

Pentecost
Sunday 23rd May 2010
Rev Brian Senior

Readings:

Acts 2:1-21
John 14:8-17

How are you at keeping promises? Can you think of a promise you've made that you haven't kept? [*Is anyone willing to own up to a broken promise?*]

I guess that most of us, when we make a promise, intend to keep it ... *use examples* ... but sometimes we forget ... sometimes we are lazy ... and sometimes we just find it harder to do what we said we would do than we thought it would be.

Jesus made a promise, which we heard about in our reading from John's gospel. Jesus said (John 14:15-17):

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will send you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth."

Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to leave them, and they were really upset about that. They wanted him to be with them for ever ... but Jesus knew that before long he would be arrested and tried and crucified ... and that although he would be raised to life again, before long he would be returning to his Father in heaven.

So Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples – the Spirit of truth – to live within them. The Holy Spirit would be with them forever, and be their guide.

Jesus talked a lot about the Holy Spirit ... how he would help them to remember what Jesus had taught them ... and how he would give them power to live their lives for God.

But there was, and still is, a condition. Jesus said (v15):

"If you love me, you will obey what I command."

It's no good saying we love Jesus unless we also do what he says ... and if we are going to do what he says, we need to get to know him better, so that we can know what he wants. The Holy Spirit comes upon believers who love Jesus and have decided to follow him ... which means choosing to live obedient lives ... living in the way Jesus has shown us, and doing the things that Jesus told us to do.

Remember what Jesus said (v17):

"The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

So the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world ... in fact, if we go right back to the beginning of the Bible in Genesis Chapter 1, we find that the Holy Spirit was there at the very beginning, sharing in the work of the creation. So the disciples knew that the Holy Spirit was already *with* them ... what Jesus promised was that one day, quite

soon, he would be *in* them.

And unlike us ... Jesus *always* keeps his promise.

So, let's think about this well-known account in Acts 2 of what happened on the Day of Pentecost.

What were the disciples doing?

Well, we need to look back into chapter 1 to find out for sure.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven ... which we remembered just ten days ago on Ascension Day ... he told his disciples (Acts 1:4):

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."

... and the last thing Jesus said to them was (Acts 1:8):

"... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Further on in Acts 1 Luke tells us that the disciples were doing just what Jesus had told them to do ... because they loved him, they were obeying his command. They had returned to Jerusalem, and they were waiting.

There was an upstairs room in the city where the disciples met and waited, and Luke says they spent their time *constantly* in prayer ... and choosing Matthias as a replacement for Judas, who had betrayed Jesus. Matthias was to share with them in the task of being witnesses, just as Jesus has said.

How long were they going to wait? ... They didn't know. But just ten days after Jesus ascended to his Father, Jesus' promise was fulfilled.

It was the day of Pentecost ... a Jewish Harvest Festival. The city was full to bursting, with people who had come from far and wide ... from all over the Roman Empire ... to celebrate the festival in Jerusalem. The streets were full of noise and colour, and the sound of many different languages ... but the disciples were all together in a house in Jerusalem.

Something amazing happened. Do you remember what? [*Tease 'story' out of children.*]

So, for those first disciples, the coming of the Holy Spirit was really dramatic ... with the sound of a violent wind and the tongues of fire and everyone speaking different languages.

Why was that?

Well, God was starting something new, and this was a time of great opportunity. All the disciples were there together, and the streets were full of people from all over the place. If those visitors who were in Jerusalem could hear the good news about Jesus while they were there for the feast of Pentecost, then the message would quickly spread to all sorts of places when they went home.

So God did something spectacular ... and enabled the disciples to speak in languages they had never learned ... and gave them courage to go out into the streets and tell people about Jesus. It all happened just as God had said it would through the prophet Joel, hundreds of years before ... as Peter reminded them:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

Remember what Jesus had told the disciples about being witnesses?

What does a witness do? [*Responses*]

The job of a witness is to tell the truth about what they have seen and heard.

Remember too that Jesus had told them they were going to be witnesses *to the ends of the earth*. That meant that some of them would travel many miles in the coming years, going from city to city, and from country to country, telling people about Jesus so that they could become Christians ... and then helping those new Christians to set up Churches.

These new Churches would continue to spread the good news in their own areas, and in turn sent out other people to new places with the good news about Jesus ... so that the Church which began with Jesus could continue to grow and grow all over the world, just as it is still doing today. Our job is to continue spreading the good news about Jesus.

But what an amazing thing this was ... these disciples who had been fishermen and the like ... ordinary working men ... suddenly found themselves filled with the Holy Spirit and preaching in the streets and telling the people amazing things about God, and witnessing to the truth that God's Son, Jesus Christ had come to be their Saviour.

Jesus had kept his promise ... and the people listened!

If we were to read on through Acts Chapter 2, we would find another promise. Peter was preaching to the crowd, and telling them all about what Jesus had done, and the people began to ask him and the other disciples: "*What shall we do?*"

Peter replied (Acts 2:38f):

"Repent and be baptised, every one of you; in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Do you hear that?

The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.

Without the Holy Spirit living in us, we can't do anything of real use for God ... but God promises to send his Holy Spirit upon every person who puts their trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The Holy Spirit comes to us to lead and guide and to give us power to live for Jesus, and to be his witnesses ... to tell others the truth about Jesus.

That doesn't mean we will all hear the sound of a rushing wind or be touched by flames of fire ... or that we will all speak in different languages, though some of us may ... but it does mean that the light of Jesus will spread from person to person until everyone has the chance to hear the good news, and to choose whether or not they will follow Jesus.

If we decide to follow Jesus, then we can be sure that he will keep his promise, and will give us his Holy Spirit, so that we can all be witnesses to him. Then we can share in the task of spreading the light of Jesus around the world.

To help us think about this, we're going to pass out candles to everyone ... then we will light one candle, and pass the light on from one to another.

As we do this, think about the good news about Jesus spreading from one person to another as Christians witness to the truth ... and think about how God calls each one of us to be part of that.

When all the candles are lit, I'm going to ask you some questions ... and I hope you will feel able to answer each time "**We will**"

Commission

For fifty days we have celebrated the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over the powers of sin and death. We have proclaimed God's mighty acts and we have prayed that the power that was at work when God raised Jesus from the dead might be at work in us.

As part of God's Church here, I call upon you to live out what you proclaim.

So, empowered by the Holy Spirit:

- Will you dare to walk boldly into God's future, trusting him to be your guide? **We will.**
- Will you dare to honour one another, and do all in your power to grow together in love? **We will.**
- Will you dare to share what you have, and to be generous to those who are in need? **We will.**
- Will you dare to pray for each other, until we grow in unity together in tune with the heart of God? **We will.**
- Will you dare to carry the light of Christ into the world's dark places? **We will.**

As God has promised to send his Holy Spirit upon us in power, so may we put our trust in him, and fulfil our promise to live our lives in his service. **Amen.**