

THE BREATH OF LIFE

PENTECOST

Introduction

In Judaism to this day Pentecost is observed as the feast of the giving of the Torah. First is Passover the liberation from Egyptian slavery. Then fifty days later in the desert the people come to Sinai. Moses receives the Law as part of the covenant promise that they would show the world they were God's people. The Torah is where heaven and earth meet. (Later the Temple would become where heaven and earth meet.)

Can you see the parallel picture here? Jesus dies at Passover, the Spirit raises Jesus from the dead promising forgiveness and new life for all, the whole cosmos. Now fifty days later Jesus ratifies the new covenant in the person and gift of the Spirit who creates the world and raises the dead. This is the Spirit who is active with the father and the Son in every act of creation, redemption and the bringing of the new creation.

Now the images of wind and fire make sense. Torah and Temple too find fulfilment in the Spirit. These are where heaven meets earth. Now in Jesus through the Spirit heaven meets earth in ordinary people. That is what 'filled with the Spirit means' in the NT. And believers are filled with the Spirit; You and me.

In this time of transition for us I think the readings read in this radical and extraordinary light display pointers that are important for us

The Spirit will take us where we need to be to do the work we are called to do

On the Day of Pentecost the disciples are inside sitting, waiting and no doubt wondering. What on earth is God going to do? It is a time of change and transition and nobody has any idea what will happen. It is a mystery.

We can identify with that. We love the idea of controlling the future. We call it future proofing. Cut out all surprises, all mystery and in the end all life and creativity. Future proofing is not the Spirit's way. It is our way. And it is the way of death and destruction because it is the way of fear.

After the wind and the fire, after the power and movement of the Spirit the disciples are taken where they need to be: in the market-place. No point continuing to sit. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit drives them to the market place (Acts 2).

This filling with the Holy Spirit is not for a special few. It comes to every believer in the Risen Lord Jesus. There is no special class of spirit filled believers. Either you believe in the crucified and living Lord Jesus and are filled with the Spirit or you are not. You cannot be a little bit pregnant with the Spirit.

Every believer in that room is driven into the market place which is the proper place for the good news of Jesus. It cannot remain with people sitting behind closed doors. The Spirit equips them and empowers them into the market-place.

So the Spirit drives them to the market place to do the work that they are called to do. That is to tell people what this means. They were asked, "What does this mean?" And they told the crowd what it meant. The fundamental human question is "What does this mean?" and the Spirit of God has an answer. It will not be found in ideas, it

will not be found in the past; it will be found in the Jesus who took on evil defeated it and lives to tell the tale.

Everything revolves around that. They can tell that tale because they live that tale in the power of the Spirit.

At the moment, in these confusing and transitional times, we do not even know where we need to be. That is the Spirit's work.

The Spirit will take us where we need to be to do the work we need to do.

Then...

The Spirit will take us where we need to go but won't go unaccompanied

Peter who is the spokesperson on the day of Pentecost has a history. He denied Jesus only a few weeks before. He is a person of proven weakness. Now he wants to go where God is leading but he knows that he dare not go unaccompanied.

And his accompaniment is the Spirit. The denier becomes the witness, the meaning-giver, the leader in the market-place. The one who could not bear the questioning of a servant girl takes on the quizzing of the crowd and in time its leaders.

What does Jesus say of the Spirit in the Gospel? "...he abides in you, and he will be in you" (John 14.17). In their situation dangerous days lay ahead, indeed were upon them. It wasn't merely transition for them; they were looking at total disaster. The Spirit will abide which means take up residence and be in you.

They could not go into the future unaccompanied. The future was unknown and dangerous. Certainly ours is unknown. It may not be dangerous but it may well be disturbing and unsettling.

We need to hear St Paul. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (Ro 8.14). The Spirit will lead us where need to go and will accompany us because the Spirit abides in us.

So the Spirit will take us where we need to go but won't go unaccompanied.

Then...

The Spirit will take us on a journey from fear to truthfulness

The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is fear. Doubt is merely an intellectual issue, significant but not the real issue for Christians. Fear is the more destructive force in Christian life.

Whys is that? Fearful leaders cannot lead. Fearful people cannot be led. Why is that?

Leaders and people who are afraid concern themselves with survival only. They are not about flourishing, they are not about the risk taking required to make flourishing happen. They are not about listening to the Spirit either, for the Spirit is not interested in our survival but only the recreation of the whole world and everyone in it; hence the drive to the market-place. Only there in the market-place can we thrive and flourish because we Jesus gives life and meaning to all.

Fearful leaders and people are driven by self-interest. The questions they debate are not what the Spirit wants or where the Spirit is leading but what makes me most comfortable, what gives me less work, what is most convenient, what can I get out of?

Fearful leaders and people are ill-disciplined. That is obvious from what I have just said. Led by the Spirit we come together under the discipline of God as children of God (Ro.8).

Fearful leaders and people create an environment of acrimony and dislike. According to our readings today especially John 14 the Spirit expels fear and replaces it with love. Acrimony and dislike tell us that the Spirit is not here; the Spirit is not leading us. I am not talking about mere disagreement; that happens all the time. I am talking about the Spirit in which we disagree. We need to struggle with our fears so that we can love one another and love the world God created.

The Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (John 14.17). The truth that the Spirit will lead us to is God. God's character is truth. If you remember the studies in the Revelation that we have just completed the true character of all evil is deceit. Deceit and lies lie at the heart of all evil. At the heart of God and therefore at the heart of the universe lies truthfulness.

And our truth is the truth found in Jesus and that alone makes you free. In fearful churches there is a chasm between what is said and what is done. There is no hope because there is no truthfulness. They have not been set free.

Fear and deceit destroy creativity. In Ps 104.32 the Spirit is described as the Spirit of creativity and renewal. Men and women die when fear and deceit rule. Parishes die when fear and deceit rule. When the Spirit of truth rules creativity and renewal flourish. Therein lies hope.

Conclusion

Pentecost is a wonderful celebration. We cannot be stale, sterile and stuffy: Because we are the Torah/temple where heaven meets earth we can only be alive, liberated, in the market-place driven by the

Spirit. To go forward in God's ways means continually beginning afresh. That in biblical terms is our election, our vocation.

Yes there will be plenty of scoffing as there was at Pentecost. Let them scoff at Jesus' offer of life. Let them scoff at our life in the Spirit. But let us be led by the Spirit into the truth in Jesus and the love and justice that flows from that.