

Service

Sunday, 23rd May 2021

10.00am

Worship led by Rev Dr André Groenewald

Bible Reading: Acts 2: 1-13

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

² When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Sermon

Our reading signifies the birth of the CHURCH of **GOD. And** all of us have been invited once again to remember how it all began. It began during an old Jewish festival of the Harvest that was celebrated 50 days after Passover and called the Shavu'oth or translated the Feast of Weeks. The word Pentecost was the Greek translation of the festival as it literally means 50 alluding to the number of days after Passover.

The disciples were together once again when all of a sudden, their world changed around and inside them for ever. Nothing could prepare them for what was to come. No wonder the writer says they were amazed and perplexed. I do not know whether our reaction would have been different.

But the emphasis of the passage is not on the details of what happened but on the consequences of God outpouring His Holy Spirit on them, equipping them to be what He intended them to be namely missionaries and disciples bringing into creating the beginning of the Church of GOD through the Salvation of Jesus Christ.

All too often we can be distracted by the precise details of what happened in the room. We can so easily become muddled by *non sense* questions like: was it really tongues of fire? How did it look like? Or When the tongues of fire came to rest upon them, were they not burned?

The fact of the matter is that this was a profound moment in their lives of faith. They were called to be Jesus' disciples, they have walked and talked with Jesus and have been witnesses of His death, resurrection, and ascension. They have heard His Commanding words before He ascended to heaven which would have been difficult for them to grasp since they had limited knowledge of the wider world, limited

financial resources and limited experience. Jesus expected them to go out into the world and proclaim the Good news to all. They must have wondered how on earth could they do it? Most probably they only spoke their native language Aramaic, with their own distinct dialect (also known as Galilean Aramaic) with a limited knowledge of Greek which was the *lingua franca* of their time. How will they be able to speak to other people in the world about Jesus? And if they cannot speak the language of other people in the world, how can they baptise and teach them?

Jesus did promise them that He will be with them always, but He did not elaborate on the how.

And then all of this became true when God's Holy Spirit entered the house and filled them enabling them to do what He has asked them to do.

The meaning is clear as daylight. The disciples had limited resources, knowledge, and experience, but God equipped them with His Spirit to fulfil His command to reach out to the world. All of a sudden, they could understand different languages. SO much so that even the bystanders were amazed and could not help themselves saying: ***“Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?”***

God Spirit descended upon them with one goal namely to equip and nourish them for the Missionary task ahead. This had such an impact on them that Peter had the courage and bravery to stand up and address the crowd defending their honor after they have been “shamed in public” with the words of the bystanders saying: They must be drunk!

God's Holy Spirit encouraged them to go out and start a body of believers all over the world – a body of people who are still witnesses of the Risen Christ now in our present.

Although the disciples had limited resources, God gave them enough to change the world forever with their witness and service to Christ.

The message to us is so clear. We have received God's Holy Spirit for two reasons only namely to assure us that we are never alone in our endeavors to worship, serve, proclaim and follow the Triune God and secondly that we have to proclaim HIS Gospel of HOPE, FAITH and LOVE everywhere we go. And when we do it – bystanders will see and hear the difference in and of us just like they did a long time ago with the disciples. In the letter to the Galatians chapter 5 the Apostle Paul mentioned, what he called the fruit of the Spirit which is:

“love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

ALL who are receivers of God's Spirit through proclaiming of God's message to all people, will bear the fruit of God's Holy Spirit.

Too often we forget that as believers we belong to God through Jesus Christ. We are called into HIS church and equipped through HIS Holy Spirit to proclaim His NAME everywhere we go. A CHURCH without God's presence and without believers, is no CHURCH of Christ. And a CHURCH without being faithful to Jesus's command to MISSION, is no CHURCH at all. And a congregation which does not rely on God's Spirit to proclaim the SALVATION and RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ cannot be part of the CHURCH of GOD!

We, as a church can often give a lack of resources especially financial ones, the reason why we cannot commit to mission, why we cannot reach out to other people. Maybe we should start afresh today and step back a few centuries to a place where it all began – and ask God to pour out HIS HOLY Spirit anew in us to go out and obey what He commanded us to do. If we rely on God’s Spirit, to equip and nourish us like the first disciples – we will have the courage to stand up for our faith and be counted as believers.

May we as believers always pray for God’s Spirit to fill us, renew us and encourage us for the MISSION we received from GOD.

Amen