

## Acts 2:1-21 – Pentecost 2014

Pentecost – overlooked time of year in terms of major festivals

- Christmas and Easter – big celebs of Father and Son
- Ascension and Pentecost – moment to celebrate Spirit. 3<sup>rd</sup> member of Trinity in more ways than one – overlooked?
- Pent to rival Lent – period post Pentecost of celebration – but that’s another story

What thinking about – **tension between church as a community governed by principles of love and an organisation governed by principles of law.**

Hardest bit since being here: from state’s point of view, I am chief exec of a charity, not a minister of Jesus Christ – with all statutory responsibilities that come with it.

Steven Croft Ministry in 3D – average evangelical minister 60 hrs/wk – 22 hrs admin, 38 mins prayer

Not my primary calling, or ours. Yes, we have certain respons – but fundamentally we are not an organisation governed by law but a community governed by love.

A unique entity – when church started at Pentecost, no-one had ever seen anything like it. Vision of God’s new society, where all were looked after with radical hospitality and generosity, where lives were empowered and transformed. Emperor Julian 361 – ‘not only look after their own poor, they look after ours as well!’

What made difference then? And now? How can we operate as a community governed and empowered by love? **One fundamental ingredient: the Spirit.** Human love only gets us so far. We need something more, something which only God can provide. Romans 5:5 ‘God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.’

Have you ever seen a fake coin or note? We did once - £20 note – and took it to bank. Good, but not exact – and worthless. Risk for church is to be like that £20 note. Looks like real thing but not. Too many churches are in counterfeiting business. Manufacturing by human effort what only God does by his Spirit. Why we need Spirit. Why we need Pentecost.

Is it a one-off? Yes and No – YES in that Spirit poured out once for all, had to be a ‘moment’ when it all started. But NO in that passage points out a number of key things that represent hallmarks of the Spirit at work in the church and world in ANY AGE. 3 today: Signs, Seekers and Supernatural Gifts

**First hallmark – Signs:** famous story of what happens when Spirit comes: READ v2-4.

What make of it? Just for then? Not sort of thing God does now? True that, in one sense, a unique event. Gift of languages – even by end of NT age, tongues changed from other earthly languages to a heavenly one (glossa to glossolalia). But want to suggest that signs still integral to a Spirit-filled church. Why? Because if God really present in his church some stuff will happen which only God can do. Some of that will be quiet, peaceful transformation. Other stuff more obvious.

I have seen it firsthand – once seen it, no going back. ‘Everyone has a problem with miracles until they see one.’ I have been privileged to see a number with my own eyes. Lump on wrist, deafness in right ear, arthritis in thumb and blood circulation, blood pressure 115 to 63 overnight, stabilised at 80 2 weeks later. I prayed for each person myself – but point is, it’s nothing to do with me. I’m no-one special, I’m not a doctor and they were ordinary prayers. I asked Jesus to heal them, and he did. All the glory goes to Jesus.

So this kind of stuff still happens now. Could tell you other stories, but I’ll save those for another time. Point is: how do we know Spirit is at work in church? Lots of ways, but first of 3 today: SIGNS

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Seekers.** READ v5. Spirit given primarily to empower mission. Yes, to empower church to love each other: but first thing they did was preach good news to others. Another mark of a Spirit-filled church is that people are coming to faith, or at the very least, being drawn to the message. Makes sense: nothing attracts people like a fire. People come to watch it burn.

Car catching fire in Walthamstow c.1989. Or bonfire nights.

Fire of Spirit draws people in. People come to watch it burn. Jesus (most Spirit-filled person) drew people like a magnet. Same for churches today. HTB birthplace of Alpha: why do 800 people attend HTB's alpha course every term? Partly fame, but because Spirit at work in power. Stories of changed lives.

Back to my own stories: last two not Christians or struggling with faith – that changed! Not just healings, could be a supernatural word: word for left eye – healing – Christian. God spoke to her and she changed. Just like in text. Not everyone: bewilderment (v6) and ridicule (v13) – but Spirit draws people to Christians/church and to message of Jesus.

So Signs, seekers, and 3<sup>rd</sup> hallmark...

**Supernatural gifts:** READ v14a. Why is this important? Look at change in Peter. Foot-in-mouth disease to great speaker. Coward to courage (EXPAND). What changed? Filled with Spirit.

Really important: church supernatural gifts as well as natural ones. Qualitative difference. Of course natural ones are good as well: but what grows kingdom is exercise of supernatural gifts. 'God makes things grow' – so it is God-empowered gifts that make difference. Key area of counterfeiting: too much exclusive emphasis on natural gifts and not enough on grace-gifts (charismata). I am a charismatic by experience, but also by deep conviction: it's what bible teaches and also what God uses to grow his church. So God takes clumsy Peter and uses him to preach first message: not Simon the Zealot, or James/John (sons of thunder).

I want our church to become a place where people discover, develop and use their grace-gifts, their charismata. Lots of organisations can counterfeit marks of church – look at atheist church (singing, community). Two things it misses: worship and Spirit. All sausage and no sizzle. Spirit is sizzle in sausage.

Two caveats:

These are not the only marks of Spirit – there are others – but this is focus of passage, and therefore of Pentecost. And as it is Pentecost, we should give due weight to it.

Doesn't override human involvement. Signs came to a church constantly praying and seeking God (v14 – seek God and not experience from a few weeks ago). Seekers need to be welcomed and ministered to by church. Gifts require our co-operation and investment.

But Spirit is what distinguishes church from any other human organisation. Marks of Spirit we see today are amazing signs, crowds of seekers and supernatural gifts transforming lives and building the kingdom. This is authentic work of Spirit, and challenges our tendency to rely on human strategies and plans.

At one level we can't avoid being an org governed by principles of law. But our true calling is to be a community governed by love: love poured out by Holy Spirit, the Spirit which empowers the church, and empowers each one of us.

Desire the fire. We need it. I need it. Are you willing to ask for it?