

Evotional

Bible passage: Acts 2:1-13.

Speaker: Neil Durling.

Sermon title: "Pentecost."

Date: 19.5.13.

Message:

This evotional is a mixture of the morning and evening sermons. So here goes!

Pentecost in the Old Testament: Pentecost means *fiftieth* and comes 50 days after Passover. It is part of the Festival of Weeks (one of the top three annual Jewish festivals). It originally celebrated the Jewish harvest when they offered thanks for the first-fruits of the grain harvest to God. After the destruction of the temple in 587BC the focus slightly changed and celebrated the fifty days between crossing the Red Sea and God giving Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. All male Jews were obligated to come to Jerusalem and appear before God for the festival (Exodus 34:21-24, Leviticus 23:15-21 and Deuteronomy 16:9-12).

Two Old Testament events are explicitly linked to this Acts passage: The writer Luke is unapologetic in reminding his readers of the Tower of Babel incident (Genesis 11:1-9) when different languages were given to confuse and disperse people. Pentecost is a reversal of this – the languages are brought back together. Secondly, when the law was given on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16) the sound from heaven was like fire (wind and fire = thunder and lightning).

Pentecost in the New Testament: Jesus died on the cross, rose again and then taught his disciples about the kingdom of God for forty days. After ascending to heaven he told them to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit. And then this passage happens! Fire, a sign of God's glory, descends, they speak in different tongues and the law is replaced by the Holy Spirit. We now live by the Spirit, not by the law.

A few observations that spill from my brain:

- 1. *The ultimate aim of Jesus' crucifixion was to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit:*** For Luke the Holy Spirit's arrival is his great theme. In fact, without the Spirit there would be no story to write about. Many Christians look to the cross for the forgiveness of sins and stop there. Or maybe we acknowledge that must share this great message with others because God loves the whole world, but then we stop there. We need to realise that the Holy Spirit residing in us was God's "end game". The comforter, the counsellor empowers us and gives us life. *Question: How has the idea fitted into your theology when you think about the cross, especially during communion?*
- 2. *We are sealed with the Holy Spirit when we become Christians:*** Paul writes, almost word for word, to the church in Ephesus and in Corinth about the importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He says: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14, also see 2 Corinthians 1:21-22) the seal would have been familiar as the Roman Emperor had a wax one for his letters. If anyone but Caesar or the recipient opened the letter they could be executed because the letter was Caesar's property. As Christians we are God's property. He has made the down-payment on us and paid the mortgage through Jesus. Therefore, we don't need to feel unsure of our faith. Can I lose my faith? No (in my ever so humble opinion)! If we can lose our faith then it is always reliant on us and not on God's grace. The Holy Spirit dwells within us reminding us that we are God's. In fact, even if we reject God he will not reject us because his Holy Spirit dwells within us and he cannot reject himself (see 2 Timothy 2:11-13). *Question: Do you believe you can't lose your faith? If so, how does it affect your relationship with God?*
- 3. *Jesus carried out his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit:*** At the start of his ministry we're told that Jesus goes into the desert where he is tempted by Satan. He then returns "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:1-15) and begins his ministry. We know, as the early hymn tells us, that Jesus emptied himself of his Godly powers when he became a man (Philippians 2:5-13). Therefore, he did great things for God through the Holy Spirit who dwelt within him. Therefore, it is a poor excuse to say we can't be like Jesus as we have the same Holy Spirit living in us. We can live like Jesus and share him with others as we seek first the kingdom of God. *Question: What do you think of this paragraph, what grabs you?*
- 4. *The Holy Spirit bewilders, amazes and perplexes Christians:*** The crowd in Acts are bewildered and some were amazed (the Greek word *existemi* means "to remove out of its place or state". In the New Testament it only refers to the mind and means to be out of one's mind, beside yourself or to be transported beyond yourself with astonishment) and perplexed (in doubt and thoroughly non-plussed). *Question: Are you comfortable with sometimes not understanding all that God is doing in a church service and feeling slightly uneasy?*
- 5. *Let's embrace the Holy Spirit instead of arguing about who embraces her in the right way:*** We're told that other onlookers made fun of and sneered at them saying they'd had too much wine. If we're not careful we can end up making fun of what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst. *Question: How do you make fun of what the Holy Spirit is doing (be honest, come on, feel a little uneasy. Humble yourself and God will exalt you!)*
- 6. *Power or breath:*** Ruach (Hebrew) and Pnuema (Greek) can be translated in various ways. "Air in motion" is probably the most literal. They can also be translated as "power" or "breath". We are aware of power and some of us crave it whilst others hide from it. On the other hand, we are hardly ever aware of our breathing, it is a natural part of us. Isn't it ironic that the very gift God gives us can cause such division amongst us? Are you "filled with the Spirit"? Do you speak in tongues? And so on. Maybe because of the way God has wired us we are either more power kind of people or more breath

kind of folk. Let's accept where we are but also appreciate those in our church family who express the empowering of the Holy Spirit in their lives in different ways to us. *Question: Are you more of a "power" or a "breath" kind of person? How can you appreciate those who are different from you?*

7. **The freedom not to know:** Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar, writes: *"Cultural Christianity and today's civil religion define faith narrowly and wrongly to mean having certitude about things. Actually, it is exactly the opposite! Biblical faith is the freedom not to know, not to have answers for everything, to be able to combine a degree of knowing with a degree of not needing to know – because we are being held at a level deeper than cerebral knowing. So faith is actually having the security to be insecure, enough certitude to entertain a good degree of uncertainty, enough full-body knowing that we don't give the whole job of understanding to our minds alone. This knowing does not need to eliminate all doubt but includes creative doubt in the process – which is why true faith is always humble and receptive to more information. This can look like arrogance or delusion to those who don't experience it for themselves. Healthy believers are no better than nonbelievers, but they can be happier because they don't need to prove that they're right. Healthy believers are actually less dogmatic than most atheists I know."* *Question: What do you make of this then?*
8. **If we live by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) we will bear fruit:** *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."* (Galatians 5:22-23) *Question: How can we practically "live by the Spirit"?*

Prayer:

Father God, Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name, amen.