

Sermon
9 June 2019
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Reading: Acts 2:1-13

It was 50 days after Passover. People from all over, including the disciples, were together in Jerusalem, celebrating the Harvest Festival, when all of a sudden, a strange thing happened!

A sound, like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and FILLED the whole house where the disciples were sitting.

They saw, what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and all of a sudden, they had the ability to do things they were never able to do before, like speak in other languages...

Please bear in mind that the disciples were not in a good place. They were still devastated because Jesus wasn't with them anymore, they were uncertain as to what was expected of them now, and although Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they have been "clothed with power from on high", they really had no idea what that meant.

I think it's safe to say that they felt *empty*. As if it wasn't enough that meeting Jesus in the 1st place turned their lives upside down, *loosing* him was a million times worse.

Until now! Until a violent wind came and literally set them on fire – in a good way.

They were given the ability to testify about Jesus, all the barriers that stood in their way instantly disappeared.

The Spirit of God *filled* them. The emptiness was gone. They were filled by something they couldn't explain, something they could *feel* inside them. Something that would put them into action, something that would shine through them from that day onwards...

This is not an easy concept to understand, and yet, it's not nearly as complicated as we sometimes make it out to be.

I would like to show you a wee video clip of a girl participating in America's got talent: <https://youtu.be/TosRwLpAXXk>

Out of the mouths of babes...

Without thinking about it, without any prompting or any hesitation, a 5-year-old girl, called HEAVENLY JOY, declares that Jesus lives within her.

And you know, even if she didn't say it, it was obvious from the outset that this girl had *something*, that she was living up to her name –

Heavenly Joy. It's almost as if the Holy Spirit visibly bubbled up inside her!

I could stand here and deliver long theological arguments about how we should live if we are filled with the Spirit, about what we should do and what we should say... I could explain that God's Spirit is the "paraclete", and what *that* means, or, I can just point to Heavenly Joy, and say that she *gets* it! And she is only 5 years old!

If she was a wee bit older, she might have thought about it before speaking out like that, she might have wondered what people's reaction would be, but she didn't. And we shouldn't either.

Because there will always be those who are negative, those who judge us and those who look at us with suspicion. In our reading we heard that the crowds were amazed and perplexed at what God did through his disciples, but there were also those who thought they had too much wine. The sceptics.

We'll always have them with us. So, let's not use their presence as an excuse to not do what we are supposed to do...

And you know, I can stand here saying that *if* we are filled with the Holy Spirit, it will be obvious to others, it will be visible – but that statement, although it is correct, isn't completely right.

Because we ARE filled with the Holy Spirit. God promised his Spirit to ALL those who believe in him. In other words, not only to his disciples, but to every single one of us too.

So we already have his Spirit living within us!! It's not a case of "*if* we are filled with his Spirit", because we *are* filled with his Spirit!

I think our problem today is that we sometimes try to keep it a secret...

And that's not right. That's basically the opposite of what God wants us to do!

Because God's Spirit can set us on fire. God's spirit can make us speak to all people in a language they can understand. Like St Francis of Assisi said: "Go into the world and preach the gospel. And, if necessary, use words."

We can *show* people God's love through our actions, our attitude; by allowing the Spirit to guide us...

The fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

In other words, if we show these things to the world, we will be offering evidence that God's Spirit is living within us. That we are filled with the Spirit.

A huge big problem in our society today is that people feel empty. And then they try to fill this emptiness in lots of different ways... But no matter what you do, what you think or even what you consume, nothing will be able to fill the space meant for the Holy Spirit.

So let's show the world that they are chasing the wrong things, that they are running in the wrong direction... That what they need are readily available.

All you need to do to receive the Spirit of God, is to believe.

If people ask me how I *know* that the Holy Spirit exists – I just tell them what happens to me week after week... On a Monday morning, I have no idea what I am going to say here from the pulpit on the Sunday. But then I pray and ask God to send me his words, and without fail, Sunday after Sunday, I get a message. Now, *that*, I believe, is the Holy Spirit working...

If you are filled with the Holy Spirit – and you are – then:

- You will be stronger than you ever thought you could be;
- You will be braver than you could ever imagine;
- You will be smarter,
- Kinder,
- More understanding,
- Much more tolerant,
- forgiving,
- and open-minded

than you ever thought possible –

because if you are filled with the Spirit of God, the impossible becomes possible.

- Then you can go through tremendous suffering, without losing your faith, but in fact, grow closer to God;

- Then you can face hardship after hardship without losing heart, but in fact, grow closer to God;
- Then you can break into pieces, without falling apart, and still grow closer to God.

Because although God's Spirit is like breath, like the wind – invisible, but present;

It's also like fire, like petrol – keeping you going;

It's also like glue, like cement – keeping you together.

With God's Spirit inside you your life will never fall apart.

And because all of us have his Spirit within us, his church will never fall apart either.

Because the day the disciples received the Holy Spirit, was the day the church was born. God's Spirit brought the people into action. It's only through his Spirit that we can talk about him, feel him, and have communion with each other.

Could you see the light of God's love shining through wee Heavenly's eyes? Let's look at the world the way she does.

Because if all of us do that, we will be doing what God meant for us to do all along – to let all people on earth know about his love for us. The people in West Calder/Polbeth, the people in West Lothian, the people in Scotland, the people all over the world.

God fills us with his Spirit, let's go out these doors and go fill the world with his love.

Amen