

Pentecost: Jesus Releases the Spirit Isa 44:1-5; Ps 68:11-19; Acts 2:16-21; Luke 3:15-18

Introduction

Christians all over the world will excitedly celebrate Pentecost Sunday tomorrow. Some will focus on the birth of the Church, others will exult in Jesus' promise, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8). A promise becoming true all across the non-Western world with vast numbers of people turning to Christ. Whilst this is a great challenge to us, my primary focus today is about the intimacy between Jesus and the Spirit. Although during his earthly life Jesus was *sent* and empowered by the Spirit (Luke 1:35; 3:21-22; 4:14,18 etc), from the time of his ascended heavenly Lordship Christ became the *sender* of the Spirit. This is a central point of Peter's Pentecost sermon, that the crucified and risen Jesus (Acts 2:23-24), was exercising his reign through the Spirit. "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." (Acts 2:33). As the Son of God emptied himself in becoming human in order to be completely filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:35 cf. Phil 2:5-8), the Spirit now humbly serves the glorified Christ as King.

The Spirit Needs Jesus

John's Gospel explains the Spirit's dependency on the finished work of Christ, "the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:39). This was a glory which Jesus entered through the cross (John 12:27-33; 13:27-31). It is what the Lord did on the cross to save the world (John 3:16-17; 17:1-4) that opened heaven so that the Spirit could be outpoured on "all people" (Acts 2:17). On the cross Jesus endured the great things prophesied by John the Baptist, as the Lamb of God he took away the sin of the world (John 1:29) *by* taking on himself the unquenchable fire of divine judgement (Luke 3:16-17).

Insight into how these two great saving moments for humanity are united in Christ's death comes from hearing how the Father addresses Jesus at his baptism, "'You are my *beloved* Son; with you I am well pleased.'" (Luke 3:22). This is the language that God used in commanding Abraham, "'Take your son, your *only son* Isaac, whom you *love*, and go... sacrifice him there as a burnt offering" (Gen 22:2). As *the* only beloved Son, Jesus was destined to be the real offering for sin consumed by fire that would turn away God's wrath (Lev 1:4-5). Jesus himself must bear on the cross the unquenchable fire without whose cleansing from sin the *Holy* Spirit could never inhabit fallen humanity. About this necessary (Luke 24:26) offering by fire Jesus said with deep intensity, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:51). The authority of Jesus to ask the Father for the gift of the Spirit on behalf of his Bride at Pentecost (Acts 2:33) sprung from his limitless love as the sin-bearing Lamb under the judgement of fiery wrath.

If the Spirit were to fall *directly* on sinful humanity, he would utterly destroy us; but through the death and glorification of Jesus he can be freely poured forth from heaven (1 Pet 1:12). It is the unity of the Spirit with Christ which shields us from his devastating holiness. From the time of ascension the Spirit and "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5) live as one in heaven (Acts 7:55) where the Spirit is no longer simply the Spirit of God but the "Spirit of Jesus (Christ)" (Acts 16:7; Phil 1:19). He has become *the Spirit of the glorified man Jesus* carrying the authority of his limitless sacrificial love to renew the whole creation; just as he has recreated the humanity of Christ in raising him from the dead (Rom 8:11). The old saying, "What the cross cleanses the Spirit fills." (Hession), means that once the cross has cleansed

through fire the dross of human evil (2 Pet 3:7,12) the Spirit can be poured out without measure (John 3:34).

The Spirit who was always one with the Father and the Son, and who then empowered the Incarnate ministry of Christ, now indwells us, he has become *one with ordinary human beings*. Just as Jesus promised, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be *with you for ever* – 17 the Spirit of truth. The world...neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be *in you*.” (John 14:16-17). The oneness of Jesus and the Spirit is now communicated to us (1 Cor 12:13). It was this remarkable transformation in the nature of the Spirit that first flowed into the Church at Pentecost.

The Spirit Fills the Church with Christ

The Spirit communicates the healing and renewing life of Christ by bringing the Church into the closest possible association with Jesus. The connection between Christ, the Church and the Spirit is one of the utmost intimacy. The Church is “his (Christ’s) body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Eph 1:22-23) and a “dwelling place for God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). To “be filled with the *Spirit*” (Eph 5:18) is dynamically equivalent to “let the word of *Christ* dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). This is no mathematical formula, but a description of the beautiful relationship whereby Jesus and the Holy Spirit by mutually indwelling one another in love come to indwell us (cf. John 14:23).

