

Sermon for Sunday 19 May 2024 – Pentecost

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Acts 2.1-21; Psalm 104.26-37; Romans 8.22-27; John 15.26-27; 16.4b-15

Father, on this day of Pentecost, would you come by your Holy spirit, open our minds and our hearts to your word that we might glorify your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A question for What is the work of the Holy Spirit? What is the work of the Holy Spirit? Comforter? Mediator between ourselves and God? To inspire? Yes, but... Yes, but... All right answers. But I want to focus this morning on what **Jesus** says is the work of the Holy Spirit. Because it has implications for each one of us and for us as a community of believers who seek to do the work of God.

Our gospel reading - let's put it into context because it needs to be put into context. Just before this, where Jesus has been talking to the disciples about the coming of the advocate, he's talking about the hostility that they will face, that the disciples will face. He says, 'The world hated me. The world is going to hate you.' In John's gospel and the letters of John that we call the Johannine literature, very often the world means everything that is opposed to God. We're not just talking about the created world, but it is those who are in opposition to God, the world, it's used in a negative context. Yes, God loves the world and his cosmos, but John writes to the young church saying, Do not love the world. Be separate from the world. It is what is against God.

Then Jesus says, When the advocate comes, whom I send, who I will send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth who the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you've been with me from the beginning. This is this pivot point between Jesus saying they're going to face hostility, but they're going to be his witnesses, and then he says, 'But the spirit is going to come'. And then our lectionary readers take a little section out, which is about them being put out of the synagogues. Again, the hostility they will face. You'll be put out of the synagogues. The hour is coming when those who kill you will think that they are doing so. They are offering worship to God. I don't know why the lectionary readers might have taken that out; maybe we might be a bit uncomfortable with the idea of being killed for our faith, says he, wearing the stole of the Martyrs.

Now, what is this word advocate? In the Greek, it's *parakletos* or *paraclete*. Para. Any Greek scholars? If I said to you parapatetic, like a parapatetic music teacher. Para meaning moving, walking. Paraclete is to walk alongside. Hence, we get... (it's a very difficult word to translate, because it has many uses) comforter, to come alongside, to support. But in this language of hostility and giving testimony, it's the language of the courtroom, which is why it's often translated advocate. It's like the barrister. I don't know if anybody has been following the post office inquiry online. Anybody? The barristers are the advocates for the inquiry and for the subpostmasters who were treated so badly. But somebody who was an advocate in a court would often come to the support of a friend who had been accused and were facing the hostility of the court, the prosecution of the court. This idea that their testimony would successfully defend their

friend and turn things on their head. They're not guilty, they're innocent. Do you get the language? I know I'm being a little bit technical, but it's very, very important.

Jesus says, 'The advocate, the one who is going to give testimony in support of me, I will send him.' And you also, speaking to the disciples, you're going to testify as well. We could argue that the way that the Holy Spirit testifies is through the testimony of the disciples. But what is the Holy Spirit going to testify to when he comes? You might want your pew sheets to hand, because in the middle of it, in the reading from John, so our third reading, it says this, 'And when he, the Holy Spirit, the advocate, comes, the paraclete, he will do this. He will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement.' So yes, he will comfort, he will inspire our prayers and many of the things that Paul says about the work of the Holy spirit. But Jesus says this is what the advocate is going to do. He's going to prove the world wrong. Prove those who have been against Jesus, against God, prove them wrong; about sin, about righteousness, about judgement.

The paraclete is going to do, and continue to do, and do it through the disciples, what Jesus has been doing, because Jesus has been showing the world that it is sinful. If you read the section before, he says, If I hadn't come, they wouldn't have had sin. It's because I've come that we've identified that there is sin. You may find that strange. But think about a speed limit, 30 mile an hour sign. If you were driving at 60 miles an hour and there was no 30 mile an hour sign, have you done anything wrong? If you're driving at 60 mile an hour, there's no 30 mile an hour sign, and it's a built-up area and there's a school that's on, have you done anything morally wrong? Not necessarily legal, but morally wrong. Yes. But how do we know that we have done something wrong? It's because there is a speed limit that says, go over this, you've gone wrong. Jesus, if you like, is that speed limit? He identifies what is right, where the limits are. So Jesus coming sets the boundaries, if you like. Does that make sense? I don't have a speed limit, I don't know I've gone wrong. Jesus draws attention to where we go wrong.

