

WELCOME AND NOTICES

Arts Festival next weekend –
last chance to get involved

CALL TO WORSHIP: Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Ephesians 5:19b-20).

SONGS: I am a new creation
This is my prayer in the desert
An army of ordinary people

OPENING PRAYER

God our source and guide and goal: you have made us in your image and set us in a world full of beauty; you dwell in unapproachable light, yet you have come among us, full of grace and truth. You have revealed yourself in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Help us by your Spirit to worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION

The Bible tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3.23). If we say we have no sin we deceive

ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins (1 John 1.8-9). Let us confess our sins and seek God's forgiveness.

Almighty God, we confess before you our own sin, the sin of the Church and the sin of the world, in which we share. We have not loved you with our whole being; we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. In your mercy, forgive us when we turn to you; release us from the burdens of the past, and remake us in your image and likeness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5.17). Through him your sins are forgiven. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

OFFERTORY

Almighty God, out of the fulness of your gifts we bring before you this bread and wine, our gifts and our lives. Blessed

**be your holy name forever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

PRAYER FOR SUNDAY CLUB

Gracious God, as we have offered all we have and are, we now pray for the children and leaders of Sunday Club. Bless their time together that it may be a time of growth in faith for all; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

READING: Acts 2:37-47

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, 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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three

thousand were added to their number that day.

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

**This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God**

REFLECTION: THE CHURCH ON FIRE (3) Spirit-filled living

Today quite a few programmes give a reminder of what happened on the previous episode. So we are starting this week where we finished last week, when Peter ended his

Pentecost sermon. People were cut to the heart and asked ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ The people were convicted that Jesus is Lord and convicted of their own sin. Peter responded, “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” (v38). But this promise was not just for them, it was also for their children and all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (v39). The promised gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit would not remain just with the Jews but would extend to Gentiles, those who are far off. And the promise is for us here today too.

Three thousand were born again that Pentecost day. These 3000 new believers in Christ that needed caring for, 3000 that needed teaching by the apostles. New believers are vital for the life of the church. When new believers come in, then it brings an excitement and a challenge to the existing church

community. Questions are asked about the faith which means we have to be on our toes, we have to study the Scriptures, we have to continue to grow in our faith. A church where there are never any new believers will become stagnant and ultimately die. Often that kind of church will turn inwards and only focus on internal issues, whereas a church that is engaged in proclaiming the gospel will have an outward focus, a mission focus. New believers bring a lot of joy to a church, although they can bring a few troubles as well as they work out their faith over time with help, as they learn to live in Christ’s way.

When Terry became a new Christian, he had to learn to run his business truthfully, to pay his taxes and not just think what he could make but what he could give. He got there in the end but it took time.

Just as new babies bring a lot of responsibility and some broken sleep, so new believers are the

same. It is our responsibility as a whole community in Christ to care for those who have newly come to faith. And together sharing in their care we will all grow.

The 3000 on that Pentecost day believed and were baptised. The apostles must have had aching limbs by the end of the day with all those baptisms, although their physical tiredness would have been balanced with the spiritual exhilaration of so many new believers in Christ. Now the coming of the Holy Spirit led to some practices that brought growth to all and made the apostles' task possible. Four things happened and continue to happen where the Spirit reigns. These four things were and are the keys to spiritual growth and maturity.

Firstly the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (v42). This verse in Greek literally says, "They were *continually* devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching." This idea of continually devoting is

relevant for all the characteristics of the church where the Spirit is at work. It speaks of a single-minded devotion to a course of action. Jonny Wilkinson famously scored a drop-goal in the last few seconds of the Rugby World Cup in 2003. That drop-goal was no fluke. He had spent hours every day practising his kicking, kick after kick after kick. That continuous practice paid off in the World Cup final. The new believers were *continually* devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching.

This meant that they were devoting themselves to God's Word as spoken by the apostles. What were the apostles teaching? At this point none of the Gospels or Epistles or any of the New Testament had been written. They were teaching the Old Testament as well as the things Jesus had said to them. These new Christians were hungry for God's Word. Being filled with the Holy Spirit and being filled with God's Word go together. As Paul wrote in

Colossians 3:16-17: 'Let the word of Christ live in you richly. Use all wisdom to teach and instruct each other by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Everything you do or say should be done to obey Jesus your Lord. And in all you do, give thanks to God the Father through Jesus.'

