

St Botolph's Church Worthing
Pentecost 15 May 2016
John 14: 8-17, Acts 2: 1-21
Father Roger Walker

Our Readings today were the wrong way round – for we heard first of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost and then for the gospel Reading Jesus' prophecy that this would happen. So let's look first at the prophecy: Jesus tells us his disciples that he will ask his Father to give them another advocate to be with them for ever – even the Spirit of Truth.

Advocate seems to be a strange word to use to describe the Holy Spirit, but it is actually a term from the Law Courts, meaning someone who stands beside you to make you strong – the equivalent of what is called at modern day courts martial the prisoner's friend. This is what we want the Holy Spirit to do for us: to make us strong to serve our Lord. But he is more than this – he is the Spirit of Truth and the word truth in St John's Gospel is always a sort of shorthand for the message that Jesus preaches.

You can see how this is so at the end of the Reading, where Jesus says that the Holy Spirit 'will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you'. Now this is great. The apostles and, by implication, we ourselves, when we receive the Holy Spirit, will be strong and know all of Jesus' teaching. Both of these, however, have a further purpose: first for the apostles, but also for us – they and we are to be strong to pass on the Lord's teaching.

We can see how this happened for the first time in our Reading from Acts: the disciples had been hiding away praying and busying themselves appointing a successor to Judas Iscariot. But they had not actively told anyone about Jesus.

Then, after ten days of waiting, the promised Holy Spirit comes – much more violently and much more powerfully than they could ever have imagined – and they find themselves leaving the safety of their hideaway and coming into the public square, declaring the wonder God has done. Everyone, whatever their native tongue, can understand them – a symbolic reversal of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. And, as in today's world when the Gospel is preached – some were amazed and perplexed and some mocked. But such was the power of the newly given Holy Spirit that Peter was able to shout them down and give the first Christian sermon. We only heard the first part of it – explaining that what was happening was the fulfilment of a prophecy by Joel.

Peter goes on from there to proclaim that Jesus may have been crucified but he was also raised from the dead, fulfilling another prophecy in Psalm 16: and, that this shows, fulfilling yet another prophecy from Psalm 110 that Jesus – risen from the dead is the Lord – that is God – and Christ. That is, the long awaited Messiah promised to the Jews in the Old Testament.

Three thousand people believed this and accepted Peter's call to repent and be baptised – it was a pretty effective sermon!

So what does all of this say to us? We are unlikely to experience the drama of wind and fire, but God's Holy Spirit is here. He wants to enter our hearts and minds just as He did those of the apostles. He wants to stand beside us and make us strong: so what do we do next? Preaching in Heene Road is unlikely to be very effective, but the wonders of God need to be proclaimed today as on that first Pentecost in Jerusalem.

How are we going to do it? First we need to be confident that God will give us the Holy Spirit, the advocate to stand beside us and make us strong: He will do this, for Jesus promises us (Luke 11: 13) that 'your Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him'. All we have to do is ask: and this must be our prayer today, that God will refresh us once more with the Holy Spirit

Next we need to accept what God has done – that He is there and we are stronger, so that we have the courage to show His love in acts of goodness and kindness, and speak to others of how God can change things for them. I know it is hard to do, but remember – the Holy Spirit is standing beside you to make you strong.

Then we have to use this strength to deal with whatever response we get: if it is mocking, as it could be, then be gracious and don't respond in kind. If it is tentative and searching – as is more likely – pray quickly to God for the right words to say, and especially for Bible passages that will be appropriate. For God promises that the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth: the ability to remember Jesus' teaching. If the searching response turns into an acceptance that there is something they can believe – don't leave things up in the air. Please make sure you introduce them to me or another minister or opinion leader, so that their burgeoning faith may be nurtured. Above all, go out from here today expecting that God's Holy Spirit will do something through you and be guided to the right response.

We are not going to be St Peters and convert 3000 people in one go, but we live among people who have a need of God, who find that they want 'spirituality'. We are to be God's spirit-filled ambassadors, who show them that Christianity is the answer to their deep yearnings and that God has a place for them within the family of His Church. May the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, stand truly beside you to make you strong.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

24.4.16