

SERMON: Sunday – 28 May 2023 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Serving in the Spirit

Joel 2:23-32

Acts 1:14; 2:1-8, 14-18

We read in Acts that the early followers of the Way of Jesus met regularly for prayer. And we should learn from that, that prayer might just be a necessary precursor to the coming of the Spirit, bearing in mind always, that the Spirit blows where she wishes. It's not in our gift to control the Spirit. It's pure grace.

We see that this prayer meeting was violently interrupted by the coming of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, the Source of all Power necessary for guidance and the kind of life in abundance that Jesus lived.

And now, the Spirit speaks in every language so that every single person can hear in a voice they understand.

In a moment, we're going to hear about the hub, the community listening project, a kind of new voice for people to hear God and become part of the church (and Christ's body).

Joel, the Hebrew prophet of old, had spoken about this centuries before Jesus.

In these last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. I will pour out my Spirit upon all my servants, men and women alike, and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18).

All people. Not just a holy few.

God has given us all the Spirit as the means by which we can speak in the different languages that we need to speak in this (increasingly) secular day and age.

Jesus told his disciples that though he would not be with them that the Spirit would come to them, the Spirit who would guide them, teach them truth and share with them the very things Jesus would say.

The words of Jesus given to us are here to guide us and to transform us into the kind of lives God wants for us. With the Spirit's help we can try to walk in

step with God's ways, even though we stumble often. And we can aim to be in tune with the Spirit even though there are times we switch off or deliberately tune into a different channel.

Since the beginning of time, God's Spirit has sought to be our Guide, often through the words of prophets like Joel.

God, through the prophet Joel, proclaims, in a time of drought, that once more the rains will come. Once more, in the gracious giving of God, the land will be refreshed.

Chapter 2 has the stirring words, "Rejoice you people of Jerusalem. Rejoice in the Lord your God! For the rains he sends are an expression of his grace. Once more the autumn rains will come, as well as the rains of spring. The threshing floors will again be piled high with grain, and the presses will overflow with wine and olive oil. The Lord says, "I will give you back what you lost and I will pour out my Spirit on all people". (Joel 2:23-25, 28).

What a promise for God to make to his people - I will give you back what you lost.

I will give you back the years lost when you were in the wilderness.

I will give you back the wasted years.

I will give you back the blessings you spurned when you went your own way.

I will give you back growth that was lost when people turned away from me and church membership started to decline and people stopped hearing the call into ministry (much of which was explored once again this week at the GA).

The Spirit of God has the power, and the desire to give back; to transform, to reconcile, to repair, to challenge in new ways, to enliven, to refresh like rains on a parched earth.

There are so many ways in which the Spirit will speak to us - as individuals and together in the one body - about what matters to God, about what is good and pure and worth giving one's life to; the things that bring peace and joy to all humanity; and all of it done in the name of Love.

One of the main ways we as a church are embracing this life in the Spirit is through the ministry of the Hub Here is an opportunity for us to support this work of the Spirit through the giving of our time, our prayer, our talents or even our money.

Elizabeth is going to speak a bit more about the project.

The project is thriving but our 1 issue and great burden is funding. I recognise Gods hand in this project and I know that many of you hold me and the project in prayer which is crucial and I thank you for that.

If this is not of gods spirit, it will not succeed.

Within the project we now have:

The Hub

1-1 sessions

Support groups

School links

Jesus instructs us Do to others as you would have them do to you - sermon on the mount

Jesus was a people person - he listened to others, he came alongside others, he cared for others and he served others.

This all happens through the project - whether it's the 1-1 sessions and listening that takes place

The coming alongside others at the hub to share company and food and that's not just the volunteers that do that, perhaps they are the ones who physically serve the food but all our guests come ready to share and give care and company to each other. It's hard to put into words how precious this time is. I am very lucky being there all the time and seeing people coming and going - the smiles as people greet one another is something very special.

The support groups are something that a lot of people have commented positively on and we need to be present and available to people helping them to learn that we are a safe project and there to help - help through building bridges and promoting encouragement within our community

The links with the schools is absolutely priceless - there can be real barriers about people accessing projects, needing to talk and feeling lonely - through working with the schools we are introducing our youngsters to the positive impact projects like this can have on peoples lives and how crucial it is to listen to people and encourage people. The children are really amazing and really get involved when they visit us and this will help as their parents Listen to them and learn more about this community initiative.

People will perhaps be a bit anxious or overwhelmed about coming on their own but I love this quote -

“Strangers are just friends we don’t know yet”

And that is what happens at the hub - people are not strangers long.

Let me show you some photos of the project in action.

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Funding - why is there problems?

People/funders are very happy to fund the hub - fund food, outreach events, even listening training but none of them are happy to support salary costs. Without a project coordinator - whether that is me or someone else then this project can not continue.

We have a team of 20 volunteers - half from the church and half from the community which is a great position to be in for a community project. Each one of them is committed, hard working, friendly and efficient but all teams need coordinated and that’s where my role comes in. I am contracted to 20 hours a week and believe me I need 20 hours to do the project justice. It is fantastic to have our website live, an article going out in the Konect directory and a Facebook page that is well used. We are setting up a community just giving page and today are launching share to care, your chance to support the project through a standing order which Alistair will explain in a wee while.

I’m going to finish but want to leave you with my heartfelt assurance that I truly believe god has called me to this job. I see a future in the project and all it provides for so many people. It has had its trials, but didn’t God tell us in John 16

“In this world you will have trouble”.

But it goes on to say -

But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

On this Pentecost Sunday we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit, we celebrate God with is, the assurance of the trinity being our guide.

Like I said at the start, if this is not of God it will not work. But we need to step out in faith and trust his guiding, his equipping of us to be friends, neighbours, a community who can show others we care, show others we are encourages and as Colin McKay said show others Christianity with its sleeves rolled up.

Let’s pray for this ministry which is ‘the hub’.....