

Sunday 19 May 2024, Pentecost, Parish Eucharist
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Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? St Paul wrote this to the church at Corinth. In the middle of a letter dealing with all the messiness that still characterises everyday life, he drops this theological bombshell. We are so used to thinking of the Holy Spirit as being 'with us' - or perhaps 'around us' - that we can miss the real apostolic teaching that the Holy Spirit dwells in our bodies. It can also be easy to miss the startling fact that before the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, believers in God did not have the Holy Spirit living in them.

In the Old Testament, we find the Holy Spirit coming upon individuals to allow them to complete certain tasks. Consider two examples from the book of Judges: *The spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him or the spirit of the Lord rushed on [Samson], and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.* A slightly less war-like action of the Spirit may be found in 1 Samuel 16: *Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him [king] in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.*

What these and other passages show is that the coming of the Holy Spirit was an irregular and particular thing. People are gifted with the Spirit to rule kingdoms, lead armies, and overcome incredible odds. It's no wonder the prophecy of Joel which St Peter quotes in his sermon on the day of Pentecost was such a memorable passage:

*In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

Especially for the Jews, longing for freedom from Roman oppression, this passage and the memory of the powerful action of those filled with the Holy Spirit would have been something they longed to see. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost does achieve freedom from oppression, if not in the way they had hoped. But that's another sermon.

What I'd like you to ponder today is the rather astounding reality that the Holy Spirit no longer comes on individuals to allow them to do particular, and often spectacular, things; but it falls on every believing Christian to equip them for their everyday lives. The same Spirit that gave Samson strength to break his bonds and gave David grace to rule Israel as king comes upon each and every one of us, without distinction of sex, class, or occupation.

Some chapters after St Paul writes of our bodies being temples of the Holy Spirit, he spells out what the Spirit enables us to do. He says,

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

And these gifts, he teaches, are intended for the common good and especially the building up of the Church. The Spirit was poured out on a few in the Old Testament to do wondrous things for God's people. Now that Christ has ascended to the Father, the Spirit is poured out liberally on all believers to allow them to do wondrous things in the every-day life of the Church. We move from showy scarcity to an almost domestic abundance. One could look on this change with some disappointment, but I think that would be to misunderstand the true wonder of Pentecost. We have now such gifts in such great measure that things which were heretofore rare are now ordinary. We have such power and such grace as the day-to-day state of affairs. And we need never worry again about not having the gifts the Spirit gives.

Finally, a word about how the Spirit shapes our lives or, to ask the question 'What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit living within me?' We have a simple answer from the letter to the church at Galatia:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another... My friends if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

What does it look like to be temples of the Holy Spirit? It is to nurture the fruit of the Spirit and effect amongst each other restoration and consolation. This is the whole point of Pentecost, to give us Christians the ability to live well together and to build up the Church. *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. Amen.*