



Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2026 Sunday Celebration with Holy Communion

Preacher: Rev Chris Briggs

### **Acts 2**

So the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people'. All people. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So here we are over the weekend, we've majored on all. All need to be saved. All can be saved. All can know they are saved and All can be saved to the uttermost.

On Saturday evening, yesterday evening, we remembered that we are all for Jesus, or we should be. And today we celebrate that the Spirit is poured out for all people and that everyone- all who call on the name of the Lord- will be saved. The Holy Spirit is here. Holy Spirit, is here. Your Spirit is for us all.

The Holy Spirit wants to continue filling us all. A church which ignores the Spirit, is one which relies on its own power. My car let me down a few weeks ago. I was traveling to church for a service. It was a Saturday service, 'cause you can have those outside Sundays apparently. And I was traveling to church for this service and I pulled up in Derby at these traffic lights. When the lights went green, I pressed the accelerator. When the car began to move, it went to one mile per hour, and two, and three, and eventually got to about 15. Fortunately I got through the lights and then - back to normal. Next set of lights? Exactly the same thing again. That lack of power needed addressing, didn't it?

It could be actually quite dangerous, to be honest, when you're driving like that. It's like when you're pulling away from things, someone behind you, a bit impatient, foot straight down, bang, right into the back of you. I did that to the minister I was replacing in the first appointment that I ever had! He had an old car, it didn't matter.

I had a brand new car, a Ford Fiesta. It did matter! Bent a wing on one side. In fairness, it wasn't his fault really. It was someone going through a red light, at a T junction. He slammed on his brakes. I was a newer driver and I slammed on mine, but not quite as quick, and bang- into the back. Bit of a problem.

You don't have the power to get away. How sad is the church, the follower of Christ that has no power? Not worldly power, not about that, but the power of the Spirit. Maybe we've experienced the Spirit's power in many in various ways, or maybe we've leaked it. Maybe we've never entered into the fullness of the Spirit.

Maybe we inch forward when we could be accelerating. Almost stutteringly. Later on, there'll be an opportunity to open ourselves afresh in this service to the Holy Spirit. Let me share you my experience of Spirit. I've found this morning session so helpful and so unhelpful!- Because you think you pinned down a phrase or something in your mind and then you realize that someone else somewhere in the church history has completely redefined it again and they don't quite agree with you or they do agree with you or they change or whatever.

Let me share you my experience, my initial experience of the Holy Spirit- 'cause it's not a one off thing, is it? It's not the Holy Spirit hits you once and you never talk to the Holy Spirit again. I became a Christian when I was about 16. It was in the 1970s, which is when there was that charismatic revival renewal movement going.

And our minister Reverend Malcolm Daley, I don't know if anyone ever came across him- father in Christ in many ways- he invited a speaker on a Tuesday evening and persuaded some of us lads to go along and he effectively bribed us. We had a little gospel group, and we wanted to- it wasn't a gospel group at the time, it became one- we had a little band and we wanted to practice in church hall.

And he said, you can practice in church hall if you come to this Tuesday evening meeting. A bit of bribery and corruption really? But that works quite well, even in the church, doesn't it? Yeah. So we went along to this meeting and he invited a guy called Trevor Dearing. Anyone know that name? Yep. Okay. Came from St. Paul's Heinault, down the road to St. Paul's in Basildon, on a Tuesday evening, and he brought his team with him and he preached the gospel. I can't remember much about the actual content of whatever it was he preached, but of course he made an appeal, as he would've routinely in those days. To come and be prayed for, to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

He might have said baptized in the Spirit. I can't remember which words he used. And if you base it on the morning's interpretations by different people, who knows what was going on anyway, except God. But that's enough, isn't it? I was sitting back because I'm really shy person. Was! Yeah, exactly. I was really shy and sitting in the back, giving out hymn books. And I felt myself pushed down the front by this irresistible force, which I know now is God. And as I went down, I don't know where I got this from because believe me, the stuff I was involved in wasn't healthy or helpful, but somehow I knew as I walked down the front, I needed to give my life to Christ.

