

Followers of the Way

Come, Holy Spirit Lynda Rose 15-05-24

Acts 1:4-9; Acts 2:1-12

At the last supper, Jesus had told his disciples, 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you ...' (John 14:16-18).

Without any shadow of doubt, the last days of Jesus' life – His death on the Cross and resurrection, followed by his ascension into heaven – would, for the disciples, have been a really steep learning curve. For a start, what was Jesus talking about, when he said, 'I won't leave you orphaned ... I will come to you'? I guess that might have been a bit reassuring at the time, because however you looked at it, Jesus was acting really weirdly. But at least he was going to be around, so maybe everything was going to be okay after all?

Then He got crucified, and things definitely weren't okay ... but three days after that He rose from the dead! However you looked at it, this would all have been a bit strange, and we know that in the time between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus gave the disciples some intensive teaching to help them understand what it was God had done, what He was going to do ... and their part in it all. And, in our reading, we've just heard how, before the ascension and when he was about to leave them physically, Jesus ordered them to stay in Jerusalem, to wait for the promise of the Father.

Well, by this time – and given all the amazing things that had happened – they must have been expecting something pretty momentous. But even so, I'll bet nothing actually prepared them for the reality. After all, there they all were, quietly eating breakfast and mulling over what they were going to do for the rest of the day, and suddenly there was a sound like rushing wind, followed, without any warning, by tongues of fire! Pretty scary when you think about it. But the disciples knew instantly that this was why they'd had to stay in Jerusalem and what they'd been waiting for. And the effect was ... phenomenal. There's no other way of describing it, because they're overwhelmed by the incredible power of the Spirit, and they begin to speak in a whole host of other languages, all telling the glory of God, and the amazing things He had done in and through Jesus.

So what had God just done, and why had the disciples had to stop in Jerusalem? Why couldn't they have taken a break in Galilee, or somewhere a bit different, like the Dead Sea? What did it matter where they were? Well, we know, from Scripture, that Jerusalem was the chosen dwelling place of the invisibly present God. Psalm 132:13-14, we read, *'For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling, saying, "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it."* Just as

Israel was the chosen land, given to the people set apart by God as His special possession – so Jerusalem was the seat of His presence on Earth, manifestation and sign that, of all the tribes and peoples of the Earth, the Jews were the ones He had selected to implement His plan to win back humanity. And that, I think, is why the disciples had to stay in Jerusalem, because in the Holy City they were in God's dwelling place. But to begin to understand what the coming of the Spirit that first Pentecost morning really meant and why it was so important, we have to go back in history, to the moment of the Fall. When, in Genesis 3:4-5, the serpent said to Eve, 'You will not die (when you eat the fruit)', you'll just become like God, knowing good and evil ... he lied. In that moment of giving way to temptation, a part of Adam and Eve really did die – the important part, because in the beginning men and women were created as spiritual beings in the image of God; housed in a body, yes, but spiritually alive and living in direct relationship with God. As physical beings, men and women were enabled to function and interact with the material world through their five senses, but in their essential nature or being, they were – and we still are – spirit. But when Adam and Eve gave way to temptation and ate the apple, their spiritual awareness and connection with God 'died', and they came under subjection to the devil.

A perfect example of zombies, when you think about it – mankind became the living dead. And it was from that moment that God began to plan how to win us back and set us free, that we might once again become fully what He had created, and intended, us to be. Spiritual 'enfleshed' beings – in His image, and living in direct relationship with Himself.

Once the fatal step had been taken, however, there was no way, by ourselves, that we could break free. God was still 'around', of course, as we know from the Bible, and the Earth was still 100% His. But the whole of creation had been spoiled. If God had dealt with Satan then and there, as he deserved, we, along with the whole of creation, would have been destroyed. So God began to plan.

But, though spiritually 'dead', the Fall didn't mean we'd lost all awareness of the divine and supernatural, of course. Men and women still had a consciousness of the transcendent, of that something more that existed beyond and outside themselves – of a different order of existence. And from the beginning of life outside Eden, we know they tried to tap into and manipulate it. From that consciousness, of course, came witchcraft, divination, and all the various forms of worship, religion and sacrifice, through which men and women attempted to get control, and/or placate the powers that existed 'beyond'. But none of these efforts could restore us to the existence we'd known before, and indeed they played into the devil's hands, because they only strengthened our subjection.

And this was why, from the beginning, God picked out the Jews as His chosen people, revealing Himself to them as the One and Only God, teaching them how to live until the counter-offensive began. It was a lesson, we know, that the Jews didn't find easy and it took hundreds of years ... of protection, provision, and discipline, as time and again they got it wrong and had to be pulled back on course. This, very profoundly, was the love of God in action, as He brought humanity through Satan's wilderness and prepared things for the arrival of His Son.

The only way mankind's bondage to death could be broken was by Jesus Himself – fully God and fully man – entering the battle and going head-to-head with Satan. Which was exactly what He did on the Cross, and His resurrection three days after His death was visible and tangible sign of the victory He'd achieved. His resurrection, in every sense, was the rebirth of humanity and heralded the return of the Spirit. By Christ's victory the hold of death was smashed, and we were restored to direct relationship with God. By the sending of the Spirit that first Pentecost morning, we were spiritually reborn and a new order of existence had begun.

But creation still awaits full restoration, which will happen when Christ returns, as promised, in glory, and deals with Satan finally and forever. The time we're in now is a time of dispensation, given so that everyone might have opportunity to hear the good news and repent, and be saved from the inevitable destruction of judgment. Our commission, during this time, is to be Christ's witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.'

We know all this, of course – but one thing I think we still don't fully realise is the power of God that has now been given to us. We know Christ has saved us, and that in Him we have eternal life – but we don't realise the power that's been given to us as part of that victory!

At one level this is completely understandable and right, because we don't suddenly become 'perfect' when we first come to know Christ, and one of the chief tasks of the Spirit is to teach and heal us. To 'conform' us to Christ and get us ready for heaven. To allow still damaged 'babies' to wield the power of the Spirit, without understanding, would become a form of very dangerous magic or witchcraft. So we have to learn, which for our part involves obedience, discipline, and absolute trust. To learn how to use the Spirit's power – which is actually what we were created for, and what the devil really fears – we have to be purified and healed.

The Spirit 'uses' us throughout this process, of course, but our task is to co-operate in His work of guiding, training, transforming, and leading us, so that we might become unblocked channels through which His power can flow. So that God can use us the way He wants.

Do we want to see more of the power of the Spirit in our lives? Do we want the fruit of the Spirit to become fully manifest in and through us? Do we want to become a channel for God's love and power to this dark world?

By Christ's death, those of us who believe have been reborn – snatched from Satan's hold. We have become, once again, spiritual beings living in direct relationship with God Himself. Be absolutely assured that the Spirit *wants* to use us, which is why in John 14:12, Jesus said, 'whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.'

So let's co-operate with the Spirit's work in our lives, and strive to live in obedience, self-discipline, and purity. Because it's then that we'll see the power of the Spirit released in and through us – the power to heal, to change lives, to shine light into the darkness.