

## *Peace and power*

St Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor

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Pentecost Sunday, 8 June 2014

*1 Corinthians 12.1-13; John 20.19-23*

Many of us are wearing red today, to celebrate Pentecost. I have only one red shirt—this is it. The red colors and the fast-approaching World Cup in Brazil remind me of my first visit to Korea, with James, at the time of the 2002 World Cup. The streets were full of happy people wearing red tee shirts and supporting the Korean national team with chants of *Dae Han Min Guk* 대한민국, one of the traditional names of their country. The national side is nicknamed the “Red Devils”. It might have been fun to wear a “Devils” shirt to church, if I had one!

This year, rather than the traditional reading of the Pentecost story from Acts chapter 2, Rebecca and the team decided to focus on the lectionary readings from John's gospel and from 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

Jesus' resurrection was on the first day of the week, early in the morning. That evening, the disciples were together in a house, with the doors locked because they were afraid. Jesus came and stood among them.

I imagine they would have been rather startled at this sudden appearance. Sometimes God comes to us in the unexpected. Sometimes what God may do through the Holy Spirit will be startling. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the unexpected, the Spirit of freedom, the Spirit of the unanticipated. If we are not sometimes a little startled, surprised, disturbed by what happens in church, perhaps something is missing.

The first thing Jesus said to the assembled disciples was what they needed right then: “Peace be with you.” That is no mere greeting—it's the same word of peace that stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee. It's the same peace that reconciles us to God and each other.

The disciples rejoiced at Jesus' words of peace. He said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus commissioned the disciples to go into the world, to go in peace, to minister peace. For this to be even possible, they needed the Holy Spirit, the “spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1.7)

Jesus knew they would be powerless, lifeless, without the presence of the Holy Spirit deep within their spirits. In Luke we read of Jesus commanding his disciples to wait in the city until they received power from on high (Luke 24.49). And here in John, Jesus imparts the Holy Spirit as he sends them out.

The Holy Spirit came to the disciples as they were in a place of peace. Jesus spoke peace and then imparted the Spirit. The Pentecost account says that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples as they were all together—in harmony with each other, I suspect, at peace with each other.

And so we come to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. This chapter begins by encouraging us not to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts. Every Christian is a charismatic, a person with a gift, for that's what charismatic means. There is no un-gifted life, no life of total dis-ability. Everyone is of great value. All have their own special charism, or gift, in the community of Christ's people.

The Holy Spirit and the power of God are given to all believers. Our baptismal calling puts our lives at service of the Kingdom, including whatever gifts—abilities—we have and whatever gifts we may receive. Yet there are many differing abilities, gifts, charisms, given to and exercised by each person individually.

The whole of life, and every life, is God's gift, and the Spirit is 'poured out upon all flesh' to quicken it, to give life. Yet the Holy Spirit does give new gifts to believers, as the Spirit wills. We may find the Spirit encouraging us to exercise God-given abilities that are new, have not had before. Besides the nine gifts we heard described in the reading from I Corinthians 12, there are many other gifts of ministry, service and leadership.

Paul needed to emphasize the use of spiritual gifts to build up the church. Because that is why the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts—so that we can minister to each other, build each other up, and build up the church.

It's not authority that unites us as differing people with differing gifts. It's not a book of rules, but love in the fellowship of the Spirit. It's freedom that releases the different gifts. The power of unity is love. But the power of diversity is freedom. "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3.17). Too often we ask, "What are the rules?" instead of "What says the Spirit?"

In chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, we're urged to "earnestly desire" the best gifts. Sometimes I think we are reluctant to ask God for gifts of his Spirit, because we think that it might be a little self-aggrandizing, or that we are unworthy. Or maybe we are afraid of what it might lead to. Rather, the Lord wants us to be filled to overflowing with good things so that we can bless God and bless others—and along the way we will be blessed, too. To ask for a powerful gift of God's Spirit is far from egotistical. Rather, it's obedient.

The only way to find out whether one has a gift of healing is to pray for the sick. The only way to speak in tongues is to open one's mouth. The only way to be a witness to the faith is to start doing something. We need to 'have a go' when we feel prompted to exercise any gift.

Of course we need to be wise and discreet—and, above, all loving—but if we are over-cautious, we won't understand our potential or live in all the opportunities God offers us. If we don't 'have a go' we won't learn our genuine limitations either, and be at peace with them.

To exercise an ability from God is often something we *learn*. Of course we make mistakes, but the Holy Spirit is the best teacher in the business. It takes trust—in God and each other—and a willingness to forget mistakes as we learn together.

Let's continue to encourage one another in sharing our faith and the use of God's gifts to minister to each other and those around us. Let's give leaders and workers in ministry the same freedom as God's Spirit gives them; don't tie them down, but let them move and grow. Let's be persistent in seeking God and spontaneous in responding to God. Let's "seek earnestly the best gifts," as Paul says.

In a few moments we will share together in a prayer to the Holy Spirit. I earnestly invite you to use this as an opportunity to be refreshed by the Holy Spirit, to recommit yourself to using your gifts, and to make yourself available to the Spirit to be used in new ways.

May the Holy Spirit grant each of us peace, with gifts of ability and power, to build us up in the church, to bless those in need, to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and to be richly blessed ourselves.

**Prayer to the Holy Spirit: Pentecost 2014**

Holy Spirit of God,  
Jesus promised that you would be with us.  
We welcome you.  
We worship you as Lord.  
Your presence brings to us the glory of God.

Fill us we pray,  
each of us,  
all of us together.  
Bind us together as one family,  
made alive by your life, the breath of God.

Give to each of us we pray  
the peace that Jesus breathed upon his disciples.  
May your fire burn away the deadness of sin,  
the hurt of failure, the pain of loss.

Holy Spirit heal us,  
heal those who are in need,  
those who have sought our prayers.

Renew us, refresh us, lead us.  
Teach us forgiveness and forgive us our sins.

Holy Spirit,  
lead us into all truth  
teaching us all that Jesus taught.

Holy Spirit of God,  
empower each of us  
and empower our fellowship of St Philip's with your gifts—  
gifts of power,  
gifts of wisdom and speech,  
gifts of discernment and skill,  
gifts of blessing.

Holy Spirit of God,  
be fruitful among us,  
enrich us that we may be fruitful in you  
with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Holy Spirit,  
come upon the whole church;  
renew the whole creation.

Holy Spirit,  
touch us now as we wait upon you,  
for Jesus promised it. Amen.