And that's what I did, and then I received prayer to be filled with the Holy Spirit. So that was my first conscious encounter. Sure, the Spirit had been at work in my life in various ways, getting me to that point. But that was my first conscious encounter and praise be to God for that. A couple of things happened. Let me tell you about them. I got focused in at that time- tongues was a big thing, speaking in tongues. I got a bit too focused in on tongues- I thought, I must speak in tongues. I would pray in my bedroom fervently at night, down on my knees, and I'd pray fervently for two things.

Two things I prayed for in those days. The first thing was that the Lord would return, and this was often bound up with the fact that I hadn't done my school homework for the following day. But boy was I fervent in prayer because I thought that'd be a marvellous way, really, of not getting in trouble for not doing my homework.

No surprise the Lord didn't answer that prayer. The second one that I fervently prayed for, I would kneel and I would groan and strain, probably looking more like constipation than prayer, wanting God to take me over and start speaking tongues through me. It took me a number of years to realize that I made it hard and that with God it's simple.

Happy to say that God enabled me to have that gift. Some years after, I realized I shouldn't be chasing that gift just because I thought that was the gift to have- I'm not saying that you shouldn't ask for a specific gift- but for me, there was a lesson to be learned. Happy to chat to anyone about that afterwards. That was my experience. I'll just share it with you just because it's important. Perhaps you know where I'm coming it from and that's why we will offer an opportunity just to invite the Spirit to come in a very simple way. Grace and I are going to offer an anointing opportunity with oil, and we'll just say something like, 'come, Spirit, come,' no longer prayer or anything like that because we'll let it be God and you. If you want that. That's later.

So then we come to this passage- I think we'll get out for lunch on time!- But then we come to the passage. What does this exciting passage full of dodgy riches mean for us? We're not going to be able to cover everything, but I've chosen some parts, which I felt God was just laying on me as a way of summarizing some of the important bits and pieces in this passage, in the context of the weekend that we've shared together, which I think are relevant to the 'All..' bit (the four All's)..

It will be three H's. So the first **H is Holy**.

*'Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.'* Acts 2:2-4

So that's the opening verses of chapter two. We didn't read it now. But that's the opening verses. So the Spirit, described here as Holy, touches and feels. Then the nature of the Spirit is God and is Holy. When God's Spirit touches us, we are touched by that same Holiness, even if we can't quite understand exactly how that works.

And part of what is implanted into us is the desire, the ability, the promise that we too can enter into that Holiness. And if Scriptural Holiness is to be spread across the land, then I suggest the Holy God meet the holy people, yes?

Leviticus 11 tells us in verse 44, *'I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves and be Holy because I am Holy.'* Now, talking about clean and unclean food there, but the author of 1 Peter widens that in chapter one and says in verse 15, *'Just as he who called you is Holy. So be Holy in all you do. For it's written, be Holy because I am Holy.'*

We have the gifts of the Spirit. One Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4. We have the Fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5. They all play their part in making our character like the character of God. I don't know if you struggle with holiness, with sanctification. Instant sanctification may be a reality for you and for many others. Or it may be that some people struggle and seem to fall over constantly. I'm sure I fall over way too much, but I desire that God's Spirit would enable me to be holy, both in the sense of if you like, moral character and also in being set apart for the purposes of God. And no matter how imperfect I might be, I think we can be set apart for the purposes of God.

It's not just, if you read about the temple stuff and everything, it's not just about people, is it? It's about anything. So this ice bucket, I think that's what it is. This ice bucket over here, it's Holy. It's Holy because we're setting it apart for God's purposes today, as we did last night.

No matter what we are. We've done been useful. We can be Holy set apart for God's purposes. John Wesley said, 'always remember the essence of Christian holiness is simplicity and purity. One design, one desire an entire devotion to God.' I continue to dream and pray about a revival of Holiness nowadays that moves forth in mission.

I think John Wesley saw something of that. And we can too. We can too. Paul. Not saint- he is saint Paul as well, isn't he? St. Paul this morning!- spoke the other day about justification. And there's a sense in which I think in the Methodist Church, we have a little bit of an insight into that, although maybe not a full understanding of it. A little bit of an insight into that in the current Methodist church, with our desire to be all welcoming and understanding that God can welcome anyone. I believe it's kind of

getting towards justification here, but my concern is that as a church, we spent so much time emphasizing that, that we forgot the sanctification bit that comes after it, and that's really important.

