



Receptivity to the Spirit

An address for the Cosmic Mass at Pentecost & Mother's Day
11th May 2008 ● Rev Heather

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away; and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance

Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4

During the service of the Veneration of the Light and the Blessing of Fire, the Paschal candle was lit. We were blessed with the lit candle, and that blessing, given in the form of a cross, was a holy moment. It signified that through Christ's giving of his life on the cross and his resurrection, light has triumphed over darkness. Throughout the Mystical Interval, the Paschal candle has spoken to us of the etheric presence of Christ which the disciples experienced and which it is possible for us now to experience. Today we extinguish that candle.

The events of Easter are not simply past history. Each year at this time, the spiritual worlds pour newness into this world which Christ came to redeem and restore. Over the past weeks, we have been encouraged to be open to the pulsation of this life-giving energy, to be still, to listen and respond to the quiet voice within us, to have a heart of flesh and not of stone.

A Time of Waiting

And now we have reached the Day of Pentecost. Before the apostles could reach this point, they had to go through a period of stillness, of waiting. After the Ascension, they were no longer able to perceive the presence of the Christ in their midst. During the ten days that followed, they struggled to understand the meaning of the cosmic events which they had witnessed and also to deal with their deep sense of loss. I'm sure they often reminded one another of what Jesus had said to them. "Don't depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me. For John baptised with water, but before many days you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

He spoke these words while he was staying with them, the RSV says. This is not the word that means to abide or remain. We could translate the verse as; "He spoke these words while he was assembled with them." During Christ's ministry the disciples were with him continually – we could say that they remained with him. During the forty days of the Mystical Interval, they could perceive him only at times. After the Ascension, even that was taken from them, and they were instructed to wait.

To wait purposefully, we have to be quiet within – in our minds and hearts. Otherwise waiting is frustrating and tedious. I wonder how long it took the disciples to get to that point of inner stillness. Maybe it took them the whole ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost. Ten days before they were all together in one place, quiet in their spirit and united in purpose. Only then could they receive the promised Spirit.

The Day of Pentecost

In Old Testament times, the Spirit descended on particular people for a specific purpose. It did not abide with them. But the coming of the Holy Spirit to that group of waiting ones was different. It was not a spasmodic event. Christ had promised: “He (the Father) will give you another Counsellor, **to be with you for ever**, even the Spirit of truth ...you know him, for he dwells with you, and **will be in you**” (John 14:15-17).

We do not know exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost but it was unmistakable that this promise was fulfilled. The experience of the disciples is described in pictures. The coming of the Spirit is likened to the sound of a rushing mighty wind that filled the house where they were, and to tongues of fire resting upon each person present.

What can we understand from these pictures? The sound like the rush of a mighty wind suggests that their ears were opened to a higher vibration, and that it became possible for them to directly receive the inspiration of the Spirit. This was an all-encompassing experience. The sound completely filled the house where they were. Metaphysically, a house represents the dwelling place of our soul. It is where we live. The sound of the Spirit reverberated in their physical, etheric and astral being. We can imagine the elements of those bodies being shaken and transformed by the power of this experience.

Our Earth was created through sound. At its creation, the word of God sounded forth with creative power. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit entered into human beings, into all human beings, in order to bring about our re-creation. Those that awakened to that presence were able to see new possibilities and to take hold of a new future.

Something of this future is shown us in the second picture of this event - the tongues of fire resting on the heads of those gathered. The word “tongues” appears twice in two verses, and I think we are meant to understand that there is a relationship between them. “There appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.” That is the first part of the picture. It points to a very important aspect of the Spirit’s work. The tongues of fire rested on each individual person. This Holy Spirit is the spirit of individuality.

The second mention of tongues is in the next verse: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” At the Feast of Pentecost people from all over the world came to Jerusalem to worship, and it seems that a large gathering heard the speech of the apostles. These people from other countries were confused and amazed because each one heard the message in his or her own language. The inspired speech of the apostles broke down racial and language barriers and brought a shared understanding among peoples who had been separated.

