

SERMON: Sunday – 5 June 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Come, Holy Spirit

John 14:8-17, 25-27

Acts 2:1-21

This week I deleted the language learning app Duolingo. Why? Well, it was my tiny little act of protest against their mocking of Amber Heard on social media during and after the high profile domestic abuse trial with Johnny Depp who is suing Heard for \$50 million.

Social media exerts such a powerful influence that even normally level headed people had began to believe that Heard was making it all up.

Writing in one of our national newspapers, a journalist commented on the result of the trial in Depp's favour that "women's speech just became a lot less free" and that "women are punished for coming forward".

The article reminds us that Depp has previously been found guilty of physical abuse on at least 12 occasions and describes the trial as "a public orgy of misogyny".

Its into such a fallen world that the renewal by the Holy Spirit is so needed. So that domestic abuse, and every other kind of abuse, would rightly be a thing of the past forever. Its part of the Holy Spirit's role to bring people back to their true ways of living, we might say, to convict people of their sinfulness and turn them back in repentance so that all who call on the name of the Lord be saved. Come, Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts with love.

(SLIDE)

Jesus told his friends before he died, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

They might have been bewildered and frightful but Jesus speaks to reassure them that a day would come when they will begin to understand. Then they would know. What was needed in the meantime was to love as best they could until the day came when they'd be filled with a strange, holy power, a power that would blow through them like a tornado, and change them forever.

(SLIDE)

25 I have said these things to you while I am still with you, said Jesus. 26 But

the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.

This week's commentary by Spill The Beans points to the Greek word for the Holy Spirit used in John's Gospel, *parakletos*. Essentially it means the Advocate or Comforter or more accurately, simply "drawing alongside".

Which strikes me as a good description of effective, simple evangelism, the act of drawing alongside another. How has God drawn alongside us this week? In what ways do we desire God to draw alongside us or someone else? Who are we drawing alongside? How might we draw alongside someone we know?

STB writes this, "In our highly divisive times perhaps such a name for the Holy Spirit should be reclaimed. With the massive challenges that are currently facing humanity from climate change to the rise of populism to the corrosiveness of misinformation, we are ever more in need of a Paraclete to come alongside us to help guide and encourage us. It is a well-known response recorded by historians of totalitarian regimes to batten down the hatches and turn inward towards family and friends: those whom you can still trust. The disciples following the events of Easter day had also reverted to this same kind of inward focus. We might look at imperilled local church congregations today and also see an inward focus dominate. It is safer, it is controllable and understandable, it acts according to rules you know. But that inward focus is not what the coming of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts seeks".

(SLIDE)

The writer Paula D'Arcy speaks about a time watching a desert sunrise when she sensed an invitation to let her ideas about God expand: She writes, "I sensed, deep within, that there is more: more to know, more to experience, more reality than my careful definitions of God. . . .

To awaken is not about staying in the same place and seeing, from there, new vistas. Nor is it about having enlightened insights, or realising new thoughts or ideas. It is to find myself in the new vista, looking back at my former life with an entirely new set of eyes. It is, literally, to be changed; the spirit within becomes my sight.

Paula D'Arcy, *A New Set of Eyes: Encountering the Hidden God* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2002)

Seeing with new eyes. A good definition of life in the Spirit.

Some of us have been following the 10 days of Thy Kingdom Come between Ascension and today, Pentecost. Let me share a paragraph from this

morning's contribution about the good news of God's love for all being very personal.

"In the telling of the story of Pentecost we notice the Holy Spirit is poured out on the community – all who are in the upper room – yet tongues of fire separate out on each person. The Holy Spirit is a gift for all. But He is given personally, distinctly, to each one. And He is given to each one so that they may, in turn, be agents of the good news to others. What does it mean to you that your reception of the Spirit is unlike anyone else's? And that you will be enabled to speak in a specific way to particular individuals?"

During this week, one of our elders sensed that it would be good for us here to ask for a refilling of the Spirit, and I'd like us to do that if you'd like.

We must have the humility to ask for God's ever present help.

Peter declared that everyone who calls will be saved. I don't think that has necessarily meant a one off spiritual experience that we had 20, 30 or 40 years ago, or longer. I think it's an ever necessary, ongoing sensitivity to the One who draws alongside us and promises to remain with us.

So whether you're sitting in the pews or standing in your place or coming forward, we're going to pray, Come, Holy Spirit, renew us, revive us, refill us, restore us, rescue us, whether for ourselves or for a situation or other person we have in mind. And as a demonstration that I need such a refilling as much as any of us, I'm going to turn and face upwards in the same direction as we pray together, silently or speaking aloud.

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill us afresh with your holy power,
Set our hearts on fire with the flame of your amazing love
Pour upon us your heavenly grace.
Wind of Change, transform us and those we hold before you
And the situations we hold before you that long to be saved in your mercy.
Anointing Fire, burn in us, through us, with us.
As you did on that first Pentecost,
Shake our villages that people might be awakened, re-awakened, reborn, find
fresh faith, fresh hope, fresh power, to live out the Good News of Christ with
us, the Advocate within, the Comforter ever present.
Guide us, your church, into an ever nearer sensitivity to your will,
Especially in these days of change before us.
Holy Spirit, show us the ways of kingdom of God.
And give us courage to follow Christ in all we say and do.