Bearing in mind the word happy has changed meanings as we saw in a book. In the last session, I would still want to say that Holiness, not happiness, is the chief end of man. And I'd want to say that because I'm actually repeating something that Oswald Chambers said. He was a Scottish Evangelical teacher, of course.

So today, is there a desire to be Holy? The Spirit can enable that in the Spirit's way as long as we are open so that we can be a different kind of sign to the world. So Holy is the first word.

The second word is **Heaven**

In Acts 2, Peter, quotes Joel, the prophet Joel, we'll come to that in a moment. But there is a phrase in that quotation from Joel, which looks forward to a time when the Spirit will be poured out for all. And that, of course, is what we see, beginning in Acts. *'I will show wonders in heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire, and billows of smoke.'* Some will be familiar with the song, 'Our Father, all of Heaven roars your name, Spirit break out'. The words say, 'Spirit break out. Break our walls down. Spirit break out, heaven come down.' 'The wonders of heaven,' says the text in verse 19. The quotation from Joel, and actually Peter as well, talks about wonders in verse 22, talking about Jesus- a man accredited by God, by miracles, wonders, and signs. Wonders in the heavens. At one level, that literally means signs, unusual events, above us. It means that.

There's a spiritual context to it as well, because if you think of the incarnation- wonders in the heavens coming down into earth. Heaven opens and God is with us. Heaven is opening as God declares, *'this is my Son in whom I am well pleased,'* when Jesus is baptized. In Acts 2, when the Spirit breaks out of heaven, you might say- not in a of being trapped- but when the heaven opens and the Spirit comes down and together with the Father and Son enters into the lives of the disciples with signs and wonders, which we will see as we go through Acts. It's like the 'thin places' that Celtic Christianity speaks of- places and times when heaven breaks through, when the kingdom is clearly seen, when there's a breaking out of the Spirit and a breaking into the lives of people by the Spirit.

Do we want to see more of that? Sisters and brothers? Yes... Come Spirit, come. And there are signs when that happens. Signs on the earth below says that prophecy from Joel, sons and daughters will prophesy your young men will see visions your old men will dream dreams. The Spirit will be known, seen evidence, there'll be changed lives in the followers of Jesus, there will be gifts and fruit.

Heaven will be seen. You and I are to be little signs of heaven. Gosh, that's an awesome thing, isn't it? And yet Spirit in Us, how can it be anything else other than that? What God intends. You've heard that quotation. I don't know who came up with it. For Christians, this present life is the closest they will come to hell, for unbelievers it's the closest they will come to heaven. It was actually a guy called Randy Alcorn, who said it, apparently. But you and I are little signs of heaven. We can't help but be anything else than that. Heaven bearers. We have a responsibility to allow the Spirit to shine heaven through us as part of reflecting the life of Christ and being a sign of the kingdom.

Do we want more of that today? To enable us to serve God more faithfully and obediently. Do we want that? There's something of heaven come down in this reading.

And then the final H, which comes to me from this passage and the passages it's drawn from is the **Heart**.

Paul Smith spoke about the heart when he talked about, All can know they are saved. Talking about the heart, speaking of emotion and passion and know that there would be more within us. Now the heart is mentioned only once in the reading that Nicola read to us. It's in verse 26. Therefore, my heart is glad. But if we dig into the background and the context of the Acts 2 reading, we see it a little bit more.

If we look at verse 17 to 21 where Peter quotes the prophet Joel, and if we then go back to the prophet Joel and that original prophecy there, the context, as you probably know, is that there's a prophecy that Judah will be devastated by an army of locusts. Now, some argue that's picture language for a human army.

Some say no, it's two separate things. It doesn't matter very much to us now, the fact is it represents divine judgment coming against the nation 'cause of their sins. So whichever way it was coming, it wasn't good news. So we have the disaster of judgment, but also the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, which is fulfilled in Acts 2, especially in that special way.

So with judgment hanging over God's people, there was a need to get their hearts right and that becomes obvious as you read through Joel. Remember, the heart in Jewish understanding is not just an organ that pumps blood, but instead it combined everything in Jewish understanding, the intellect, the emotions, the will, moral decisions, decision making.

Generally it is all in the heart. So for heart, read, all of that stuff going on. So as the people are called to repentance in Joel, a really important verse in Joel chapter 2, is this 12 and 13. In fact, *'even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning rend your hearts and not your garments'*.

