

ACTS 2:1-21
THE SPIRIT IN US

This is the Day of Pentecost; this is the day when God gave His spirit to the disciples and to the church. The Spirit has been with us and in us ever since! We don't celebrate Pentecost as much as we celebrate Christmas and Easter, and that's a pity because this day is up there with these other celebrations; because of Pentecost, the church even exists and survives. Because God has given us the Spirit, we have our faith in Jesus. It is because God has given us His Spirit that we are able to follow Jesus. There was a time when we talked about the Holy Ghost and that's language that will confuse us all day long; ghosts are scary, spectral things that we're not even sure exist and they are connected with dead people! How does that fit with the gospel? God's Spirit is given to us; the spirit of Jesus lives in us – that is the plain truth of the matter. The story of Pentecost is full of pictures to help us – wind, fire, water!

1. Wind: Have you ever been in a school playground on a windy day? You watch the children go wild, harnessing the energy of the wind to be 'as high as kites'; ask any teacher what it is like to control them after that! Jesus' friends were frightened, staying in the city, praying in their upper room; perhaps still behind closed doors? Pentecost was one of Israel's great feasts and fifty days after the resurrection, God pours out His spirit on the disciples and on the church on the day of Pentecost. "*When the...*" (Acts 2:1f) It sounded like the wind, like a gale force wind coming through the room. The wind is full of power; see what the wind can do when it blows a gale and how much power there is harnessed in it, enough to blow you off your feet.

God gives us power. See how Peter is changed: from hiding away in a corner, he stands in front of the crowd and declares his faith in Jesus; he tells the crowd what God has done! Peter is a changed man, confident, full of enthusiasm and passion to tell people about Jesus. Perhaps he also has new insight into his faith: he quotes the old prophet Joel; this is God keeping His old promise. There is power to the believers to understand our faith, to be passionate and enthusiastic about our faith and to be confident in our faith. We will understand; we will follow Jesus; we will be the right kind of people – because the Spirit gives us power, power described as a violent gale!

2. Fire "*they saw...*" (Acts 2:3) In the Bible, fire is a picture of God's presence. Moses was led through the desert by a pillar of fire; God is there leading His people. God is there when the fire is to be seen. Fire says something about God being holy, special, as well as powerful. The Spirit is seen as the fire that refines: "*who can...*" (Malachi 3:2,3a) When we were on holiday in Budapest last year, we came across this story about the silversmith: "Faith is purified by trials; ask the silversmith how silver is purified. It is purified in the heat of the furnace; it is the only way. It is held in the heat, not brought out till the work is done; I watch it constantly, never turning to look away, not even for a second; how do I know when it is done? When I can see myself in it!" The Spirit's work in us is to refine our lives, to make us more like Jesus; God wants to see Jesus in us; the Spirit is the fire that refines!

3. Water "*On the...*" (John 7:37ff) Jesus makes a promise; He will quench the thirst of all who come to Him thirsty and in need. Streams of living water will come to us from Jesus to quench our thirst for life, meaning, and salvation. John adds a comment that this is about the Spirit who was not yet given because Jesus had not yet ended His ministry. For Jesus, the coming of the Spirit was the coming of these streams of living water that Jesus gives to people in need. "To come to Jesus and to drink is to believe" (Morris) – we are drawn to Jesus and Jesus will satisfy our deepest needs. It is the Spirit's job to draw us to Jesus, to inspire us to faith, and these streams of living water live in our hearts. The Spirit points us to Jesus so that we may be inspired to believe and that we may be inspired to follow Jesus and that our hearts and minds might be refreshed by these streams of living water. This is the difference between what we know in our heads to be true and what our hearts feel with passion: we know about Jesus and the facts of His life, death, resurrection and we know that in our heads. The Spirit

wants us to feel a passion in our hearts for Jesus, with our whole lives refreshed by streams of living water.

Christians in Scotland need a confidence-boost. We hear so many things that get inside our heads and hearts about how poor the church is, or how far Scotland is drifting from the Christian faith, or how irrelevant the church is. These things get inside our heads and hearts and we start to believe that we are nothing, nobodies. Pentecost reminds us that God lives in us and that the Spirit comes with power, that the Spirit teaches us, equips us, helps us, strengthens us, refreshes us and leads us to Jesus. God is with His people; God lives with us and in us; His Spirit brings power and grace to our hearts, inspiring us to worship and to follow Jesus. All of this began on the day of Pentecost and still goes on 2000 years later. Let that get inside our heads and our hearts too. The Church is still the people of God living in the power of the Spirit. This is who we are; this is our confidence.

One more picture: it is laid out on the table in front of me. It is the picture of a table spread with bread and wine; it is the picture of a table to which Jesus invites us, so that we can find grace. Bread and wine speak to us of a crucified Saviour, One who gave His life for us because He loves us. But this is not a memorial for a dead hero; this is the table of the risen Lord; Jesus is here by the Spirit and gives us grace. The Spirit leads us to Jesus, to know in our heads the truth of the gospel and to know in our hearts that Jesus did this for us; it is personal. Here is our life in Jesus; here is our salvation in Jesus; here is our risen Lord in Jesus. The Spirit burns Jesus into our hearts so that we love Him and become more and more like Him. Wind, fire, water, bread and wine – there are lots of pictures that show us what God has done. The power that energises, the fire that refines, the water that refreshes – here is the Spirit of God poured out on us with transformation, refreshing, grace – all from God for us!