

SERMON FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY
ST DAVID'S ANGLICAN PARISH, BURNSIDE
19 MAY 2024

The Holy Spirit is the much misunderstood third person of the Holy Trinity. This is not surprising. The Spirit of God who moved across the face of the waters at creation defies being constrained by the strictures and limitations of our understanding of God's Spirit, breath, wind, the Ruach of God as He continues to move across the face of creation.

This sermon seeks to provide a foundation upon which the life, presence, and activity of the Holy Spirit can be for us more certain. We need to understand that the Holy Spirit's interest and activity should not be regarded as inhibiting our freedom to make choices. Guidance yes but not interference, because the Holy Spirit has the divine ability to work within our choices, whether those choices are right or wrong for us and others.

Let's consider the presence of the Holy Spirit with people, clans and nations spoken of in the Bible.

The world of the Hebrew people described in the books of the Old Testament reveals a migration towards identity and the discovery of faith in a God who is shaping them, to be something more than they were at first birth. The origin of the Hebrew people lies well beyond the reach of historians. However, the mists of the ancient world begin to clear with the Patriarchs of Israel. It is generally agreed despite alternative thoughts that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were individual leaders of clans who moved away from the Fertile Crescent to wander as semi nomads through Canaan, Mesopotamia and Egypt.

So what gods did the Patriarchs worship as they journeyed through foreign lands? The biblical evidence is that they worshipped the god of the clan, for instance 'elohe' abraham. The Hebrew's at this time worshipped El. El was the basic Semitic name for God, its root meaning was 'power'. It was applied to the father of all gods. Examples of the use of the word El are found in the names of individuals such as Ishma-el ['May El [God] hear'], also ['the Lord has given heed'] and El Shaddai' [the mountain one], and El Olam [the everlasting God one who never changes].

Then out of Egypt where the Hebrews had lived for 430 years (Exodus 12.40) God gathered them - remember the Passover of God's Spirit protecting them - under the leadership of Moses, a murderer (Exodus 2.12), and brought them across the Reed Sea to wander for 40 years towards a part of what used to be popularly called 'the Levant' - meaning from the French - 'rising', a reference to the sun rising in the east. And so with a combination of conquest (Deut 31.3-6) and peaceful settlement over many years the Hebrews found a home in Canaan or if you like Palestine, staying to the present day.

If today we could work through the history of Israel after they had taken possession of Palestine, we would see that the writers of this history record the influence of God's Spirit upon Israel. *'The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.'* (Isaiah 61.1). The psalmist prays *'Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.'* Psalm 51.11. The prophet Ezekiel tells us of one of the most dramatic encounters with the Spirit of God, *'The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley;'* (Ezk 37.1). *'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, say to the*

breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breath upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.' (Ezk 37.9-10)

Turning our thoughts to the New Testament era and the gospel according to St John we continue to consider the evidence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people, clans and nations. We learn that the Spirit of God now named the Advocate or Counsellor whom Jesus will send, will testify concerning the truths of God. *'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.'* [John 12.13]. Note that the Spirit of truth will guide, not take away from us the freedom of choice.

During his third missionary journey covering western Türkiye and the eastern part of Greece down to Corinth in the Peloponnese St Paul had reached an understanding that the whole of creation depends on the Spirit of God to renew life, *'the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now the redemption of our bodies.'* [Romans 8.22-23]. *'And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.'* [Romans 8.27]

Here Paul is teaching us that the Holy Spirit interceding on our behalf before God does not require us to utter a word. God understands what the Holy Spirit is saying on our behalf. We remain in silent contemplation. We can rely on the Holy Spirit to tell the inner most truths about us, truths we are not even aware of.

Our focus in this sermon is to understand that the place of the Holy Spirit in our lives is one of guiding influence, allowing us to make decisions good or bad, but at the same time dwelling within us and interceding before God on our behalf with words that require no sound of utterance from us.

If we thoughtfully accept that the Holy Spirit is over-shadowing our lives, guiding us while respecting our God given right to make our own choices then maybe we will more alert to that guidance. Maybe then the fruits of the Spirit will be more visible in what we say and do. Maybe our anxiety about everything that surrounds us will be less acute. If we have need of words then why not repeat the words of the psalmist *'Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.'* Psalm 51.11

'When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them.' [Acts 2.1-4]

As the Spirit enabled them the Spirit of God will enable us.

Fr John

Saturday 18 May 2024