

SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE, SUNDAY JUNE 4.
THE FEAST OF PENTECOST. THE REVEREND STUART LANGSHAW

The first song that we should have sung in the service this morning should have been "Happy Birthday to you." Today is the birthday of the Christian Church – the Feast of Pentecost.

That word 'Pentecost' is our way of pronouncing a Greek word, *pentekoste, πεντηκοστη*, which means "fiftieth." We celebrate Pentecost on the Sunday 50 days after Easter. This year, Easter was observed on Sunday April 16. Today is 50 days since then. [For Jewish people today is *Shavuot*, 50 days after Passover. For them it is the day when they remember that God gave the Law to Moses on Mt Sinai.]

You will know from your reading of the New Testament that at the Feast of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given in an open and visible and audible way. The open and **visible** way in which the Holy Spirit came upon those first generation Christians was in what looked like ... something that had the appearance of ... well ... tongues of fire. The open and **audible** way in which the Holy Spirit came upon those first generation Christians was in what sounded like a very strong wind. Visible and audible. Not unlike the phenomena that appeared on Mt Sinai when Moses was given the Law (see Exodus 19:16ff). The red colour that we are using everywhere in Church today helps us to recreate the impression of that fiery appearance. We could turn on the church air conditioner and get the impression of the sound of that very strong wind ... but we won't!

As a result of the disciples' preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit on that particular Feast of Pentecost, 3,000 people decided to join the spiritual movement that Jesus Christ had brought. The number of followers jumped from maybe a couple of hundred to three-thousand-and-a-couple-of-hundred. (*Acts 2:4, 41-42; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8*).

Since that first Day of Pentecost Christian writers and thinkers have given thought to the work and actions of the Holy Spirit. Sunday by Sunday in the Nicene Creed we say, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets." Every time we meet for a Holy Communion Service we re-affirm our belief God the Holy Spirit.

When St Paul thought about the Holy Spirit, he realised that there were both gifts and fruit associated with this person of the Godhead. In a couple of his letters to early churches St Paul catalogued **the gifts of the Holy Spirit**. In 1 Corinthians 12 he enumerates nine of them - "utterance of wisdom; utterance of knowledge; faith; gifts of healing; working of miracles; prophecy; discernment of spirits; various kinds of tongues; interpretation of tongues." (1 Corinthians 12:8-10). In his letter to the Romans he lists "prophecy; ministry; teaching; exhorting; generous giving; diligent leading; cheerful compassion." (Romans 12:6-8). In his first letter, St Peter speaks about speaking and about serving. (1 Peter 4:11). All these gifts of the Spirit are God's equipment to us so that we may serve God. If you look around our congregation, you will see many of those gifts of the Spirit practised by many people in various ways here.

But there is also **the fruit of the Holy Spirit** – those characteristics that God gives us as we spend time living as Christians and growing as Christians. St Paul gives us this list –

love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; gentleness; self-control. (Galatians 5:22). If you look around our congregation, you will see many of those fruits of the Spirit in the lives of parishioners here.

For our Old Testament Reading this morning we had a reasonably dramatic reading from Isaiah chapter 11. As each of the seven characteristics of the Spirit of God were read out, we paused for the lighting of a candle – wisdom ... understanding ... right judgment ... courage ... knowledge ... reverence ... wonder. You will see them listed on page 9 of the Pew Sheet. I hope that you will read them carefully and think carefully – for we are going to be asked to choose the characteristic out of those seven that seems most important for our lives ... most relevant for your life right now. While both parts of what has been written about each characteristic on Page 9 are instructive, the second part gives an inkling of how the characteristic could be important.

We are asked to do something this morning ... if you choose to ... to move. As I read the first part of each section of the Prayer of the Gifts of the Spirit ... if you choose that particular characteristic as important in your life just now, I'm going to ask that you consider standing in your place, and receive a flame badge as the servers come to you. When all who have chosen that characteristic have received their badge and sat down again, we shall read both parts of that characteristic's prayer again, and then move on to the next characteristic.

This is highly un-Anglican and most difficult – and won't be done again while I am Locum Tenens - yet it allows us to respond personally and graciously to the teaching ... and the experience ... of the Feast of Pentecost.

THE PRAYER OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT (Pew Sheet page 9)

With the Spirit's gift of *WISDOM* that helps us to see clearly,
Let us analyse the situations that face us, and act wisely in all we do.

With the Spirit's gift of *UNDERSTANDING* that helps us to appreciate all sides of what we read, see and do,
Let us relate to others with generosity and care.

With the Spirit's gift of *RIGHT JUDGMENT* that helps us to make just and fair decisions,
Let us be released into fairness and be free from bias.

With the Spirit's gift of *COURAGE* that helps us to face the circumstances of our life, and although we may be fearful, to have confidence.
Let us confront our fears, face our difficult choices and live positively.

With the Spirit's gift of *KNOWLEDGE* that helps us to play our part in helping others also to grasp the truth,
Let us share with those we know the experience and expertise we have gained.

With the Spirit's gift of *REVERENCE* that helps us to approach God our Father with awe and love,
Let us worship with all our hearts and be transported into the very presence of God.

With the Spirit's gift of *WONDER* that helps us to be moved in our hearts and souls at the sights and sounds of beauty, grace and grandeur,

Let us revel in the excellence of nature, in the power of music and in the companionship of our family and friends.

“Just as the burning bush was a sign to Moses of God's presence, the flame badges we are wearing are signs of the presence of the Spirit within each of **us.**”