overflowing so that Jesus can be honoured and respected and that people come to know him. The Holy Spirit gives many wonderful experiences to Christians and none of them are an end in themselves.

And we all leak – we all sin and stuff up and need forgiveness and fresh Holy Spirit filling.

The Spirit’s filling is not just about us. When the Spirit came at Pentecost; it was all about giving truth and power and boldness to Jesus’ followers so that more people might follow this same Jesus.

Experience, for its own sake, soon fades. It can be forgotten or even worse it can be longed for like some kind of idol. We are not to seek experiences but we are to seek the person of our triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is God we seek primarily, not the things he can do for us.

We do long for revival in our church and our land for sure. We can be part of that happening. We mustn't despair because the world looks so bleak just now.

Os Guinness says:

The story of Christian reformation, revival, and renaissance underscores that the darkest hour is often just before the dawn, so we should always be people of hope and prayer, not gloom and defeatism. God the Holy Spirit can turn the situation around in five minutes.

In Scripture there are many promises of the Spirit's coming:

- We will be 'clothed with power from on high.' Lk 24:49
- We will 'receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon' us. Acts 1:8
- 'You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' Acts 2:38
- Scripture tell us that 'the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.' Acts 10:45

So let's continue to ask the Spirit of God to come to us. Let's ask him to come to us more fully than before. Let's ask him to make us bold and powerful and truthful SO that others will come to know this wonderful Jesus to whom the Spirit always points.

And let's never try to judge who has just what degree of the Holy Spirit. None of us is capable of this kind of judgement. Each person's relationship with the Holy Spirit is unique to them. But each one of us can invite the Holy Spirit to come into our lives more fully.

We cannot tame the wild goose, nor determine how the Spirit works in each of us, but we do know that the Spirit does want to fill more and more of our lives – to take us to deeper levels in Christ.

Let's take a few moments to think and pray about what this means for us. As we listen to the wind, please ask the Holy Spirit what he is saying and what he'd like you to do about it.

Reflection questions:

1. Do you expect the Holy Spirit to give you supernatural gifts that enable you to live your daily life and to help others?
2. When you speak of your Christian faith, or your relationship with Jesus, can people understand what you are saying?
3. How would you tell someone what Jesus means to you? What words or images would you use?
4. In what ways do you see the Holy Spirit working through you?