



Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Allie Joseph



Sunday 31 May 2020

READINGS

Acts 2: 1-21; Psalm 104: 26-36; 1 Corinthians 12: 3b - 13; John 20: 19-23

Holy Spirit in lockdown

The Holy Spirit is moving amongst us, despite the lockdown, calling us into a new way of understanding and living our call to witness. This is some of the sentiments expressed by Bishop Steve in his latest pastoral letter. Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, seven weeks after Easter. Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. All gathered in the upper room they were waiting, in prayer. Then there was the sound of a rushing wind and the tongues of fire that manifested behind closed doors.

Then the Holy Spirit spilled over into the streets of Jerusalem in the form of the Apostles found talking in foreign languages, preaching the message of Jesus Christ. This Jesus who changed their lives and who opened their hearts to accept a new way of living. Remember that after Easter the Apostles were struggling to break free of the fear of persecution. They spend most of their days together praying, most of their time anxious about their future without Jesus physically present in their lives.

Then the Holy Spirit came. Amid their own lockdown the Holy Spirit came and empowered them to live their call to witness. The Holy Spirit made the Apostles, who were mostly fishermen from Galilee, speak to visitors from present day Iran, Iraq, The West Bank, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete and Saudi Arabia, to name but a few. The Holy Spirit enabled the Apostles to speak in the language of all these foreign visitors in Jerusalem, about Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God who changed their lives. If ever there was a time when the Spirit of God was moving and bringing about change it was during those early days of the Church, as it is now, during the time of Covid19, the new normal.

This pandemic has closed off borders and ground planes and caused distance between people everywhere. Amidst all of this we are celebrating the feast of the Holy Spirit. We are calling on the Spirit of God to be poured out over all of us, as it was on that day of the first Pentecost.

Then something magical happened. Peter stood up and stood out among the crowd. The man who disowned Jesus three times stood up and in the first sermon preached by the newly found Church he quotes a passage from the prophet Joel. Peter stands up and brings the words of the prophet Joel into the present day. He reminds those listening that the Holy Spirit has always been promised to us. The Holy Spirit is being poured out on all flesh as we speak it is moving within and among us despite the lockdown. Peter reminds us that we should allow the word of God, the Spirit of God to move in and through us, in and through our lives and our situations.

This is so relevant to our current situation. With more than 5.5 million infections and just over 350 thousand deaths the Novel Corona virus is fast growing into the title of pandemic, it is becoming the new reality and changing the way we understand ourselves and the world we live in. Here in our own country we reached a stage where we can no longer halt economic activity, government is using a staged approach to bring South Africa back online. We all know what this means, and as we go into winter, we expect the number of confirmed cases and the resultant death rate to increase. While think tanks come up with models and predictions, we as Christians face the challenge of bringing the Holy Spirit out from the locked doors of our upper rooms into the areas where we are called to bear witness to Christ. Christ who promised us that he will send us the comforter, the Holy Spirit.

As a church we feel the Holy Spirit moving us into action, into witness. This is the time when we must bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit. When we must share the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Like Peter we need to move from the insecurities of our unworthiness, our shortcomings, whatever obstacles we face. To move into the power and force of our Christian identity and mission. Like the early Church we must now move with the Holy Spirit. We must be the body of Christ who bring the message of Jesus into a world in the grip of a pandemic. Like the early church devote yourselves to the teaching of the apostles, to Christian fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer. Find new ways in which to be church in this disconnected connectedness. During this time of Covid19 churches all over the world had to revert back to being church like in the beginning. When the early Christians started Church in their homes, allowing the Holy Spirit to move in and through their family units.

The parish is doing its best to reach out through social and other media but can only do so much. The way forward with government allowing church services with no more than 50 participants will still need to be worked out. We pray the Holy Spirit guide and direct the leaders of faith communities.

As St Michaels let us support the pastoral and social ministry of the church. As the Holy Spirit is poured out once again on all flesh let it be poured out on us too. On our sons and daughters, our young men and women, parents, and grandparents. We are those in whom the Holy Spirit resides those in whom the Holy Spirit moves.

We acknowledge that fear and anxiety sometimes threaten to keep us all locked down behind closed doors. As we put on our masks it gets more and more difficult to see ourselves for who we truly are. All this washing of hands and sanitizing surfaces, the lack of human touch can so easily make us forget the gift of the spirit we share in common. Do not allow this lock down and social distancing make you feel cut off and removed from your brothers and sisters, from your God. Because the Spirit has been poured out on you too, not even the lockdown can keep the Holy Spirit from moving.

As the human spirit cries out to its God. Trying to make sense of all this the answer comes to us as it has come for so many throughout the ages. When the stark reality of our current situation threatens to stifle the Holy Spirit in and around us let us remind ourselves of Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will lead us and guide us. We hear the Lord's reassurance: Look I am doing a new thing, I am making all things new and you have always had my Holy spirit moving within you, giving you life amidst and despite the presence of death.

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. -Anne Frank