

Today is the feast of Pentecost and is one of the most important festivals of the Christian calendar, after Christmas and Easter. Pentecost is a time when we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is celebrated fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus and commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and other followers of Jesus while they were in Jerusalem celebrating the feast of weeks. It is also called as 'Whit Sunday'. In the Old Testament times it referred to the festival celebrated on the 50th day after the Passover and was known as the 'Feast of Weeks'. The coming of the Holy Spirit has changed everything inside out for us. This morning I would like us to look at three questions concerning the Holy Spirit. Firstly, who is the Holy Spirit? Secondly, what does the Holy Spirit do? Thirdly, how can I receive the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God is pre-existent and we notice the presence of the Holy Spirit actively involved in creation. The Spirit participates in the work of creation along with the Father and the Son. He brings life. When God created human beings, he breathed into them the breath of life. The Ruach of God brings life to human beings formed out of the dust. In the Old Testament times we see that the Spirit was given to leaders and kings to carry out specific tasks. Moses was given the Holy Spirit to lead the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt to freedom. However, when Moses complains that he is not able to lead his people, God asks him to appoint seventy elders and God gives them also the gift of the Holy Spirit. We also notice that during the time of the Judges and Kings, God anointed these leaders with the Holy Spirit to equip them for the tasks set before them. We also see the Spirit of God working and speaking in and through the prophets. However, the Holy Spirit of God was not available to everybody and was not resident forever and ever to those whom he had given the Spirit. However, God spoke through the prophet Joel who prophesied in the late 7th century BC and spoke the words of God as follows: "And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams and your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days." This was prophesied about a time in the future when the Holy Spirit will be given to all believers. This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out upon all the Apostles and believers. From that day onwards till today God continues to give his Holy Spirit to those who believe in him. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and holiness and will lead us into all truth, especially the truth of Jesus.

What does the Holy Spirit do? When we look at the life of Jesus we see the Holy Spirit anointing and empowering Jesus to do what the Father wanted him to do. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to preach, heal and deliver: to preach the good news, to heal the sick and to set people free from all kinds of bondage.

One of the things that we notice about the Holy Spirit is that the Spirit uses the Word of God to direct and empower Jesus. In our lives too the Spirit and the Word need to concur together. The Spirit will never be against what is given in the written Word. Before leaving the earth Jesus tells his disciples that he will ask the Father who will give them another counsellor to be with them forever. The Greek word used is Paraclete meaning 'legal assistant' or 'advocate'. The Spirit is the advocate who appears on our behalf as mediator, intercessor and helper. As an advocate the Holy Spirit pleads our cause before God. As a comforter he is the one who comforts us and gives us peace in the midst of really difficult situations. As an intercessor he intercedes for us when we ourselves do not know as what to pray for. He is the one who strengthens us in our weakness and empowers us to stand firm as followers of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). He will lead the disciples into all truth by reminding them about all that Jesus had said and done. The Spirit communicates truth to the hearers and the most important truth is Jesus Christ himself, the truth of God. It is only through Jesus we understand and know who God is. This morning the Holy Spirit of God challenges us to respond to the truth of Jesus. However, the world will reject the Spirit. The 'world' refers to humanity who are against God. So we see that the Spirit of God works as an advocate, intercessor, mediator and leads us into all truth and sanctifies us.

Thirdly, how do I receive the Holy Spirit? The scripture tells us that we were included in Christ when we heard the message of truth, the gospel of our salvation and believed in it. And that very moment we were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession (Ephesians 1:13). So in order to receive the Holy Spirit we are to invite Jesus into our hearts so that he will send the Holy Spirit to reside within us forever and lead us into all truth. The Holy Spirit gives us various gifts for the building up of God's people. When we surrender ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus the Holy Spirit takes control of our lives and transforms us in the likeness of Christ. He is the one who sanctifies us. The Holy Spirit is available to you and to me but we are to receive it by faith. On this Pentecost day may we ask God to anoint us afresh with the Holy Spirit that we may be empowered to lead lives which will bring glory and honour to God