

**30th April 2017 - St Nicholas' 9:30 am**  
**Power from on High (Part of Series "Church on the Move")**

1770 Words

**Prayer:**     *Come Holy Spirit,  
fill the hearts of your faithful  
and kindle in them the fire of your love.*

In these 41 verses from Acts 2 is enough material for months of talks and sermons. I want to concentrate on the what this story tells us about the Power of the Holy Spirit. I also want to use the story of how the Spirit worked in Peter's life to remind us that the Holy Spirit is still at work and still highly relevant today in all our lives.

Today we heard the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, blessing Jesus' disciples, strengthening them and enabling them to do incredible things. It is nothing less than the story of the birth of the Christian church after Jesus' Ascension. It is the beginning of the history that took the church from 120 active believers in Jerusalem into the lives of over 2.4 billion, or over 30% of the world's population today, and the number being reached is still growing.

To emphasise the speed at which Christianity spread in those early days when travel and communication was precarious, dangerous, and slow, think of this.

When Jesus was born Augustus was ruler of the Roman Empire. He never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. In just over three centuries the Roman Emperor himself became a Christian and soon after Christianity was adopted as the sole authorised religion of the Roman Empire with a population of 55 million (380AD). Not all the population of the Empire would be Christians, but all had been given the opportunity of hearing the Gospel, as had many people not in the Roman Empire.

Last week we heard that Jesus had instructed his followers to wait in Jerusalem for just a few days until the moment when they will "*be baptised by the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 1:5) and "*receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them*;"

As they waited in Jerusalem they did not know what to expect, but they had faith that something incredible was about to happen. Whatever it was they could never have imagined just how forceful the coming of the Spirit would be.

*“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2: 2-4)*

In the Jewish scriptures there are many references to the work of the Spirit. But even those well known biblical stories could not have prepared the disciples for the moment they personally received the Holy Spirit. Suddenly they were filled with energy and with knowledge, with determination and courage. Their hearts were on fire.

Let's look specifically at Peter and his journey of faith. Since the Passover Peter, with his well known human frailty:

- \* had initially refused Jesus' attempt to wash his feet;
- \* had fallen asleep in the garden when Jesus had asked him to watch and pray;
- \* had tried to defend Jesus by slicing off the servant's ear;  
then he had run off with all the other disciples;
- \* had indignantly told Jesus that he would never disown him;  
then he had denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed;
- \* had been nowhere near the cross on Good Friday,

But on Easter Sunday he was the first of the male disciples to enter the empty tomb and face the mystery of Jesus' resurrection.

That is when things for him began to change. Peter was able to make amends and beg Jesus' forgiveness after the resurrection and was told that he would feed Jesus' sheep.

Here was Peter now, a seemingly unschooled fisherman addressing a crowd of Jewish pilgrims with great authority and very persuasively, defending the actions and words of his fellow disciples, quoting the scriptures extensively from the book of Joel and the Psalms announcing the beginning of the expected "Last Days" and explaining what God's intention was in sending Jesus and what the Jews had done in killing him.

He taught: *24 (That) God raised (Jesus) from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him*". and 3,000 people that day believed and were baptised.

Despite all Peter's human frailties - seen all too obviously in the books of the gospel, especially in the lead up to the crucifixion, Peter has now at last become the rock on which Jesus will build his church.

Today's story shows very clearly the work of the Holy Spirit in strengthening, motivating, energising and enabling Peter and the other disciples to accomplish God's work. There are many more such stories in both the Old and the New Testaments. The Holy Spirit is present in every aspect of our lives.

(a) In the Old Testament we see the Holy Spirit active in creation and inspiring the lives of the people, present within them when they are commissioned to perform mighty acts in God's name.

The "Spirit of God" was hovering over the waters during the creation (Genesis 1:1-2); he was the "Spirit of God" "who made me", and the breath of the Almighty who gives life (Job 33:4); and the "Spirit sent by God" to create, and renew the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30).

(b) The Holy Spirit is at work in Baptism.

Jesus says (John 3:5) that unless a man be born of water and the spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Peter says (Acts 2:38) repent, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

(c) The Holy Spirit is always present in mission.

The Church at Antioch was inspired by the Holy Spirit to summon Barnabas and Saul to work in Seleucia, Cyprus and Salamis (Acts 13:1-9). Later Paul urged the Ephesians to feed the Church of God over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (Acts 20:28).

(d) Christians approach God in prayer through Jesus and with the support of the Holy Spirit.

St Paul says (Ephes. 6:18) that we should pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

(e) The Holy Spirit is the bringer of good things; and we are called to recognise the fruits of the Spirit in our own lives.

St Paul (Gal. 5:22-25) recounts the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, against which there is no law. And he goes on to charge us that if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

(f) And today we read that Holy Spirit was there as Jesus commissioned the Church; He it was who came upon the disciples, gave them energy and powers beyond their normal faculties, and empowered them to go out to preach the good news throughout the world.

(g) So, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, the Strengthener, the Inspirer, the Enabler.

In John's gospel Jesus told his disciples that he would be going ahead to prepare a mansion for them; (but) that he will pray the Father to send them another Comforter in his place who will abide with them forever. (John 14:16)

The Holy Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son. We must recognise that the he can only be fully understood as an integral part of the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist together as one God before time and are co-equal, and co-eternal, with but one mind and one purpose.

All these examples are from the Bible, but we must not think that the Holy Spirit is no longer at work. His gifts were not given only in Biblical times. He is with us every moment and is involved in every aspect of our life in the world today.

His gifts are with us always, and are not given to just a chosen few, but to all of us. Through the Holy Spirit we are all united in one body of the church, in love for God and for each other.

The Holy Spirit blesses us all in different ways and makes each of us unique and distinctive; these differences unite us more deeply because he gives to everyone as part of his community, the church, everyone contributing his or her own strengths.

In the gift of the Holy Spirit we have a deeper and restored life in God; this outpouring of the Spirit makes us truly the people of God.

This gift is always ongoing; but if we drift away from God it can grow cold.

We need to remain aware that God's gift of the Holy Spirit is always with us; sometimes it can arrive dramatically, as in today's story; usually it offers a more gradual and continuous development as he leads us on our journey of faith.

I would like to return to the story about St Peter's journey of faith. Today we read about how, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, he was able to become the rock on which Jesus could build his church. But that did not mean that his journey of faith was finished, he still had a lot to learn and still had a lot of growing to do.

In Acts 10 we find Peter's journey continuing. He has the dream where he learns that he is to teach the Gospel to the family of the foreign Jewish convert, Cornelius. And in Galatians 2 we see that St Peter still has some problems accepting Gentile Christians when Jewish Christians are present and it takes the intervention of St Paul to keep him right. The Holy Spirit is still leading and teaching Peter on his journey of faith.

And so he still leads us, all the time and every day. Our faith is constantly being informed and enlivened, and our understanding increased by the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

After more than seven decades here on earth I can now reflect on how the Holy Spirit has been working in my life, guiding and nudging and occasionally yelling. I have drifted away from time to time, and allowed myself to be wound up in earthly concerns, but the Spirit is always calling me back. I am sure that most of you can also relate to this.

We should pray that he who has begun a good work in us will continue to the day of Christ's coming through the constant blessing of the Holy Spirit.

**Let us pray:**

**Loving Father we come before you to thank you for the constant blessing and inspiration of your Holy Spirit. Like St Peter may we never close our ears or hearts to his guidance, with his support may we everyday continue to grow closer to you in your love, with his strength may we always seek to do your will, and may he enable us to play the full part you have planned for us in spreading your Gospel and in the coming of your kingdom. We ask these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen**