

THE FULLNESS OF GOD – PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-21

May 23, 2021

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Today we begin a 2 week mini-series when we're going to be looking at The Fullness of God.

Looking at how we can begin to comprehend the vastness of God, his eternal and infinite qualities, but also his personal and imminent qualities.

This Sunday we're looking at Pentecost, which was an event in history which dramatically impacted the disciples; but it's also important to see how it also impacts us now.

Next week we remember Trinity Sunday – not at all about an event, but about an understanding, a doctrine, which also impacts us enormously.

What is Pentecost?

In the Jewish world Pentecost was one of the three main festivals.

It was a Harvest Festival, an offering of the 'first fruits'.

And it was at this time of thanksgiving, that God chose to send the helper that had been promised, the helper the disciples needed.

It's as if, for the previous three years, the disciples had been fitting a giant jigsaw together.

They had seen so much, they had heard so much and they had learnt so much.

Then devastation! Jesus died!

Then elation! He rose from the dead.

Then sadness again!

They had to say goodbye - He left them to go back to his father.

But he said to them – Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.

And ten days later, we know what happened.

It's only with the coming of the Holy Spirit that the disciples were transformed.

They were transformed from being fearful to fearless; from being bewildered, to being empowered.

And then, amazingly, they turned their world upside down.

The last piece of the puzzle was in place.

The Feast of Pentecost marked the end of the grain harvest and took place 50 days after Passover.

That's why it's called Pentecost - 'pente' meaning five.

The disciples waited in Jerusalem as they were told.

They met together and they worshipped together waiting.

And it was in the context of meeting together, that they experienced the presence and power of God's Spirit in a new way, in direct fulfilment of OT scriptures, as well as fulfilling the promises of Jesus.

The Spirit of God was a gift, and gave birth to what we call "church", the community of Christians.

They were all together in one place. It wasn't just given to individuals.

The Spirit came and rested on each one of them, but it's important that it was in the context of them being together, waiting as Jesus had said to.

Well, the day comes at last, and they hear the sound of a violent wind, filling the place where they were.

Then tongues like flames of fire appear among them and settle on each of them.

Imagine how they were feeling at that moment.

I wonder what they were expecting, waiting for God to pour out his Spirit on them.

I'm not sure they would have expected what actually happened.

There are obviously supernatural signs of God's presence – evidence that was like wind and fire.

Luke says the sound like the rush of a violent wind comes from heaven. Perhaps it signifies the power that's about to be released in the apostles.

We all see the power of wind in so many places. In 2017 Chris and I had a holiday through central Qld, and we reached the coast and had 10 days at Airlie Beach. We were fortunate to find accommodation, because it was only a few weeks after Cyclone Debbie. Let me tell you, the devastation we saw was terrible. There's no doubt that the wind is a symbol of great power.

But on the day of Pentecost, there was more than just wind. There were also the tongues of fire.

Fire is a common symbol of purity in the Old Testament.

Moses encountered God in a burning bush, the fire symbolised holy ground.

When God led the Hebrews out of Egypt, he led them with a column of fire by night.

When Isaiah was called, God sent an angel to him with a burning coal to cleanse his lips, so he could speak the words of God with confidence.

These tongues of fire symbolised God purifying his followers.

But the result of all this the Holy Spirit changes things, very dramatically.

I want to try and explain this using a very simple illustration

What is the most essential thing we need in order to live? oxygen.

As Christians, we need the Holy Spirit in order to live as God wants us to, just as much as we need oxygen to stay physically alive.

A deflated balloon, is very hard to write on.

But, when it's blown up I am able to write on it, **and** the balloon is also able to do what balloons are supposed to do.

When the balloon is full of air, we can do things with it which we can't otherwise.

What about us? We're pretty useless without God's breath, without God's Holy Spirit.

To live for Jesus, we need the breath of the Holy Spirit to help us.

And we are here today because the Holy Spirit continues to do his work.

It's an absolute miracle that we are here worshipping God today.

It's an absolute miracle to see the growth of the Christian church across the world over the last 2000 years.

But it's the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit shaped those first Christians into a true representation of God's people.

They met together, to learn from the apostles, to remember Christ's death and resurrection and to pray with one another.

And as they met together, as they worshipped the risen Christ, wonderful things begin to happen.

What a pity we didn't read the whole of chapter 2. Read the whole chapter ...

v.43 says "Many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles."