The Spirit who was outpoured at Pentecost filled the Church with the victorious life of the glorified Lord Jesus (1 Cor 12:3). Indwelling the Lordship of Christ the Spirit now fills the people of God with Christ’s prophetic anointing to see into the spiritual realm and speak of the kingdom of God, he anoints us with the priesthood of Christ in his intercession and worshipping life, and gifts the Church with healing and delivering power for mission to share the rule of Christ as King. People have often been puzzled by the healings in Acts which are *commanded rather than requested* in prayer (Acts 3:6-8; 9:34 cf. Luke 9:1-2). The key to this remarkable confidence of the apostles was their immersion by the Spirit into the kingship of Christ and their desire to give him all the glory (Acts 3:12ff). This isn’t some formula for success, but a way of life in which we can all share

The Spirit bears witness always, only and ever to Jesus in his perfected glorified humanity (John 15:26). The Spirit fills the Church, with the eyes, ears, hands, heart, mouth and voice of Jesus in compassion, restoration and deliverance. He distributes to the Church all the gifts of grace and power which he first shared with Christ (John 16:14). It was an essential part of the *identity* of the first Christians that they were filled with spiritual gifts and mighty works (1 Cor 1:7; Gal 3:1-5; Heb 2:3-4). The polarisation that the Church has suffered for the last 100 years between who emphasise the Spirit versus those who emphasise the Word should not be because the Christian life is a *life in the Spirit which perfectly overlaps our life in Christ* (Rom. 7:6; 8:2, 5; 2 Cor. 3:6; Phil 2:1; 3:3).

The Spirit’s love for Jesus and his desire to exalt him is so transparent that *through it we only see Christ as Lord* (1 Cor 12:3 cf. John 14:9). If we are born again spiritually by accepting Christ as Saviour, this is the work of the Spirit (John 3:5-8), if Jesus somehow becomes closer to us as we grow, this is the ministry of the Spirit. The Spirit is seen (1 Cor 12:7) through what he does in making the kingdom of God more real in and through us. Let me use an illustration.

I was walking along a beach at night in Bali many years ago and came across a section of the ocean brilliantly lit up by a powerful beam. The focus wasn’t the light, but the spectacular

nature of the surf. The Holy Spirit is the spiritual searchlight who always illuminates Jesus. We know the Spirit is present when Jesus is revealed. The call of God on our lives is to be so filled with the Spirit that we are radiant with the life of Christ in all we think, say, and do.

Conclusion

The Church today needs a radical renewal of the unity between the word of the cross and the work of the Spirit. All Christians are devoted to the cross because it so clearly exposes the love of God for sinners in bringing forgiveness of sin. What most of us have failed to see however is that Pentecost was as much God's action *for others* as was the cross. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once put it, "*Christ is himself by reaching out beyond himself* (to the nations)." The limitless love which moved Jesus to shed his blood is the same love which moved him to ask the Father for the Spirit and pour him out at Pentecost (cf. John 19:34). His passion is always to bless *others*. And in this age, this means blessing others through us!

Online last week Dale remarked that St Marks doesn't need a new minister, it needs a new congregation. A disciples congregation where disciples make disciples. This is true, and the power to make disciples flows from the limitless authority of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20) communicated to his Church by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). As only the cross could erase guilt, so only the outpouring of the Spirit can fill humanity with the likeness of Christ's character and acts of saving power. We are not talking here about the survival of a little Anglican congregation in an obscure suburb of Perth, but of the revelation and impartation of the glorified humanity of the Son of God for lost people. I can sense a deep longing in the Spirit, a groaning (Rom 8:26), to be released in our midst. To this ache in the Spirit we must respond.

As the prophets of old were men and women of the Spirit (Hos 9:7), as Jesus was *the* Spirit-filled man (Matt 12:28; Luke 1:35; 3:21-22; 4:14,18 etc), as the early Church was a Spirit baptised Body (1 Cor 12:13), so we can be too. The Lord promised, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*" (Luke 11:13). This promise became manifestly true of all those praying in the days preceding Pentecost (Acts 1:14). This can include us. It is time to ask the Father to glorify his Son in our midst, to ask him for the power and presence of the outpoured Spirit so others might "see Jesus".