

Pako Morning Service 15/05/2016 (Pentecost)

Scriptures: Eze 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-13; Sermon: "The power of the Holy Spirit" Prayer

Congregation,

I begin by mentioning Isaac Newtown's third law of motion, "For every action there is an equal and opposite re-action."

I think this rule applies to how we celebrate the power and work of the Holy Spirit in our churches. Generally, in the Reformed Churches we are a bit reluctant to say too much about the work and power of the Holy Spirit.

Some of this is due to culture and upbringing. Just be normal and you're mad enough. And some of this is due to the abuse of the Holy Spirit that we see in some of the more extreme charismatic churches.

For instance, the talk about the 'second blessing' or the 'ability to speak in tongues' or the 'slaying in the Spirit'. Some of these things have caused us to shy away from showing the Spirit working in our lives in a powerful way.

But I wonder whether the pendulum has swung back too far. In fact, on some occasions you could be left wondering whether the Holy Spirit actually lives in a person who claims to be a Christian, or even a church or a denomination for that matter. The frozen chosen, but that doesn't apply to us.

Now this Pentecost Sunday, I could ask the question, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?" Now of course we would all say 'yes' for Scripture makes it very clear that He is part of the God Triune.

Not only that, we believe we are a part of the true church on which God poured out His Holy Spirit. We confess that the Holy Spirit has made His home in us!

The Holy Spirit reminds us of God's love to us in Christ's, through His death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are God's adopted children.

The Holy Spirit's is a deposit, guaranteeing our eternal life. The Holy Spirit illuminates God's Word and gives us understanding when we read it. So, sure we believe in the Holy Spirit!

Well, then, let me ask a more probing question. "Do you believe in the power of the Holy Spirit?" And if you do, how does He show in your life? How do we know that the Holy Spirit is with us?

Some people think that just because they clap and raise their hands during worship or can speak in tongues that the Holy Spirit is living in them.

It's not true. In fact, not even our reading of the Bible or only singing certain songs show that the Holy Spirit lives in our midst, leave alone in our hearts!

The reality is we cannot just grab the Holy Spirit and say, "Here He is, or there He goes!" For the Holy Spirit is exactly that, He is a Spirit.

We cannot capture him on an X-ray or see him in a blood test. He is not flesh and blood. John 3:8 reminds us that He comes and goes wherever He wills.

Let me tell you the primary way we can tell whether the Holy Spirit lives within us. There is one thing that the Holy Spirit does particularly, and that is to convict the world of sin and bring about repentance.

When people acknowledge their sin and and repent and run to the Saviour shows the power of the Holy Spirit at work, for no one else can do that! And I put it to you, that this is vital for the growth of the church here on earth.

In our readings today, we are given precisely this picture of what the Holy Spirit does. Acts chapter two not only shows us what happened at Pentecost, but also how people acknowledged their sin and repented and were saved after hearing the word of God.

V37 tells us that the people were cut to the heart and asked what they needed to do in response. And Peter tells them to repent and believe and 3000 were added to their number (v41).

Now Pentecost is sometimes referred to as the harvest festival or the feasts of weeks [Exo 23:16, Lev 23:15ff], was a Jewish holiday.

During this holiday, the Jews were expected to travel to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate God's blessing of first fruits of the crops that were about to be harvested. As a result, many people from all sorts of different regions attended [v5].

This Pentecost harvest celebration took place 50 days after the Passover celebration, when the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and were saved.

So Acts 2 contains some symbolism. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday celebrated the beginning of a harvest of people out of darkness and into the marvellous light of God's Son. On Pentecost Sunday the Holy Spirit made his presence and power known by wind and fire and speech and lives were changed and people saved.

The people present knew it was not a normal occurrence for they were amazed at what was happening. They were so amazed and perplexed they asked each other, "What does this mean?" (v 12)

It's not the first time that the Holy Spirit made his presence known. In the OT there was the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire [Exo 13:21]. At Jesus' baptism there was the dove [Jn 1:32].

In Acts 4:31 the building shakes where the believers were praying. In Acts 6:15 Stephen's face was like the face of an angel. In Acts 16:26 there is an earthquake to release Paul and Silas.

At Pentecost, the first sign of the Spirit's presence in the early church is the sudden sound of a violent wind that came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. When I think about the sound of a mighty wind I see the trees swaying or the washing on the line flapping.

But note, the text says it sounded like a violent wind. It was the sound we associate with a vicious storm, a hurricane or cyclone. The wind that can cause mountainous seas to rise up and cause proud trees to fall.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is not always meek and mild or gentle and soft. The Holy Spirit can be powerful and effective, awesome and terrifying, for He is the power of God.

God creates new life by breathing the Holy Spirit into people. In the OT the word translated as "wind" can also be translated "breath," and "spirit."

When God created man He "...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen 2:7). Similarly, in the vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 37 we read that when Ezekiel prophesied the scattered bones began to clank and clink and rattle.

But it is only when God commands Ezekiel to call for the "breath of God" to blow over the bodies that they stand up and become alive.

