John 7:37-39 Pentecost Sunday 30th May 2020

Pentecost Sunday is the day where we reflect on the Holy Spirit, who was sent into this world in a dramatically new and powerful way.

The traditional reading for today is from Acts 2, where the Disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit and St Peter went and boldly addressed people from many nations. Telling them about Jesus and calling them to respond in repentance of their previous wrong actions and thoughts, and turn in trust to accept Jesus’ sacrificial death for them.

It is a hugely important moment as the Lord poured out this blessing upon those present. From that time, the infant church would expand to cover every corner of this world. The whole event is dynamic and rich in symbolism.

In contrast, we find ourselves still in lockdown and restrained in what we can do. But in that constraint, you may have found that it has given us space in which to come to know ourselves better. Time to reflect on what makes us tick, and if you are anything like me, then it is not always pretty! But being honest about it, and gaining that deeper understanding is good. It should always be done in the context that regardless of what we discover about ourselves, God has already seen it and He still loves us and wants us to receive His blessings.

The knowing what our shortcomings are, and reflecting on why we are like that, will bring us to a recognition of where we may be spiritually parched; dried out like the grass at the moment, by a lack of rain. Our spiritual dryness can lead to a sense of distance between us and our living God, the routines of prayer and bible reading difficult and unfulfilling (that is if we are still doing those things). It can even take us to a place where we refuse to forgive and bless others, even getting angry at them. It can be hurtful to both them and ourselves.

But that is not at all what our living Lord wants for us. He wants us to be full of Joy and love that overflows from us.

Let me take you to another passage that is so helpful on this day of Pentecost: John 7:37-39.

But first some context:

Jesus is at the Feast of Booths. It is a week-long celebration of thanksgiving in Jerusalem, where everyone sleeps in temporary shelters as a reminder of how their ancestors lived in the wilderness, during the time of God’s rescue. One of the main symbols of the festival is water that is ritually carried in a procession and then poured out as an offering to God. It symbolises both the life bearing water being poured out in the desert, and the expected outpouring of God’s Spirit in the last days.

John gives us these words:

**“37**On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. **38**Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jn+7%3A37-39&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26367a)] **39**By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” John 7:37-39 (NIV)

Jesus, the Son of God, at that crucial moment on the last day of the feast, offers this most astonishing gift: Never again do they need to thirst, for He can give them eternal fulfilment that will quench their parched souls. He is telling them that He Himself is the fulfilment of all that they are doing. And that offer still stands for us today.

It is an offer open to anyone who believes in Him. It is not to be limited to the people of Israel, or to those who perform certain rights of passage, or to an elite ruling class, the clever or the powerful, but it is for whoever believes in Him.

And as we believe in Him wholeheartedly, then Jesus promises that rivers of living water will flow out of every believer. And to make sure that there was no misunderstanding, St John goes on to explain that this living water is the Spirit of God that would be given later, at Pentecost.

But notice how dynamic the imagery is: “rivers of living water will flow from within them.” It is a lovely description.

It is not a stagnant, still pond that can be observed but hardly experienced. No, this is a river that brings life. Life, not only to the one blessed, but will be seen and experienced by those around them.

An active river can be heard before it is seen, it changes the air temperature around it and provides life to the surrounding area.

I am left with the question: Do our lives look like that? For Jesus’ words imply that that is what believers in Him should experience.

The blessings of the Holy Spirit in our lives are at least three-fold:

* Our relationship with our living Lord is to be intimate and life enhancing.
* Our own lives will be enriched by being eternally fed from such a wonderful source of nourishment.
* Our lives will be a blessing to others, as we exercise the gifts that the Spirit of God gives all Christians.

As we explore what gifts the Lord has given us, they will bring unity, grace, love, joy, wisdom and understanding to the one body of Christ, the Church. (1 Cor 12)

If you are sensing that you are feeling spiritually dry and parched at this time, and you want to experience a new vitality in your Christian life, then the preparation is curiously similar to that for someone who has not become a Christian yet, who has not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

The preparation is to actively resolve to turn away from all your known wrongdoings, to ask the Lord for forgiveness of those sins and trust Him, that He will forgive you for them; To commit or re-commit your life to Christ as your Lord. He is to be your guide and ultimate authority in all things.

Those who do this, will often find a change take place in their lives. For some, it is almost impossible to keep silent, they are excited about this new or revitalised relationship. Suddenly reading the Bible has become more meaningful. Prayer becomes real and engaging, rather than a hardship. Now they know for themselves the presence of God in their lives, and worship becomes an experience of deep joy. Spiritual gifts are forthcoming in new and powerful ways that they had not known before.

All this is the work of the living water, the Holy Spirit, sent to bubble up in the lives of believers.

My prayer today is that in this time of isolation, we each have the time to re-engage with the Lord, to hold onto his promises, and to re-commit our lives to him, so that we may truly know His powerful and wonderful blessings for ourselves.

There is an astonishing quote from CS Lewis:

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” (*The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*)

God knows what a blessing this gift is for us. Are we willing to accept it, and know it deeply and gloriously for ourselves, or are we satisfied with a limited encounter with our Lord?

Amen

Peter