But the sin being spoken of here, that the Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong, is the sin of not believing in Jesus. Being wrong about righteousness is because the Jewish leader says, this man is not righteous. It's simple, he deserves to be put to death. And the Holy Spirit comes and says, 'No, you got that wrong.' Got that wrong because God vindicated Jesus by his resurrection. He was righteous. And we'll prove the world wrong about judgement, because the world put judgement on Jesus, and gets flipped and the judgement is on the Prince of the world, the Satan, the devil. Do you see this flipping that's going on? From the advocate saying, I'm here to support Jesus and I'm here to show you, you're wrong about sin, you're wrong about whether he was righteous or not, you're wrong about the judgments. Also, the work of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to God and to Jesus. Well, that's all very well by background, isn't it? That's the introduction.

Something happened with the disciples. They saw Jesus dead, buried. And although he appeared to them in the resurrection, they were still quite frightened. They were hiding away in the upper room for fear of the Jewish leaders. Something seems to have happened at the Ascension because then they are in the temple, where Luke particularly tells us the end of his gospel, after the Ascension, they were in the temple praising God day by day. If we'd have read the early bit of Acts, they choose a new disciple to

replace Judas, Matthias or Matthias, depending on your pronunciation. And they're gathering for prayer, probably 120 of them, because there's 120 that do all the deciding about Matthias. And it says they were together in one place, in a house. I said before that the same word for house can be used for temple. It was a pretty big house if 120 of them were in there. They may then have moved to the temple. I think maybe they were already at the temple for nine o'clock prayer because when the Spirit comes and they're accused of being drunk, Peter says, It's only nine o'clock in the morning. And that was a time of prayer in the temple. So if Luke is saying they were in the temple praising God every day, the likelihood is they turned up at the time that the service was going on. Does that follow? Right.

Well, what happened? I need a volunteer. Rachel. Thank you. I've got some disciples here *[points to some bottles with a little water in the bottom, and a limp balloon stretched over the top]*. Churchwarden Mary, please don't worry, I'm not going to set fire to these this year. I've discovered; I'm using a bit of artistic licence here; I've discovered that you can now buy the Holy Spirit powdered. I'm not telling you where, but I wonder whether the disciples before Pentecost were a bit like this, a bit flat, a bit floppy. Do you want to pour some Holy Spirit? It's there, Holy Spirit powder, go on. Stay there, don't move; this is our last disciple; I just ran out of time this morning *[pours powder into the last balloon]*. Right, so they're all in one place, they've gone for their prayer meeting at the temple. There we go. They're praising God. Can you help me from this end? We're going to tip them up. We're going to tip the Holy Spirit powder into the disciples. Okay. That's a bit weird, isn't it? That's all right. It's fine *[the water starts bubbling and the balloon are inflated]*. That one's fizzed up a bit too much. There we go. The Holy Spirit has come on these representative disciples. What's happening with that one? Can you keep an eye on those for me?

The Holy Spirit comes on the disciples and it makes a difference. I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like those disciple balloons felt before we called the Holy Spirit (inverted commas) in. Bit flat, bit floppy, bit not much use. And then the Spirit comes, and it bubbles up. And on Pentecost, the people of Jerusalem hear the disciples glorifying God, praising God in different languages; they hear and they understand. But, it raises questions. They're accused of being drunk. Let that sink in for a minute. Would people seeing us wonder whether we were drunk? I wonder why they thought they were drunk if they were clearly hearing in their own languages. That's a little conundrum for me. Because I know when I was touring in the music industry and drank a little bit too much, my speech was not particularly coherent.

But in answer to the question, Peter stands up and starts speaking. He starts testifying. He starts doing the work of an advocate saying, 'No, you got this wrong. This is what's going on.' We heard the prophecy from Joel. If we were to read on, we would hear the full summary of Peter's speech, and within that, he's doing the same as Jesus says the Holy Spirit do. He speaks about the fact that Jesus came, that he wasn't sinful, as the Jewish leaders had said, but he was sinless, that he had been vindicated and shown to be righteous because of the resurrection. God had vindicated him. And also that the world had been turned upside down because the Prince of the world now stood condemned. Peter starts doing, through the Holy Spirit, what Jesus said they would do. Peter speaks of the sin of unbelief, of the righteousness of Jesus, and his vindication, and the judgement of the world. And that leads to a response of repentance.

Let me just turn to it. 'This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses, 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 both see and hear. Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other Apostles, "What should we do?" Peter replies, "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

This, brothers and sisters, is the message of the gospel. Luke, at the end of his gospel, says this, the words of Jesus, 'The Messiah is to suffer to rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name for all nations, beginning with Jerusalem. You are witnesses. You are to testify to these things. See, I'm sending upon you what the Father promised. So stay here until you've been clothed with power from on high.'

That, brothers and sisters, is the work and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power to continue the ministry of Jesus, speaking out through words and actions in in a hostile world, speaking to the sin of unbelief, declaring that Jesus was righteous and has been vindicated, and to declare that the Prince of this world has been defeated and condemned. So brothers and sisters, this morning, we go in the power of the Holy Spirit to continue that work. Amen.