

## Living as Disciples - 1 Peter 4 v 1-11

St Michael's Sandhurst 31 05 20

Things will never be the same again. How often have we heard those words recently, at a time when our lives have been changed by events outside our control. We are just emerging from a major crisis, which turned our lives upside down. And in many ways' life will be different from the way it was before. They are calling it the new normal.

Today is the Feast of Pentecost when we remember the Holy Spirit descended in a special way and a frightened mixed band of fishermen, tax collectors and others were transformed into bold evangelists, and the mission of the church began.

When we study the Bible carefully we discover a very important fact. Whenever God's spirit acts, things change.

At Pentecost the Spirit's coming was both heard and seen. The rushing mighty wind and the tongues of flame, the symbols of God's presence which were used throughout the scriptures. Through this imagery the Spirit's mighty empowering force is communicated to the reader.

Peter in his first letter which we heard read a few moments ago reminds his readers, that, now they are believing Christians things should have changed from how they were, before their commitment to Christ.

The grace of God in their lives should be making a difference not only to the way they think but to the way they behave towards each other, and in the wider community.

Jesus had said "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

*John 13:34-35*

Peter's letter builds on this great commission directing his readers to compare what they were and what they have now become in Christ.

He develops the theme by specifying the gift of hospitality and service calling his readers to be good stewards of God's grace, utilising the gifts which God has given to each one of them.

The Holy Spirit bestows different gifts according to our individual needs and abilities, personality, and above all the tasks which God calls us to undertake. Their purpose is not for the glorification of the individual, or so that they can gain spiritual brownie points with their fellow Christians. These gifts are given in all their wide variety for the purpose of building up the church and to the glory of God.

St Paul reminded the church in Corinth that “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”. *1 Corinthians 12 v4-7*

Sometimes it is hard to recognise gifts in oneself often it is others who will spot our particular God given talents. One of the gifts which is of value to the church is the talent of enabling and discernment: of recognising gifts in others and helping them to use them to the glory of God. Whatever our gifts, however insignificant we might feel they are, we are to use them to build up one another, and these gifts must each be controlled by the principle of love, the greatest of all spiritual gifts.

Perhaps we could consider the ways in which each one of us shows evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit. If we are not showing this evidence, then maybe we should be asking ourselves why?

It is a very personal thing. Spend a few moments thinking about the signs of spiritual growth in your life? Consider “Am I the same today as I was a year ago, last week or even yesterday? In what ways have I grown spiritually? How am I sharing the good news of God’s saving love with others?”

But having done this we need to take it a step further. Each morning as the day begins pray that you may be filled with the Holy Spirit. It will make a difference, because it always does. All that is required of us is an attentive openness to God and a recognition that in all things we rely on God’s grace working in us through the enabling and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

And if the prospect is a bit frightening it might help to remember that one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit is the gentle dove.

I leave you with the words from the letter of Peter:

“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”

*1 Peter 4:10-11*