Easy to put on a show for God, isn't it? And for everyone else. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love. He relents from sending calamity. There needs to be a change of heart in order to be right with God, and the Spirit had something to do with holiness, sanctification, making our hearts right before God, which brings us to verse 26 in Acts 2, which itself is a quote of course from Psalm 16. *'Therefore, my heart is glad'*, and the context of the Psalm is that it was written at a time of trouble when it asks for preservation and protection, if you like, it talks of the folly of idolatry, there's lots of that around nowadays, isn't there? And the benefits of God's joy and preservation seem to be resulting in the heart being glad and there's joy and glory, which is seen in the Psalmist's life. It seems as if when the heart is turned from sin to repentance, and then God is allowed to operate on us through that spiritual surgery that we need. We are opened up to God's joy and gladness and glory, and we find the reality of Romans 8:9 you are not in the realm of the flesh, but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. The heart state needs to be altered and the Spirit is intimately connected with that. And you'll be pleased to know I'm almost at the end.

Research indicates, I don't know who does all this research. I was sharing something, who was I sharing with yesterday? I think it was, or the day before, perhaps it was Jackie, when we travelled together on that long journey from Derby with a 17 minute journey. Anyway, whoever it was, there's been research carried out on what to do if seagulls are attacking your food. You might have heard this on the news. I, for the life of me, I don't know where people get funded to do this research. Anyway, apparently if you shout loudly, especially if you are a male at the seagull, something along the lines of, 'no, this is my food. Go away.' A vast percentage of seagulls will go away. Free advice in case you encounter any on the way back.

That's nothing to do with what I'm gonna say, but it's research people, I don't where the research comes from anyway. Research indicates that if you're in a choir, you might know this. When choir members sing together, their heart rates tend to synchronize, creates a kind of sense of unity and calm down and everything, as long as the music director isn't shouting at them too much, but. It synchronizes and apparently this synchronization, I'm going to use the terms that I have no idea about, synchronization is influenced by the Vagus nerve, yes. Oh, now see, someone said yes. That must be right. The Vagus nerve regulates heart rate and breathing patterns and when choir members inhale and exhale in unison, their heartbeats align and it enhances their kind of emotional and physical connection. In worship that happens as well, happens at a human level but we want to go beyond the human level, don't we? So if I could swap for an image of what the Spirit might do with us and for us, and ultimately therefore for God and His glory, it is then to enable our hearts to beat in rhythm with the heartbeat of God.

When we are open to the Spirit, I really do believe that's one of the things the Spirit is trying to do, put our heart right with God, so it beats with the heartbeat of God, the

heartbeat of God. When we were praying before we came in, Hilary said, I hope she doesn't mind me saying this, we must not be frightened of silence and we miss silence too often. We're just going to pause for a second in silence. There might be two things you might want to listen for. One thing, I feel we miss out on a lot, and I don't wanna humanize this and make it, it may not be physical, obviously it may be spiritual hearing. There is a song going on in heaven all the time.

Some of the angels and the archangels praising God, and sometimes we need to just stop and listen because the song is going on and what we're really called to do is to join with that song. So let's just pause for a moment, but also as we listen, whatever that means for us. Maybe can we hear the heartbeat of God to allow our heart to speak with Him.

So just a few simple key words from this Acts 2 passage, but also from Joel and the Psalm. But I think draw something out of this passage that being Holy, the Holy Spirit, comes to help us to be Holy, set apart for God's purposes, a sign of the life of Christ within us, and heaven breaking through when the Spirit is at work, seen clearly in Acts 2, but also should be seen as our lives are changed and heaven breaks through them and the heart which needs changing so that they beat in unison with God. Captured into all of this is the recognition that 'all need to be saved. All can be saved, all can know they are saved and all can be saved to the uttermost, and that we are all for Jesus as the Spirit is poured out for all. Come Spirit, come.

(Nicola Briggs):

As Chris was speaking about the heart that needs surgery, I was reminded of those words of Ezekiel and the heart of stone being taken from us, and it may be that, for some of us, we need a new heart transplant today, that our heart has got a bit stonier than it was, that we've drifted away from the Spirits care.

We're not seeing heaven breaking through, but the promise from the prophet is that God just longs to put new hearts in old people. Let's just offer ourselves again for God's surgery in our lives, for God alone, knows what we need.