



Learning from the early church

Study 3 (w/c 9 June) Switched On (Pentecost)

*"History may not be very good at telling us what to do, but it can stimulate thinking about new possibilities."*¹

Read Acts 2:1-21

We encounter the Holy Spirit throughout the Bible; from the opening words of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation. The words used in the Hebrew (*Ru'ach*) and Greek (*Pneuma*) are significant as both have the three main meanings of 'wind', 'breath' and 'spirit'. Those who know Jesus therefore have the very breath of God within them. How does that make you feel?

However you might describe it, it's clear that the bible understands that there will be some "Spirit induced spark" that makes the kingdom-citizen you different from the old you. What's yours?

Isaiah (ch6v6-8) makes it plain that being touched by God isn't primarily something for ourselves but rather enables us to go out and touch others – or might we say breathe Godliness over others' lives? Where can you take the touch of God? See 2 Corinthians 1:4 for another angle on this.

As recorded by John in his gospel, (ch14v16), Jesus had promised that the Father would send another to be with his disciples. Not someone different, but, as one commentator put it, *"One like myself, who will take my place, do my work"*. Jesus emphasised this continuity when he went on to promise them that, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."* (John 14:18). After all, how else is his other promise made at that time – that he and the Father will come and make their home with those who love him actually going to happen (14:23)? What lesson is there for the church today in this continuity with the earthly ministry of Jesus?

While we need to emphasise the continuity, it's important also to recognise that everything changed at Pentecost – before that it would have like doing church in the dark; with the lights out. Have you ever been somewhere that it's really dark: a cave or other space where no light at all reaches? Compare that to a bright sunny day. How did it feel in each situation?

Even bearing in mind images of church as the body of Christ, it's important not to think that God (the Holy Spirit) only works through us as Christians or the church. How can we discern where he is already at work in the community around us? How can we join in?

In his book 'I believe in the Holy Spirit', Michael Green notes that the *"twin notions of power and mystery mark much of the teaching of Old and New Testaments alike when they treat of the Spirit of God"*. As well as Jesus' words to Nicodemus shown below, he cites Genesis 8:1 and Exodus 14:21. What further insights do these passages give you regarding the work of the Holy Spirit?

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

¹ Philip Harrold - Professor of church history at Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA, in *Church for every context*