

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Day of Pentecost marks a shift in the Church Calendar from God's Story to our Story. After the months of remembering and entering into the grand narrative of God's saving work, we now begin to explore the implications for us, and how we can become participants in the Reign of God. But, the key moment of transition is the outpouring of God's Spirit. In keeping with the biblical principle of "passing the mantle" from prophet to disciple, Pentecost is the moment in which Jesus "passes the mantle" on to us. We have learned from him what God's mission is, and now we have received his Spirit in order to continue his work. So, Pentecost is a gift, but it is also a preparation, an empowering, for the work ahead.

The Day of Pentecost is a celebration that is rich and challenging for followers of Christ, but it is easy to miss the transformative call that it offers. In Acts God's Spirit is given as the empowerment for God's people to become prophetic proclaimers of God's goodness – as Peter indicates through the connection with the Joel prophecy. The Pentecost narrative also contains echoes of the experience of Moses and the leaders he appoints to serve God's people, and Moses' longing that all of God's people should be filled with God's Spirit and proclaim God's message.

The temptation is to see the gift of the Spirit as something for insiders, to be jealously guarded and enjoyed. But instead we need to share Moses' generosity of vision, and long for the Spirit to come down on all of God's people. It is with this longing that Peter preaches, a longing that all should share in the forgiveness and new life that God has given to us. We receive in awed gratitude, and share because we know that God has given us what we do not deserve. Should we be more grudging than God?

The marks of Pentecost have all too often been seen as personal, supernatural experiences and the benefits of Pentecost have been understood as personal enlightenment, personal euphoria and personal strengthening. But, in every community, every neighbourhood and every church God's Spirit seeks to enable people to "speak one another's languages", to welcome and serve one another, and to work together to serve and empower those who most need help and compassion.

When God's Spirit fills us we find ourselves being "sent" to serve others. We find ourselves seeking to bring peace and reconciliation between people – whether it's a married couple who are struggling, parents and children who are having problems, or church groups that are unable to break free of competitiveness and suspicion. We find ourselves seeking to understand those who are different from us, and we find ourselves reaching out in compassion and service to those who are marginalised, excluded, poor and rejected.

When the Holy Spirit came it was powerful and dramatic, a sound like a violent roaring wind filled the house where the disciples were sitting, and tongues of fire rested on each of them; they were filled with the power of God, and began speaking other languages, languages they had not learnt, as the Spirit enabled them.

The Holy Spirit that came on that first Pentecost is the same Holy Spirit that is active in the church and world today.

But when it comes to the Holy Spirit, many people are confused and sometimes afraid. This fear exists because people don't understand or know who and what the Holy Spirit is, and because they are afraid of what might happen if the Holy Spirit was to come in power. But we do not need to be afraid of the Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus is with us now, and through which we encounter and experience God in our lives. It is the Holy Spirit that makes God real.

Some people are also afraid about what will happen when they invite the Holy Spirit into their lives, but the fact is that if you have invited Jesus into your lives, you have already received the Holy Spirit. Jesus says "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Revelation 3:20). When we open our hearts to Jesus, we open our hearts to his Spirit.

But being filled with God's spirit is not a one off occurrence. In Ephesians Paul instructs the Christians to keep on being filled with the Spirit. We need to be constantly filled afresh with God's spirit, and to recognise that there is a difference between having the Holy Spirit and being FULL of the Holy Spirit.

As we experience more of God's Holy Spirit in our lives, as the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow, so a transformation begins to take place within us. We experience the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). In other

words we should become more like Christ, as the spirit of Christ dwells within us.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, gave birth to the church, which saw rapid growth. At the end of Acts chapter 2, we see what the early church was like. It was a church where the believers devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship. It was a church where people were filled with awe at the many wonders and signs that were performed. And it was a church where no one was in need. Everyone was cared for and supported. This was all the outworking of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers.

This is surely a model of what the church should be like today, a place of awe, unity, hospitality, generosity and growth.

The Holy Spirit is given to us not only so that we may know and experience God's power and love in our lives, but also to work in and through us to change both ourselves and the world around us.

With the Holy Spirit within us, we are the presence of Christ in the world today. We are his hands, his feet, his eyes. Through us, Christ reaches out and serves the world in love.

We need to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, and release the spirit that is within us, as we seek to serve God, one another and our world. In Jesus' name. Amen.