There's a great out-flowing of generosity, of true fellowship with one another as those who had possessions sell them to support those who have nothing.

This kind of living is exactly God's plan for his people.

It had been his plan from the beginning of time; from the formation of the nation and people of Israel.

But of course, sin prevented it from happening.

We see it in the Fall in the garden of Eden.

Sin broke humanity's relationship with God,
sin broke humanity's relationship with each other,
sin broke humanity's relationship with the earth.
God dealt with that by expelling Adam & Eve from the Garden.
But sin continued to grow.
God dealt with that through the flood – basically starting again with Noah and his family.
But following that – sin continued to grow as humanity flourished and spread over the earth.
Generation after generation, God's people were supposed to live for him and be his community together.
But corruption was rife, and they built a tower to try and reach heaven so they could be like God.
God scattered them, and he confused their language.
They were meant to be a united force for God in his world, but instead they tried to usurp his role.

What we are celebrating today, is a direct reversal of what happened at Babel, where there was confusion of languages because the people were sinning.
On the day of Pentecost, here we have acknowledgement of and deep conviction of sin, and there is a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel.
At Babel human languages were confused and the nations were scattered.
In Jerusalem that day, the language barrier was overcome as a sign that the nations would come together in Christ.
And we have that great vision in the book of Revelation, where people 'from every nation, tribe and language' will be worshipping around the throne of the Lamb.
John Stott puts it beautifully, when he says *"At Babel earth proudly tried to ascend to heaven, whereas in Jerusalem heaven humbly descended to earth."*

We are part of this community, centred around the worship of God and of his Son Jesus Christ.
A community where the bonds of fellowship are real, where no-one goes hungry because their brothers and sisters look after them, and they're a community where the glory of God is revealed to the nations in a way that makes those nations want to come and join God's people.
A community that gladly proclaims the gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and his Lordship over all.
But, do you know, that that early Church community is the same community that we now belong to as we meet here today.
We're the same Church that began on Pentecost Sunday.
We have the same Holy Spirit present with us.
The same Holy Spirit inspiring each one of us to carry out the works of ministry set out for us.
And like that early Church we too should be reflecting the sort of community that God desires for his people.
We should be a community that's centred around the worship of God and of his Son Jesus Christ.
We should be a community that cares for one another in practical ways, that lifts up the weak, that shares our resources with one another in meaningful ways.
We should be a community where God's glory is seen and where people hear God's call to turn back to him.

And if you're still not convinced that **you** are part of it, look at v39 together:
"The promise is for you, for your children,
and for all who are far away,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

The Spirit will give each one of us the words to say, if we trust him to work through us. And his power is what will change people's hearts.
It's for everyone - not just for leaders, or ministers or missionaries ... but everyone who calls on the name of Jesus.

We worship together week by week.

Do we come not really believing that this is something special or different?

Or do we come with an expectation that God is going to do an amazing thing in our lives?

The Holy Spirit's job is one of transformation.

Without the Holy Spirit, those early Christians would have remained inward looking and ineffective, hiding in the upper room.

It is God's Holy Spirit that enables his church to do whatever he calls it to do, whether it is here, or whether it is overseas, whether it is something small, or whether it is something big.

Are we expectant of the work the Holy Spirit wants to do here, with us, as the Anglican Church in the Noosa region?

Pentecost brought to the apostles all that they needed for what they had to do.

Jesus appointed them to be his primary and authoritative witnesses, and had promised them the reminding and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit [John 14-16].

Pentecost was the fulfilment of that promise.

It was the inauguration of the new era of the Spirit.

Although his coming was unique and unrepeatable in history, all the people of God can now, always and everywhere, benefit from his ministry.

Although he equipped the apostles to be the primary witnesses, he also equips us to be witnesses.

The fullness of the Spirit is for us all.

At the coming of the Spirit there was deep conviction of sin [v.37], 3,000 conversions [v.41], and the widespread sense of awe [v.43]. All signs of revival!

Yes, the wind and the fire may have been abnormal experiences, but the new life and joy, the fellowship and worship, the freedom, boldness and power are not abnormal!

Do you know, without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible.

I want to conclude with a quote from the great John Stott. He said,

*"There can be no life without the life-giver,
no understanding without the Spirit of truth,
no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit,
no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit,
and no effective witness without his power.
As a body without breath is a corpse,
so the church without the Spirit is dead."*

Amen. Come Holy Spirit.