

JOHN 14:15-21  
WITH YOU FOR EVER!

Waiting. How hard it is to wait! Waiting for a baby – there is pain, uncertainty, longing for it to be over. When you were a child waiting for Christmas or a birthday, it seemed as if these days would never come. You're waiting for the Cup Final; you have your ticket! Imagine that you're an athlete waiting for the Commonwealth Games, preparing, training, maybe they will come too soon! Or you're waiting for something that you know will happen; you just don't know when...

Waiting. Our little group is waiting. We've been part of Jesus' story for 3 years; we've watched Him do all kinds of amazing things, healing sick people, making the lame walk, stilling the storms on the lake, feeding the crowds. We've watched Him stand at the eye of the storm of trouble: the authorities have seen Him as trouble-maker and they crucified Him outside the city and on the third day the tomb was empty and he was raised and we saw Him, we met Him, we talked with Him, the risen Jesus. Now we're waiting. He told us to wait in the city, then He left us, going back to His Father, He said, and told us to wait and we're waiting. We're not sure what will happen next and waiting isn't easy for us; we're still frightened of the authorities and what they might do to us if we cause trouble or raise our heads. We're waiting in Jerusalem for the gift that Jesus has promised that His Father would give to us. The crowds are gathering in Jerusalem now, for one of the great Feasts of our faith, the Feast of Pentecost, 50 days from the beginning of Passover, a harvest thanksgiving, and people are gathering in Jerusalem from all around; the city is busy.

The Day of Pentecost comes and the waiting is over. In Acts 2 Luke tries to describe an event that is beyond words. The disciples were waiting and as they were waiting God poured out His Spirit on them, a great demonstration of power. "*Suddenly...*" (Acts 2:2f) It was not the wind; it was not fire, but Luke is trying to find ways of describing the coming of the Spirit in ways that we might understand: a great sound is heard and the Spirit came on the disciples in power and they were changed men. "*All of them...*" (Acts 2:4,8) Peter, the leader of the disciples, the man who not 50 days before, when challenged by a serving maid, had denied knowing Jesus, is now standing up in public telling the world what is happening: "*In the...*" (Acts 2:17) The power of the Spirit gives Peter the courage to tell the world what he believes about Jesus and tell anyone willing to listen that they should believe as well. Some 3000 people believed Peter's words and came to Christian faith that day in Jerusalem as the Spirit worked in their hearts.

Pentecost is described as the birth of the church and we can see why. It was on the day of Pentecost that God kept His promise made through Jesus and gave His Spirit to the disciples so that they could be the people Jesus wanted them to be. Till then, they had been waiting, hiding in a corner of the city, frightened, yet now they are standing in the centre of the city, crowded with people, telling people why faith in Jesus is a good thing. The rest of the story of Acts is all about their exploits as they go about the business of making disciples and telling the stories of Jesus and doing things that Jesus told them to do, till in the end the gospel is in Rome, the centre of the world and the Church spreads throughout the world. In a few short years, these people of faith will turn the world upside down and it all began for them on Pentecost when God poured out His Spirit.

Let's go back 50 days or so. We go back to the Upper Room where Jesus is with His disciples on the night before He died and John does for us what none of the other gospel writers do, he records what Jesus said in the privacy of that safe space. All kinds of

things are said and amongst these there is a promise: “*I will...*” (*John 14:16*) It is a very simple promise, but it contains almost everything we need to know about the Spirit who came on Pentecost. The Spirit is not new at Pentecost: the Spirit was around in the story of creation, hovering over the waters; the Spirit has come upon Old Testament people of faith, men like Samson and David, giving them power to do great deeds in the name of the Lord. But this promise of Jesus gives the Spirit to the people of God in a new way, in a way that affects all of us and benefits all of us and helps all of us. Let’s look and see.

“*I will...*” (*John 14:16*) There are three things to see about the Spirit, perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of God; we know what the Father means; we know the Son even more easily, but the Spirit? The notion of the ‘Holy Ghost’ hasn’t really helped because the notion of ghosts is not what this is about at all.

**1. ‘Another’** – ‘another’ suggests that someone else has come before and the Spirit is following on from His predecessor. Of course, the Spirit’s predecessor is Jesus. He comes to continue the work of Jesus, to continue the presence of Jesus; the Spirit “is the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent.” (Brown) He follows on from Jesus, He continues the work that Jesus does; the Spirit’s work is shaped by Jesus and is centred on Jesus. The Spirit’s whole reason for being is to point people to Jesus. There is a great picture of this in a book called *Keep in Step with Spirit*: Jim Packer was going to church on a winter evening and the building was floodlit; good floodlighting means that you don’t see lights, but the building is seen in all its glory; a good number of people comment on our building being floodlit at night as they go past! Packer said it dawned on him then that this is the perfect picture of the Spirit’s ministry, to glorify Jesus by pointing people to Him. The Spirit comes to continue the work of Jesus and the presence of Jesus in the church and in the world. He is not here to draw attention to Himself, but to glorify Jesus.

