

A Life-changing Sermon Acts 2. 22-41; Mark 1. 14-20 June 16.2019

Before we begin thinking about Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, I want to remind you of our reading from Mark chapter 1. Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the Good News: 'Repent', he said, 'believe, for the Kingdom of God is near'. Then he called Peter, together with Andrew, James and John, saying, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'

We like to think of Peter as impetuous, with flashes of spiritual insight, like when he said 'You are the Messiah', but fallible and foot-in-mouth, and fragile when it came to the challenge of admitting that he was a disciple of the man who was on trial for his life. But as we look at this life-changing sermon in Acts 2, we realise first of all that

It is life-changing for Peter himself

Now he begins to grow into the leadership role Jesus has assigned to him. Now it's Peter who's echoing the words of Jesus. It's he who's fearlessly calling people to repent, and he really is becoming a fisher of men - 3000 of them on the first day!

How has this happened? Well, quite simply, it's happened because the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus himself, has filled him and empowered him in fulfilment of Jesus' promise.

In chapters 14-16 of John's gospel, we read Jesus' description of what the Holy Spirit will do for the disciples, after he himself has left this world as a person in a human body:

- he will remind them of what Jesus has taught them,
- help them point people to Jesus,
- and bring conviction of sin to the listeners.

In Luke chapter 12 Jesus says the Holy Spirit will

- teach the disciples what to say when they find themselves up against it, in front of crowds or critics;

and in Acts 1, he says that

- they will receive power to be his witnesses, after the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

So now: It's the Day of Pentecost; the Holy Spirit has fallen on the gathered believers in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, and they have begun declaring the wonderful works of God in a variety of languages; the large international crowd visiting Jerusalem has reacted, either in wonder or abuse, all asking 'What does this mean?'; and we find Peter stepping up to the podium and exercising a new, God-given authority to command their attention.

And what does he do? Well, these people are either Jews or Jewish adherents. So Peter quotes Old Testament Scriptures which the Holy Spirit brings to his mind, which he sees are now being fulfilled: first the promise of the Spirit's outpouring, through the prophet Joel, and then, in today's reading, David's prophecies of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, in the Psalms. And the Holy Spirit imbues Peter's account of Jesus' trial and crucifixion with power to convict his hearers. As he points the finger at their guilt and at the same time affirms that it was part of God's plan, they are cut to the heart and cry, 'What shall we do?'

Then he can tell them, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

So, secondly, this sermon is life-changing for the hearers

The Holy Spirit has brought conviction to them, of the truth of what Peter has said. That Jesus' life, and the miracles, wonders and signs which God did through him, were evidence that he was uniquely sent by God, and that although they were complicit in his death, his resurrection is God's proof that he is both Lord and Christ. As this truth takes hold of them and they respond with heartfelt repentance and are baptised in Jesus' Name, they too receive the Holy Spirit and become part of this new movement, followers of the Way, who later come to be called Christians, followers of the Christ. And this isn't a superficial or temporary change; it is reinforced in their daily living, as we read in the final section of Acts chapter 2, in verses 42-47. It certainly was a life-changing sermon! They develop a completely new life-style:

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'

But thirdly, this is can be life-changing sermon for us, today!

Did you hear what Peter said in verse 39? 'The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - **for all whom the Lord God will call.**' That promise reaches down through the centuries and across the continents, to us here today. Peter's sermon may not be, word for word, the way we heard the gospel. But when we heard it, either as a bolt from the blue, or as a gentle drip-feed over many years, the Holy Spirit brought it alive for us, as he did for those hearers on the Day of Pentecost, and it changed our lives and our allegiance as it did theirs. If that hasn't happened for you yet, I pray that today is the day when it will.

And if we are followers of Jesus, but doubt our ability to be witnesses who can share our faith with people who don't yet believe, then Peter is a massive encouragement for us! Didn't I remind you at the beginning, what a flaky follower of Jesus he was, and how when it came to the crunch he denied he even knew him? What made the difference? He was still the same person, with the same character, warts and all, and the same temptations. But when he was filled with the Holy Spirit he was empowered. This is what God wants to do for each one of us. He wants to fill us with his Spirit, who isn't scary or fierce or domineering. He's the Spirit of our lovely, loving Lord Jesus, and he's just longing to help us share his love and encouragement and truth with other people.

At the second service today, 4 young people are going to be baptised, just as those first believers were, to show that they are beginning a new life with Jesus. We'll be praying for the Holy Spirit to fill them, and give them courage and power, and make them more like Jesus. One of them is a young man who's only been a Christian for a few months. But already he's showing his

workmates, by what he says and does, how Jesus has changed his life. He's made them think about the meaning of the swear words they use so thoughtlessly, and now they have a jar where they put in money for charity, every time they swear. He's changing the culture of the workplace, and they want to know why he cares, which gives him a chance to talk about Jesus. Please pray for these young Christians today. And now let's just be quiet and open ourselves to this life-changing Holy Spirit, praying in the words of Chris Bowater's song:

*Holy Spirit, we welcome You
Holy Spirit, we welcome You
Move among us with holy fire
As we lay aside all earthly desire
Hands reach out and our hearts aspire
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You*

*Holy Spirit, we welcome You
Holy Spirit, we welcome You
Let the breeze of Your presence blow
That Your children here might truly know
How to move in the Spirit's flow
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You*

*Holy Spirit, we welcome You
Holy Spirit, we welcome You
Please accomplish in me today
Some new work of loving grace, I pray
Unreservedly have Your way
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You*