Where the Spirit reigns, a love for God's Word reigns. Peter wrote 'Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation' (1 Peter 2:2). So taking in the teaching of God's Word is vital to new Christians, but unless those believers grow in their faith through the study of the Scriptures, who will become the teachers of tomorrow? We live in a non-reading, experience-based culture. Although it is good to experience the filling of the Holy Spirit, those who are filled with the Spirit will want to study the Scriptures and grow in their faith.

In the autumn there will be a range of chances to study the Scriptures and grow. We will be running Freedom in Christ, which is a 10 session discipleship course. We will also run Home Groups, and if possible Christianity Explored will all be running in the autumn. There will be opportunities to grow, and the best way to grow is to start to lead. Many of you here have the ability to lead a home group. Some of you would be more suited to hosting a home group. But let's be a church that is devoted to the apostles' teaching.

The new believers also devoted themselves to the fellowship. The word used here is *koinonia*. The root idea is commonality. Whenever this word is used in the New Testament, it speaks of a sharing, a sharing of something with someone. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 it refers to a collection for God's people, sharing of finances. Here in Acts 2 the emphasis is on sharing their lives together. 'All the

believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need' (v44-45). Now they obviously didn't sell everything, otherwise how could they meet and break bread in one another's homes (v46)? Fellowship comes through giving, for true fellowship costs something – time, energy, money. The joy of Christian fellowship comes when we give ourselves for the sake of others. The life of the Spirit within us means we give ourselves away rather than only look at our own needs. Fellowship (koinonia) is a work of the Holy Spirit. If you want to have true Christian fellowship then you must be a giver, a giver of your time, skills, energy and money.

Thirdly, the believers devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to prayer. In other words they devoted themselves to worship. The breaking of bread was observance of the Lord's Supper. Devotion to

prayer meant they probably used old Jewish prayers and new Christian prayers. They prayed both in the Temple and in their homes. When the Spirit comes the hearts of God's people move upwards towards him in worship and their relationship with God deepens.

Finally, another characteristic of the Church of the Spirit was evangelism. "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (v47). The Spirit pushes us out and gives us boldness to speak the good news of Jesus. Now we will be looking at this in the a few weeks. But the result of all this was that 'everyone was filled with awe' (v43), not just because of the miracles or the teaching or any one thing. But altogether everything worked to bring a profound sense of God among his people. And they had 'glad and sincere hearts' (v46). The church was full of joy as the believers lived Spirit-filled lives, as they devoted themselves to learning from the apostles, taking part in

fellowship and worship, and evangelism flowed as a result. All this resulted in increased numbers and a joy-filled church.

What a wonderful picture of how a church can be under the power of the Holy Spirit. May we do as they did and see the same outcome here, to the glory of God. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION – led by Noel

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as
in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin
against us
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

SONG: What a friend we have in Jesus

THE PEACE

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace (Col. 3:15).

The peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you.

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

HOLY COMMUNION

As we gather at this table, we remember that Jesus was born of Mary; he lived our common life on earth; he suffered and died for us; on the third day God raised him from the dead; and he is always present with us through the Holy Spirit.

In his presence, and in the company of all the people of God, past, present, and to come, we celebrate the Supper of the Lord. 'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.' *(Revelation 3: 20)*

The Lord is here
His Spirit is with us
Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give thanks to you, O God, that from the earth you cause the grain to come for the making of bread and that you cause the vine to yield fruit. We praise you for Christ, the bread of life and true vine, whose body was given for us, and whose blood was poured out for us.

By your Holy Spirit sanctify us and these your gifts of bread and wine, that the bread which we break may be the communion of the body of Christ, and the cup which we bless may be the communion of the blood of Christ. As we share the sufferings of Christ, so give us grace to know the power of his resurrection, that we may be made one and evermore abide in him, to your praise and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

When Jesus had given thanks he broke the bread and said: 'Take, eat: this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of

me.' When Jesus had given thanks, he gave the cup to his disciples and said: 'Drink this, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' **Amen.**

The Body of Christ broken for you.

The Blood of Christ shed for you.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of a love stronger than death, you have given us new birth into a living hope through the gift of your Son. God with us, like a mother you have fed us with yourself & strengthened us for the journey ahead. Now may the love which bids us welcome at this table gather all your children into one, in your eternal presence. Amen.

SONG: Jesus shall take the highest honour

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Most holy God, who sent your
Holy Spirit upon your people to
equip them for your mission in
the world, fill us with your
Spirit and send us in Jesus'
name into your world. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God
Almighty, the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit be with you
and with all whom you love,
now and for evermore. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve
the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.