



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Ascension and Pentecost,
Late 11th century,
Stone relief sculpture,
Cloister of the Monastery
of Santo Domingo de Silos,
Spain,

Week 4: Comfort from the Holy Spirit

(Acts 2.1-13)

By Reverend Canon Archie Coates – Vicar of St Peter's Brighton

Bible Reading

Acts of the Apostles 2.1-13

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

Reflection

As Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for his passion, the most alarming feature for them was the bombshell that he must leave them. They had left everything to follow him and now he was going! And furthermore, how could he possibly be the promised Messiah if he wasn't going to hang around long enough to see off the Roman occupation?

How beautiful then was Jesus' insistence that his departure would actually be a good thing for his followers and the world, not only because it would mean his passing through the history-changing events of the Cross and Resurrection, but also because of what would be given to them after his death, resurrection and ascension – the gift of the Holy Spirit. They would be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49) as his very presence came to live inside each and every one of them. No wonder Jesus felt his departure in the flesh was actually precipitating a good thing. And at Pentecost, a few days after the Ascension, it happened: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4); the presence of Jesus, now sitting on the right hand of the Father in heaven (once described as the 'control centre of the earth') now touches the hearts of believers on earth, as we see depicted here.

As Peter declares in his sermon following the Pentecost event, this promise of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Jesus, is a 'gift' for all who put their trust in Jesus, his saving death and resurrection (Acts 2:38-39).

The reality that we are each able to have the presence of Jesus for ourselves, through His Holy Spirit – what does that mean? How does his presence show up in our lives, what does the 'gift' look like, how does the Holy Spirit manifest himself in practice? Well, though there are many characteristics of the Holy Spirit when he is present in our lives – he brings love, joy, peace and all the other fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 – in amongst all these is the word that Jesus himself used to describe the Holy Spirit whom he promised to his disciples. When Jesus spoke to his disciples about the Holy Spirit, over and over again, he called the Holy Spirit “the Comforter” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Actually, this Greek word *parakletos*, can be translated in a variety of ways. Some translations have 'Advocate', some “Counsellor”. I like the thought that God through the Holy Spirit is my advocate, who is of course someone who stands up for you in a court of law, who speaks on your behalf and defends you, bringing all their expertise and experience to act on your behalf. How wonderful that God is so practical and helpful, so on our side, especially in times when life is difficult.

However, the literal meaning of *parakletos* is 'one called alongside'. In New Testament times, if a boat got into difficulty on the Mediterranean, a bigger boat would come alongside the smaller one and guide them to the safety of harbour. This is the image Jesus is using to describe who the Holy Spirit is to us, a comforter indeed. I don't know how your life is working or not working out right now, but one of the things I like most about being a Christian is that I have with me, in fact living inside of me, consistently and reliably, one who has chosen to come alongside me, a comforter. Through the Holy Spirit, the promise of Jesus is really true: “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20).

Hymn

Hymn Of The Holy Spirit (Pat Barrett)

Holy Spirit, guide my vision
Help me see the way You see
Always Jesus, ever Jesus
Christ in all is Christ in me
Holy Spirit, guide my speaking
Words of grace in truth abound
Let my lips be filled with stories
Of the mercy that I've found

You're the light
You're my path
You're the shepherd of my soul
All I am
All I have
Holy Spirit, lead me on

Holy Spirit, guide my hearing
Wake my ears to words You speak
In the thunder and the stillness
Let Your voice be clear in me
Let Your voice be clear in me

You're the light
You're my path
You're the shepherd of my soul
All I am
All I have
Holy Spirit, lead me on
Oh, You're the light
You're my path
You're the shepherd of my soul
All I am
All I have
Holy Spirit, lead me on

Holy Spirit, lead me onward
Walking through the great unknown
Trusting, leaning, holding, clinging
Till the day You lead me home

Oh, guide my feet
Oh, guide my feet
Lead me on
Lead me on, Lord
Holy Spirit, open up my eyes
Holy Spirit, open up my heart
Open up my ears
Onwards You show me where You lead me
I will follow

You're the light
You're my path
You're the shepherd of my soul
All I am
All I have
Holy Spirit, lead me on
Holy Spirit, lead me on

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, my comforter.

Thank you that you promise to be always at my side.

Fill me afresh today please with your Holy Spirit, that I may know your strength, your guidance and your help in all that I do.

Amen