The breath of God, the Holy Spirit, creates new life in those upon whom He breathes because He makes them aware of their sin and need of Christ and hence their salvation. Without the Holy Spirit sinners would never run to Christ.

In fact, without the Holy Spirit evangelism would be useless. Missions would be useless. Church planting would be useless. Lifted Up would be useless. We and everybody else would be nothing but dead clanging bones.

However, with the Holy Spirit blown into us by God sinners are given new life and are born again. When the Holy Spirit touches people for the first time, they get on their knees and repent of their sin!

We are brought from death to life, from darkness to light and we are now a people who are saved by Christ who can now live lives that are pleasing to God.

The second sign of the Spirit's presence is the fire (v3). They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Not a little soft glowing candlelight, but a fire like the ones we see in steel furnaces. In steel furnaces, this fire is so hot that it removes impurities from the raw materials. The presence of the Holy Spirit burning in one's heart and life has the same effect.

Moses trembles and is told to take off his shoes when he realizes that the Spirit of God is the fire that burns the bush that is not consumed.

Isaiah thought he was a dead man when he saw the vision of the Lord seated on a throne. Then one of the seraphs flew with a live hot coal in his hand and touched Isaiah's lips and burned away all of his lip's impurities.

Now, look at Pentecost. The fire that had Moses trembling and Isaiah purified, is the same fire that falls on ordinary people. The fire of the Holy Spirit does not consume us, but it is still a purifying flame.

The reason why we are not consumed is because Jesus by his death and resurrection has taken the heat out of the flames, yet that flame remains a purifying and sanctifying flame.

This purifying flame of the Spirit makes an obvious difference in the lives of God's children. We may not be able to see the Holy Spirit but we can see when he is active in one's life for by their fruits you will know them.

Without the Holy Spirit man pursues the acts of the sinful nature. Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, idolatry, jealousy, drunkenness and much more (Gal 5:19-21).

With the flame of the Holy Spirit man repents of his sin and pursues the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). With this flame, in other words, man becomes more like Christ Himself.

The story is told of a young girl who accepted Christ as her Saviour and applied for membership in a local church.

"Were you a sinner before you received the Lord Jesus into your life?" inquired an elder. "Yes, sir," she replied. "Well, are you still a sinner?" asked the elder.

She replied, "To tell you the truth, I feel I'm a greater sinner than ever." "Then what real change have you experienced?" asked the elder. "I don't quite know how to explain it," she said, "except I used to be a sinner running AFTER sin, but now that I am saved I'm a sinner running FROM sin!"

That's the difference the purifying flame of the Holy Spirit makes in the lives of God's children. We run from sin rather than after sin, though too often we don't run hard enough and it does catch up with us.

The third sign of the Spirit's presence is the speech or the talk (v 4). All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

This verse is not evidence for speaking in unintelligible tongues. The text says fairly plainly that they were speaking in languages other than their own, for people from other regions could understand them (v8).

What was the purpose of this visible and audible outpouring of the Holy Spirit? They were speaking about the wonders of God! (v11).

And the greatest wonder of God is surely that He sent his Son into the world to bring about the salvation of sinners! That is also what Peter's first sermon is about! The Holy Spirit uses Peter to speak about the wonder of God, namely that by pointing to Christ so that it would bring about repentance from sin and the salvation of sinners!

Brothers and Sisters that is still the test of God's Spirit working in us and through us. If you can never talk about Christ or if you can never acknowledge your sin, then one may wonder whether you are Spirit filled.

Your repentance from sin and your talk about Christ are the sure signs of the Holy Spirit's work. Whenever you can stand before God and His people and proclaim that Jesus is your Saviour from sin and the Lord of your life then you are "Spirit" filled.

Whenever the church speaks of Christ, we see the presence of the Spirit. Whenever God's people cannot keep quiet about the wonderful works of God in Christ, we see the presence of the Holy Spirit at work.

Whenever and wherever a thousand tongues sing God's praises in Christ, there we see the presence of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who is filled with the Spirit cannot stop talking of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul said he would rather speak five words everyone can understand about Christ than ten thousand words which no one can understand (1 Cor 14:19).

Now of course not everyone has the gift of the gab. But everyone can walk the talk. And that is important for there are many who do not have the Holy Spirit. Who knows how many hearts are being prepared by the Holy Spirit to be receptive to the Word of God?

There is one other little thing I wish to mention again before I close. By the end of Peter's sermon, the Holy Spirit had convicted three thousand people of their sin and need for a Saviour.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if that could happen in our community? Ah, I know, we all say it can't happen! But why not? Don't we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Sure we do and so let's pray that the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ may go forth and pray that it may begin with you and with me!

For Scripture teaches that every person either submits to the purifying flames of the Spirit and repents and speaks about Christ and what He has done or they will not repent and not say anything about Christ. So as individuals and as churches, let's be busy with showing the result of the Holy Spirit within us.

We don't know how much time we have to show the power of the Holy Spirit. For one day soon we will see the last and most exciting sign of Jesus returning on the clouds.

May the Lord be pleased to use us to bring many into the kingdom as He works in his people with his powerful Holy Spirit. Amen!