

Sunday 4th June 2017 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 a.m.		DAY OF PENTECOST – Year A Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Ascension to Pentecost)
Numbers 11:24-30	Ps 104:24-36	Acts 2:1-21
		John 20:19-23
The gift of the Spirit for this kairos moment		

‘Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”’

Today is the Day of Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out on those first disciples. It was the day they received the power of God for worship, witness and service.

Pentecost is also the final day in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The liturgical colour for Pentecost is red, which symbolises the fire of the Holy Spirit.

The Day of Pentecost

Pentecost is known as the birthday of the church, when those first disciples were transformed from a frightened, timid bunch into a courageous group of people who spoke boldly about Jesus Christ. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the beginning of the large-scale spread of the Gospel. Acts 2:41 (our 2nd reading) records that after Peter had spoken to the crowd, after he had been filled with the Spirit, some 3000 people were baptised.

Jesus breathed on the disciples and said

“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:22)

The Day of Pentecost comes after the great events of Good Friday and Easter, when we reflect deeply on the suffering and death of the Lord, and his resurrection, his victory over sin and evil and death. We are people of the cross; we are people of the resurrection.

Pentecost says to us that we are also people of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us power for worship, witness and service.

Our readings

Our readings paint the picture of that day in the life of the church. But they also point us to the ongoing work of the Spirit in our lives, and in our world, today.

The key text is the story of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21). The disciples were “gathered together in one place” when there was a rushing wind, tongues of fire and flame rested upon them; they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began speaking in other languages “as the Spirit gave them ability.” Then comes the bewilderment of those who heard them – the many nations represented there – and the questions – are these men drunk? This is followed by Peter’s response and first sermon, explaining what was happening, and giving testimony to Jesus who had been crucified and risen; and showing from Old Testament prophecies that what was happening had been foretold – that the Spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh.

The rest of the book of Acts is a quite remarkable story of the Spirit of God at work in great power and acts of wonder, through those first disciples. Many people came to belief and trust in Jesus Christ; the church grew in large numbers, and spread rapidly. People were healed. Lives were transformed and changed by the power and love of God. And a new community of believers came into existence, consisting not only of Jews, but also of Greeks, and Romans, and people of different languages, different communities, different backgrounds. The early church became known for its diversity, its love, its care for the weak and the helpless, its allegiance to Jesus Christ.

We also see, in our readings, that the Holy Spirit was not simply a New Testament invention. **Psalm 104:26-36** – speaks of the work

of God in creation - , “when you send forth your spirit they are created: and you renew the face of the earth” (104:32) - the spirit that is breathed out on us all, pointing back to the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters of creation (Gen 1:1)

Numbers 11:24-30 is the outpouring of the Spirit on the 70 elders – a foretaste of the Spirit being poured out on the disciples and the whole church.

Our life today

And the life of the church continues to be empowered by the Spirit in us and through us. At the start of every act of worship, at the start of every meeting, we invite the Spirit. “Come, Holy Spirit of God. Move upon us, move in us and through us. Use us as your instruments, as channels for your love and power. May your will be done through us and amongst us.”

Again and again, in our life of worship and witness and service, we ask the Spirit to move in us. “I anoint you with oil in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. May our heavenly Father make you whole in body and mind, *and grant you the inward anointing of his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of strength and joy and peace.*” (AAPB pg 506, # 46)

On this Day of Pentecost let us open ourselves once again to the power of the Spirit, to move in us and through us, to assure us that we are sons and daughters of God; let us ask the Spirit to draw us deeper into the love of God; let us invite the Spirit of God to fill us with power and courage and wisdom, let us call on the Spirit of God to give us the gifts we need for ministry, for service.

What do we hope for, as we ask the Spirit of God to fill us, to move in us? What are the results we long for?

I suggest that we are in a kairos moment as a country – a moment of crisis, a window of opportunity, a fitting time, a decisive moment. How will we use this moment? Where do we stand?

The gift of the Spirit to the 70 elders – the spreading of responsibility, of ministry, from one to many – what might that indicate for us? Nationally? As the Cathedral? As individuals? Are you facing a moment of decision? A key choice to make?

Do we long for that kairos moment to come – to shake us up, to get us onto a new path – to bounce us out of complacency into action? Into a new adventure?

Is the kairos moment a time of approaching change – we know that we can't continue like this, we don't know which road to take – we need to make a decision – kairos moment!

We continue to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to convict us, to heal our land.

The work of the Spirit is also seen in our ongoing discovery of God's will for us: the promise of Jesus that the Spirit will lead us into all truth (John 16:13). We have seen the Spirit at work in the church's changed views on the role and ministry of women; on slavery and other injustices; and increasingly on the place and inclusion, in the life of the church and its ministry, of Christians who identify as part of the LGBTI community.

At the meeting of the Cathedral Parish Council this past week, PCC watched the dvd produced recently by IAM (Inclusive and Affirming Ministries), on the place of gay or lesbian Christians in the life of the church. It was warmly agreed that we need to continue to talk and dialogue; we shall be contacting the IAM team to see if they could join us later this year, for dialogue; the dvd will be shown on other occasions for further discussion; the topic will form part of a sermon series being planned for after the Festival. All this is in line with the resolution of our Vestry in March 2016, and in the resolution of our Diocesan Synod in May 2016.

As we continue to engage, I hope that we as the Cathedral can become welcoming and inclusive in our attitudes; and that we are willing to dialogue, rather than have antagonistic and aggressive debates. I don't expect us all to agree with everything: there is a very wide range of views and experiences on this matter. But let's do our best to hear what is being said, particularly if the person speaking comes from a background and experience that is different from mine or yours.

I have a number of concerns as we continue with this discussion: that people will leave the Cathedral if we DO talk about the matter; that people will leave the Cathedral if we DON'T talk about the matter; how best to engage with a very diverse congregation – seniors, adults, teenagers, children – on this sensitive and complex issue. Amongst us are children, youngsters, and parents, who are facing this issue very personally; we know people in our families, in our friendship circles, close to us, who are transgender or in other ways are very aware that they are not like others; a member of PCC spoke of a child less than 10 years old who said recently, "I am who I am, and I will always be different." We live in a fluid, changing world.

CONCLUSION

Come Holy Spirit of God; move amongst us; move in us, move through us – send us out into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to live and work to the praise and glory of God.

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