**2. Counsellor** – lots of words have filled this space in Bible translations. The word is ‘paraclete’ which is a legal word, meaning someone who stands alongside us, an advocate, or some other kind of legal helper. The Spirit is our helper and that can mean all kinds of help: our comforter, strengthener, counsellor, helper, supporter, adviser, advocate, ally, friend – all of these can be included in this idea. He is with us to give us everything we need for the living of life and for faith. Here’s an easier way of looking at it: whatever Jesus did for people that He met, the Spirit does for us! The Spirit makes Jesus come alive for us and in us, so that our relationship with Jesus is not reading about a man in history, but is a living friendship with our Saviour and Lord. The Spirit is said to hear, speak, witness, convince, lead, guide, teach, remind, command, forbid, desire, inspire, give speech, give help, pray for us and in everything glorify Jesus.

**3. With you forever** – Jesus’ promise is that the Spirit would be with His disciples for ever. This was the promise that came true on Pentecost as the Spirit came upon the disciples in power for that first time. True to the Bible in other places, when something like this happens for the first time there is something spectacular about it and Luke struggles to find the words to describe the noise (like the wind) and the sight of the Spirit (like fire). Ever since the spectacular day of Pentecost, the Spirit has been with Christians and has lived in us, just as Jesus promised. The Spirit has not gone away; He is with us forever. We can grieve Him and do things that make the Spirit unhappy; the Spirit works on our conscience to point out our mistakes to us, but He also reminds us of the grace that there is for us in Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. God with His people; God is living in His people – that’s how it is; that is what Spirit brings to us.

Have you ever been in the presence of someone you consider to be a great person? There are people who have a presence about them and you can feel their presence as soon as they walk into the room; the room changes as soon as they walk in! Then you try to talk to them and somehow your tongue just won't go the way you want it to go and you feel such a fool; you're in the presence of greatness yet overwhelmed by it. There are some people who, despite their greatness, have the happy knack of making you feel quite at ease in their company, almost relaxed and the conversation is easy. This notion of presence is so important when we think about the Spirit: He is present in the Church; He is present in us. He is here with us in worship; He is with us at home; He is with us wherever we go because He lives in us. God is present with His people. There are times when we scarcely believe it; we consider ourselves poor examples of faith and hardly wonder that God be anywhere near us; but God is present with His people everywhere and for ever.

The Presence of the Spirit is to encourage us and help us. Let me give you an example: you're struggling to find a way to pray; you have something on your heart that is bothering you, but you're not sure how to find the way to put that concern into words. It is beginning to get on top of you. The Spirit's job is not to get even more on top of you to tell you how stupid you are for not being able to find right words; the Spirit's job is to take these concerns and unformed prayers, that may even be simple groans and take these prayers and present them to God on your behalf. Your unframed prayers are heard and answered. The Spirit stands alongside us in every circumstance of our life, helping, supporting, bringing the love of Jesus and making the salvation of Jesus come alive in our hearts so that the blessing of God is something very real to us.

The Presence of the Spirit transforms us. You are frightened to let anyone know that you're a Christian; in the place where you work, the atmosphere is just hostile to anything to do with faith or Church; the people seem so ready to make fun of anyone who believes. Someone with whom you work is in need and has talked to you about their circumstances and what they need and how they long to believe something that will give their life meaning and purpose. What are you to do? The Spirit gives us courage to speak of our faith; He gives us wisdom to know when to speak and when to be silent; He helps us know the words to say that are right and appropriate. Under the promptings and stirrings of the Spirit we become stronger Christians, we live better lives, we reflect Jesus more brightly to the people around us. The Spirit makes us more and more like Jesus and we are changed.

Here's something about the Church to celebrate! There is so much about church that is hard to deal with: concerns for the future, talk of decline, congregations whose active life is limited! Yet, here is something to celebrate: God is with us; God has not gone away; God is with us for ever. That's what Pentecost is all about: the Spirit is given to group of people who have been waiting, frightened, in a room in Jerusalem, waiting and praying. On the day of Pentecost, God gave His Spirit; God came upon these people in power and they were changed, bold, courageous, ready to speak of their faith, ready to point people to Jesus, ready to go out into the world to tell people stories of Jesus. Energised by the Spirit, they are inspired, given strength and courage. These people changed their world, they turned it upside down and within years, the gospel had travelled across a continent and had touched the heart of the Roman world. God is with us; the Spirit lives in us; He gives us courage to live out our faith; He makes us more like Jesus.