

Day of Pentecost

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Introduction

The Holy Spirit that day in Jerusalem did not cause chaos – it caused freedom from constraint, freedom from fear. The Holy Spirit brings transformation and wonder and grace. God’s transforming power. Not ours. Human endeavours by themselves will fail. But when we are given the Holy Spirit, that risky, uncontrollable power reaching down from heaven to earth, we will be transformed.

Text

John 15:26 – 16:15

26 “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. 27 You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

16”I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. 3 And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. 4 But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; 11 about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. 12 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Comment

It must have been utterly extraordinary to have been there that day when the Holy Spirit came, on the first Pentecost. Imagine being part of the crowd who witnessed

such strange events..or even imagine being one of the disciples, touched with tongues of fire and blown apart, literally, by a 'violent wind'. They must have felt completely out of control...

The Holy Spirit, or 'Advocate' as we read in this version, is the 'Spirit of truth'. The one who will testify on Jesus' behalf, as also the disciples who, Jesus says, are to be guided into truth. So what does it mean to 'be guided into truth' by the Spirit who testifies on Jesus behalf? What happened that day at Pentecost is about truth and power. It is about who has the power to speak truth. And where that power comes from.

Being powerful can cause others to feel out of control, or helpless. Being out of control and power are often closely linked. Think of powerful regimes which brook no argument. Clearly it depends on how power is used, and who is wielding it. Power without truth and justice can lead to chaos, or worse. But God's power, the power of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is always about truth and justice. And therefore it leads to good. Which is interesting, given that it can also lead to feeling out of control...like the disciples that first day of Pentecost.

So feeling out of control may not always be such a bad thing. Or put another way, maybe the Holy Spirit allows us to be free enough to take a risk...to try something new, to allow ourselves to be blown around a bit by God's breath.

The Holy Spirit that day in Jerusalem did not cause chaos – it caused freedom from constraint, freedom from fear. The Holy Spirit brings transformation and wonder and grace. God's transforming power. Not ours. Human endeavours by themselves will fail. But when we are given the Holy Spirit, that risky, uncontrollable power reaching down from heaven to earth, we will be transformed.

And so how do we respond to this Holy Spirit of God? Well, clearly there is a place for human efficiency and planning. We could not function well as a society or a church without it. But what Pentecost shows us is that is not enough. We must also be open to receive God's abundant, uncontrollable Spirit – not so bound up in our planning and strategy that we are unable to let God's power work in us. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940's, who was passionate about a just society and social reforms, said that change is never without inconvenience, even when for the good – i.e. change is always a bit uncomfortable, makes us feel a bit out of control, even when the change is for the better...the Holy Spirit blows us into the heart of change and transformation, but will not leave us comfortless.

Response

In the midst of conflicts at home and afar; in the rise of violent extremism; in the fracturing of the European Union, how can we be open to God's Holy Spirit, that spirit of truth? How can we use the power that we have in that spirit of truth? To work for the good of all...to advocate, to testify to God's work of reconciliation?

So how do we respond to the Holy Spirit? Well, if we truly allow ourselves to be open to God's Spirit, we may find that it is risky, it is hard, but it is hopeful.

Can we then let God's power work in us to transform our broken world? To feed the hungry, to bring peace and justice and healing? The question that Pentecost asks us is whether we will be open to God's Holy Spirit and allow its power to free us from our constraints and our fears, to allow transformation in our own lives, and in the world...in justice, in truth and in God's uncontrollable love for us all.

Prayer

O Holy Spirit of Pentecost
Blow apart our reservations.
Blow open our closed imagination.
Blow down our walls of fear and restriction.

And bring life, and light and joy
to your world.

Where there is conflict
May your breath of life bring peace.

Where there is brokenness
May your healing breath restore

And may we hear your call
to come and join you
in your reconciling work for the world

Amen