The pictures of Pentecost demonstrate the purpose of the Spirit that we human beings will become true individuals and that the divisions between us will disappear in the unity the Spirit will bring about.

What is our experience of the Spirit now?

It is a breathtaking purpose of cosmic significance, towards which we are taking the first faltering steps as we become more conscious of the Spirit within, and as we learn to live in attunement with the Spirit.

In Romans 8, Paul helps us to recognise some of the ways the Spirit is working in us now. He says:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him... We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.
Roman 8: 14-17, 22-24

The Spirit leads us.

"Lead" is such a rich word. It can also mean to bear, to carry and even to impel. To be led can be a very passive experience; to be impelled is to act in a strong way. "For all who are impelled by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." There is a force, a power at work in us to which we respond. At various times in our lives, we experience the Spirit in us in all these ways. Sometimes the Spirit leads us when the way is unknown or unclear, guiding us through circumstances or through thoughts that come to us "from the ether". Sometimes the Spirit bears us, carries us, strengthening us when the way is difficult. Sometimes the Spirit impels us to action through a strong inner urging. When we experience this work of the Spirit in us, we know that we are the children of God.

The Spirit enables us to know that we have an intimate relationship with God.

This relationship is expressed in the words, "Abba! Father!" Abba is an Aramaic word, related to the Hebrew word for father. It is a small child's word, we could say. In an Aramaic speaking family, as many families in Palestine in New Testament times were, this would have been one of the first words a child spoke. Out of the baby babble emerged Abba, just as our children say "Dadda" or "Daddy".

Parents treasure those first words - "Mum, mum" and "Dad, dad" - as a sign that the child recognises them and has a special name for them. I think that perhaps we are like infants just learning the language of spirit, and that the heavens rejoice when we show that we recognise our heavenly Father and our special relationship with him. The divine Spirit enables our human spirit to know this, to know its divine origin.

Mark tells us that when Christ wrestled with his destiny in Gethsemane he spoke to the Father in these words, "Abba, Father." Perhaps Paul is also telling us here that even in our darkest times, the Spirit helps us to know that we are being upheld within the will and purposes of a loving Father.

We have within us the first fruits of the Spirit.

The purpose of God for us, and for the whole of creation, is redemption, transformation, the uniting of all things. The first fruits of this purpose are already evident in us.

The Feast of Pentecost was also called the Feast of Harvest or the Day of First fruits because the first fruits of the wheat harvest, which was mostly completed by this time, were presented to the Lord.

Within us are the first fruits, not of the land but of the Spirit. We use different words to express what this gift is. Sometimes we speak of it as a seed. Paul says that God has put his seal upon us. He says that the Spirit in our hearts is a guarantee, or a first instalment of our inheritance, of what will one day be ours as sons of God. Whatever words we use, this gift is

definitely ours. It is a seed to be nurtured, an instalment of an inheritance which is to be treasured.

How may we enter more fully into the experience of the Spirit?

Over the past weeks, we have been developing in ourselves a greater receptivity to the Spirit. At Pentecost a few years ago, Rev Robert spoke of the chalice we have created in our being which enables us to receive the Spirit into us and to pour it out in turn to those around us.

And if you think that a chalice seems a little grand for what you have created during this time, then let me tell you what else Robert said, which I found very heartening. He said that even if all we have created is a paper cup, the Spirit can still fill it and flow out from it. In other words, to whatever degree we have opened ourselves, the Spirit can fill the space created.

Perhaps it is quite significant that today is also Mothers Day. As we at The Centre understand the meaning of Mothers Day, it is a day for acknowledging and honouring the feminine in us all, in whatever body that may be expressed. And one of the qualities of our feminine nature is receptivity.

So today, let us be thankful that the Spirit has come and dwells in us. Let us open ourselves to the inspiration of the Spirit. Let us listen for the Spirit's guidance and leading. Let us realise and rejoice in the closeness of our relationship to the Father, and let us be impelled by the Spirit to move towards greater unity with one another.

So shall it be.

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