

Sunday 21st February 2010

St Mary's 10am

Acts 2:14-21, John 14:15-27

1st Sunday in Lent

Deepening Faith Week 5 'The Indwelling Holy Spirit'

Prayer: It is only by the grace of God that I speak to you now in the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Here we are at the beginning of week 5 of Deepening Faith, the half way point through the sermon series and the groups that are meeting. So far the groups have spent 3 weeks learning about God the Father and have had the first week of a three week block on the Holy Spirit and will then as Easter approaches spend 3 weeks learning about Jesus. So far in our sermon series the titles have all explored something in faith, living, praying, serving, and giving. This week our sermon is called the indwelling Holy Spirit and ties in much more closely with the group studies. Next week we will go back to thinking about growing in faith and then the last 4 weeks sermons will focus on Jesus. So this week I have the task of talking about the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Now I don't know about you but usually when we get to the topic of the Holy Spirit it is something that people become wary of for all sorts of reasons. In the group study that I am part of the feeling was shared that we have some comprehension of God as Lord and we can relate to Jesus who came and was a human just as we are but the Holy Spirit causes some confusion. And it is true, the person and works of the Holy Spirit are often not spoken about in Churches because it is hard for us to understand

and to get our heads round. I often think that the Church in the past did not do itself any favours when the language used in the prayer book was Holy Ghost. It led people to feel uncertain about some sort of spooky thing floating around covered in a white sheet! So what do we know about the Holy Spirit? Well the Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity; God is three in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I want to emphasise the word person, the Holy Spirit is not an 'it' but a person and hopefully this realisation will help us as we try to get rid of the ghost image.

According to scripture the Holy Spirit lives in us, in all Christian people. I don't know how you react to that but as we explored the topic of the Holy Spirit in our group we discovered that the Holy Spirit was the part of the trinity that was closest to us. For we often think of God the Father as somewhere up there and we know that Jesus has ascended into heaven to be with his Father and so as we explored together we came to the realisation that the experience we have of God with us is the Holy Spirit. That, in a nutshell, is what the Holy Spirit is, God with us now, day by day.

So what does the Holy Spirit do? Verse 16 of John tells us that the Holy Spirit is with us, (as Jesus was), to be our paraklete. Paraklete is a Greek word rich in meaning and can be understood in a number of different ways such as advocate, comforter, intercessor, counsellor, helper, strengthener, encourager or standby. So the Holy Spirit does all these things for us. The Holy Spirit is our advocate, pleading our cause before God. The Holy Spirit is our comforter, giving us spiritual aid, extra strength from God to face the situation before us. The Holy Spirit is intercessor, bringing our prayers to God. The Holy Spirit is our counsellor, offering us guidance and advice. The Holy Spirit is our helper, giving us strength and encouraging us on our daily walk with

God. The Holy Spirit shows us God's love and presence with us now and will be with us forever. In verse 26 we are told that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things.

Often people's biggest fear with the Holy Spirit is that his presence and action will make us uncomfortable or get us doing things we don't want to do. Yet verse 27 speaks of us being given peace, peace beyond what the world gives. One of the main symbols of the Holy Spirit is that of a dove. This image is taken from Jesus' baptism and is often portrayed in art. The dove is also a symbol of peace. It is true that the Holy Spirit is also portrayed as tongues of fire in the beginning of the book of Acts. I would also say that the times when we feel challenged by God or convicted of something is the Holy Spirit at work but ultimately these things are for our own good even if they are not pleasant at the time. The point I am making is that the Holy Spirit is not mean or nasty but is God at work in us for our own good and benefit.

I hope by now that we have discovered the Holy Spirit is a good thing and we are feeling encouraged to want his presence in our lives. Often people think that the Holy Spirit only comes into us at the point of baptism. The danger is when we think that is the only time it can happen. The reality is that we need the help of the Holy Spirit in our lives every day not just on the day we make a commitment to Christ. If you look at Paul's writing in the New Testament when he is asked by the new Christian converts about how they are to go on living the new kingdom life they have received, how they can stay righteous and do what God wants. Paul does not tell them to pray, or to read their Bible, or to go to Church, or to follow any rules he simply tells them to live by the Spirit, live by the Spirit. As followers of Jesus we need the Holy Spirit to

help us live every day, and we always need more because each day we will use up all that is given to us to help us.

Think of it like this, the Holy Spirit is God's gift to his people and his Church. Most of us like to receive gifts but we never actually know what is inside until we unwrap them. What are you going to do with this gift from God? Bearing in mind that we know God loves us and that is why he is giving us this gift. Remembering what we have discovered about the Holy Spirit, we already have a good idea of what the gift is going to be like but until we fully unwrap it and unreservedly invite the gift of the Holy Spirit into our lives we are never going to know what we are missing out on. So to finish this morning I want us to pray but in a slightly different way than normal. I want to allow an opportunity for those who want to, to unwrap the gift of the Holy Spirit today. I am going to suggest we do this with an imaginative prayer. So let's close our eyes and in our minds think of our image of Jesus....Now imagine Jesus is offering you a gift....If you want to, take the gift from him.....Then however you are used to take the wrapping off the gift which is the Holy Spirit.....Now in your mind invite the Holy Spirit into your life today using words such as come Holy Spirit.....Quietly allow the Holy Spirit to touch you now.....

Prayer: Father God, thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Help me to know your presence with me today and everyday. Amen.