

Evangelical Essentials – The Holy Spirit

On Monday last we met to say farewell to Gordon Scott. We heard many tributes to the life of this humble and holy priest, family man and lover of the fells. It has been a privilege to worship with Gordon right up to the last Sunday of his life. But over the last few months seeing him deeply wrapped in prayer (no, not asleep!) was to know that he was already on his way. Here was someone so close to God that he already had one foot in heaven. His gentleness and kindness were still there because here was someone full of the Spirit of God. I am sure that he is now at peace with the Master he served so faithfully and I am sure he will be praying for us that the Spirit of God will inspire us on our journey of faith.

It is about the Holy Spirit that I have been asked to speak by Charles as the first of a series of sermons over next 9 weeks as we prepare for the Diocesan Mission called Moving Mountains. The New Testament is full of references to the Spirit of God indwelling believers and giving them gifts and power, in the Gospels, in the letters and in Acts Luke's 2nd volume on the birth of the church. But despite this emphasis, Paul discovered believers in Ephesus whom when he asked "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" could reply ' We have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit.'

Not as bad as that in the Church of England or at St John's but we perhaps don't often think about the Spirit of God. We talk easily about the Father and the Son but are not quite sure how the Spirit fits in to the Trinity. We think about him or her at Pentecost and our confirmation but rarely at other times. Seem to me to be far fewer hymns about the Spirit Breathe on me breath of God, Come down O Love divine.

How good then that John has chosen Grayston Ives' anthem about the Spirit today – look at words.

3 reasons why is the Spirit so important. St John sees the giving of the Spirit as the first event after the Resurrection. It's that important. Jesus takes his gaggle of frightened friends and breathes on them. He literally *inspires* them by giving them his own life-giving breath. He is now in them, here is their authority to go out and continue his mission, preach his love and bring people to God. Paul in our epistle takes this further. This indwelling of the Spirit is no optional extra "If you do **not** have the spirit of Christ, you do **not** belong to him". It is because the Spirit comes to us that we become the child of God, a member of his family, can call him Abba, Dad and know Jesus as our brother. That's why we stress the Spirit at baptism and Confirmation.

2. We need the gifts of the Spirit to be the church. Luke tells us that it is God's spirit which enables the disciples to heal, opens the prison gates and enables people to communicate the Gospel beyond the bounds of language. And its true today. Think of spirit filled people you know – a Mother Teresa, a Pope Francis, people who strive tirelessly against modern slavery, for justice and fair trade or to save the planet. It is the Spirit who equips us for these tasks some to be prophets, apostles, carers, teachers, encouragers, givers yes even administrators! We **need** the Spirit to fill us to be the church today (especially when we are few and ageing) and surely something we shall be praying for as we approach My Church Sunday in 2 weeks.

3. It will be by being aware of the Spirit of Jesus living in us that we shall grow more like him. As our hearts and minds

feed on him and we share all our life with him, his presence will change us into his likeness. Paul speaks of the Spirit bearing fruit in us – the fruits you see writ large in Jesus, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness and self-control. Yes, that's what we saw in Gordon, in the couple I knew who fostered 200 children and in others it's been our privilege to know. Daily becoming more like Jesus.

How wonderful then to contemplate God's Spirit at work in you and me – surely worth praying that the Spirit may be more real to us day by day. Not just for our own benefit but that people may look on us and see Jesus for themselves. Why so important? The clue is in John's High Priestly prayer of Jesus which he records just before his arrest in 17. "I in them and you in me that they may be completely one so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them." The Spirit's presence in every believer should be what draws us together (despite our different denominations) so that the world may believe. Unity is not an optional extra but an essential for reaching out and sharing the gospel. As Cameron related in a sermon a while back, polls tell us that disunity among Christians was given as the greatest factor stopping people believing. Good to speak then about the Holy Spirit on this Sunday of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity because we need to recognise the Spirit in other believers however different (and maybe even of different religions!). The Spirit should be drawing us closer together not to create a mega church where all sing and pray alike but where we recognise that through the Spirit we are all children of the same heavenly Father. We are united not for our good but for Mission –yes Moving Mountains **but** our daily work of sharing in God's mission to his world. So that people may

look on us and see people so aware of God's love that they cannot but beckon others to feel the warmth of his love too.

So 3 things I'd like you to take away today as we prepare for the Moving Mountains Mission:

1. Take time to luxuriate in the Spirit that makes you God's child and fills you with all his loving gifts if you will but ask.
 2. Take Jesus' call to unity in the Spirit seriously so that people are not put off finding his love for them. Perhaps commit to coming to tonight's service or to one of the lunchtime prayers this week
- and finally
3. pray that we and every Christian united by the Spirit may be equipped to reach out to those who do not yet experience his love for them.

Michael Webb