

# **ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 23RD MAY 2021**

ESSENTIAL QUESTION - WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH TODAY?

*"Welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for the 23rd May 2021. This Sunday was Pentecost, when we remember the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the disciples." - Rev. Andrew Gill*

## **Call to Worship – Ezekiel 37:4-6**

*Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."'"*

## **Opening Prayer**

Almighty and ever-living God,  
you fulfilled the promise and sent your Holy Spirit, who opened the way of life eternal to every race and nation. Keep us in the unity of your Spirit, that every tongue may tell of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

## **Reading - Acts 2:1-6, 14-21**

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.*

*Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

*“In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.  
And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

### **Sermon - ‘What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church today?’**

During the week Julie and I were watching a TV show with a scene where the main character had to hold his breath to escape a building full of a deadly poisonous gas. As I watched I started to hold my breath too, to see if I could have escaped with the hero. But it didn’t take too long before I was gasping for breath! The world record for voluntarily holding your breath is held by a

man called Budimir Šobat, who at the end of March this year held his breath for 24 minutes and 33 seconds!

That amount of time by itself is not particularly impressive, after all you can go days without water, weeks without food, and the world record for not having a bath is over 60 years! Breathing is necessary for life, and in the Hebrew parts of the Bible the word for breath is exactly the same as the word for *spirit*. Just like our bodies need breath to live, so our church needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the essential questions about church. So far we have seen that church is about people, that God has called us to experience his love within community, and that we exist to love God, to love others, and to make disciples. But we cannot do that without the help of the Holy Spirit. Trying to have a worship that is meaningful, a community that overcomes division, and a mission that is fruitful in our own strength, is like trying to live by holding your breath. So today we are going to dive into this topic in more detail as we ask, 'What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church today?'

There are three things that I want to highlight; firstly, that the Holy Spirit *dwells* in the church. In the Old Testament, the presence of God was experienced first in the tabernacle in the wilderness, and then later in the temple in Jerusalem. While it is true that God is everywhere, there was something special about God's people experiencing his presence in his temple. After its construction, we read in 1 Kings 8:11, that a cloud descended on the temple and it was filled with the glory of the Lord. The temple was heaven on earth, and it was the meeting place between God and his creation. But that glory was contained to the Holy of Holies separated from the people by a curtain. For all worshippers, except the high priest, they were close to the presence of God but they were never able to enter into it fully. But now after Christ's death and resurrection, through his Holy Spirit the Church, as in the people of God, are the dwelling place for God's

presence. Ephesians 2:22, *"In him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."*

Because of the Holy Spirit, we can experience what very few people did in the Old Testament, the glorious presence of God. After weeks of being unable to gather for worship, we know that there is something special about meeting together in the name of Jesus. How often have we gone home from church with more joy, or more hope, or more peace, or more faith? That is because you have been in the presence of God. But of course there are some things that can prevent us from fully experiencing his presence. Perhaps it is unconfessed or unrepentant sin. Sin is always a barrier to God, and even though Jesus has died to set us free, sometimes we still hold on to our sin, not wanting to admit we've done something wrong. Or maybe it's that God is present, but we're the ones who are absent. We are physically in church but our hearts are somewhere else; we are filled with worries, our mind is on the argument we had last week, we are thinking about what we are having for lunch, or we are simply distracted looking around to see who's had their haircut! More often, the reason we don't fully experience the presence of God is because we have low expectations. We need to come to church with the attitude that we are entering into God's presence and expecting to meet with him.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the church, and secondly, the Holy Spirit *unites* the Church. Relationships of any kind are hard. Even when you have lots in common with somebody, and there is care and love, it can be a struggle because there are always differences. We can have different opinions, different points of view, different attitudes, different desires, different expectations, and different experiences. In a community those difficulties can be multiplied. But when you think about the global Church, it has got to be the most diverse collection of people in the world. Even in our congregation of St. Andrew's, we are different ages, different backgrounds, we have got different family and marital statuses, different nationalities,

different political views, different hobbies, and different forms of education. But the great news is that if our faith is in Jesus, then we share in the one spirit. In Ephesians 4:3-6 Paul writes, *“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

The Holy Spirit unites, he reconciles, he heals relationships, and he casts out fear with perfect love. Of course, it doesn't happen in an instant. But the Holy Spirit is at work binding us together in peace. The sign of a mature church is not one that has no differences, but one that has no divisions, despite its many differences.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church, the Holy Spirit unites the Church, and thirdly, the Holy Spirit *empowers* the Church. Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he gave his disciples a task to preach the gospel to the whole world. We thought about this a little last week, but let us look again at the end of Luke 24, *“He told them, ‘This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”* (vv.46-48)

Christ died and he rose again for the salvation and the hope of all humanity, but the only way the world will know about this is if the disciples do their job. And humanly speaking, it didn't look good for them to succeed at their task. When you think about it, these 11 men were uneducated, they were an unnatural mix of fishermen, tax collectors, and religious fundamentalists. They were filled with doubt and fear. They had a proven track record of crumbling under pressure, but would argue openly over which one of them

was the greatest. From all outward appearances you would expect that they were doomed to fail, and the Jesus movement to quickly fade to nothing. But now today, more than 2000 years later, the number of the Church has reached billions from every corner of this planet! How is that possible? It is because they were clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit as promised. Jesus finished off his commission by saying, *“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:49) It would be like watching somebody push a car up a hill, and you think to yourself that they are never going to be able to get it to the top. But then somebody comes along, fills the car with petrol, they start the engine, and off they go!

In Acts 2 we read that on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and then Peter preached repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus, and thousands came to faith. And the Church is still growing today by that same power. In many ways our church today is facing just as many challenges as the church did at the beginning, and at times it can feel like we are surrounded by a variety of enemies who are threatening our worship, our community, and our mission. So what do we do? We breathe deep. We breathe deep in the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that was poured out unto the Apostles on the day of pentecost lives in us!

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus,  
you have called us to be a community of worshippers. You have commanded us to love one another. And you have commissioned us to be witnesses of your truth. Thank you, that we are not alone, in being and doing these things, but you have given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us.

So we pray, *‘Come, Holy Spirit.’* Fill us with your presence. Unite us in love. Empower us to share the gospel. In the name of Jesus, Amen.