

Power, Praise, Gifts, Acts 10, May 9th 2021.

Acts 10:44-end.

Pentecost is in two weeks. Acts is always included in the Sunday readings in the Anglican Church from Easter to Pentecost. Let's look at our passage.

Acts 10: 44: 'While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.'

And as he was preaching this is what happened. What did they experience?

Power. Praise. Gifts.

1. They experienced the power of the Holy Spirit

We know that something very remarkable must have happened, because Peter was in the middle of a sermon and he had to stop preaching. Preachers do not stop preaching unless something very dramatic happens! But Peter had to stop, because God the Holy Spirit interrupted his sermon.

Now, we don't know exactly what they experienced. But Peter and the others with him could see it happened. Later Peter, when he is being cross-examined by the other apostles, elders and significant others in the Jerusalem church – Peter tells them: "As I began to speak the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord has said: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God."

What Peter and the believers with him experienced on the day of Pentecost was clearly a very powerful thing.

There were physical manifestations. They heard a gale. They felt the wind fill where they were.

Sometimes, when the Spirit of God comes, people speak of an amazing sense of peace.

Sometimes you see people shaking. Some simply fall to their knees in prayer...

You might be thinking: 'That is VERY ODD!' Maybe it's helpful to think of it as a simple physical symbol of a deeper, spiritual work of God.

I sometimes think that if we accept the fact that as we encounter God, it can affect us spiritually, then it's not so odd to think that it may affect us physically too. The Old Testament reminds us, of various responses, to the very tangible presence of God coming close to his people.

The disciples also saw something that resembled fire on the day of Pentecost – something that seemed to be like tongues of fire. Fire is a common image for the presence of God.

Often, when the Spirit is at work, people talk about experiencing something like fire or a physical heat on their hands, bodies, arms. Heat is an experience I have had at times, for example when I am in prayer or being prayed for.

Now I'm not suggesting that you necessarily need to experience any of these things in prayer or on Pentecost or anytime.

The reason for mentioning them is because sometimes people do experience them. I remember years ago, when I had my first powerful encounter with the Spirit, I had no clue what was going on. I was just praying by myself, kneeling during a time of sung worship. I thought there was something wrong with me. Only later when I chatted with a mature Christian, I realized, it was the Spirit more tangibly at work and it was all fine...

However, a person may experience absolutely nothing.
Yet that does not mean the Spirit is not working or present.

Some people do experience powerful, physical manifestations of the Spirit, but others don't and it's no better to have experienced those things than not to have.

God meets us where we are at and what he is seeking to do.

In Ephesians 3 Paul prays that the believers experience the power of the Spirit. That they would be 'strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner person'. The Spirit is in each believer – Paul says – but he prays for a fresh work of the Spirit within each. That Christ would dwell in their hearts. That he would increasingly dominate and shape their lives.

And as Christ dwells within, they will be rooted and grounded in love. They will somehow know God's love for them. Love is the soil in which believers are to be rooted and grow, and the foundation on which they are to be built.

He prays that they would have power – through the Spirit – to grasp how wide, and long, high and deep is the love of Christ. He says – with all the saints – for each to grasp. But each may grasp it in a different way. Paul then shares: to know this love that surpasses knowledge and be filled to the measure of the fullness of God. Christ's love, is so profound that its depths will never be sounded and so vast that its extent will never be encompassed by the human mind

It's perhaps easy to believe that God loves the world, John 3, verse 16, with a kind of 'wholesale' love. But Paul wrote in Galatians, 'The Son of God loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.' It's as personal, and as deep, and as real as that, and as the Holy Spirit comes and fills us, he works out in us a knowledge and experience of God's love for *me*. God's love for you.

So that's the first thing, Cornelius and the others experienced : they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, which, considering Paul's words

in Ephesians, possibly included a growing knowledge of God's love for them. It's only natural to want to express something about that.

2. *'They were released in praise'* (Acts 10:46), 'For they heard them speaking in tongues, and praising God.'

Cornelius and the others have their eyes opened to truth about God, that Jesus was more than just a man, that the cross was about life and in fact the empty tomb and a resurrected Jesus proved it was all true. Forgiveness of sins and a relationship with God now possible. And as their hearts and eyes are opened, as new birth and new creation comes to them, spontaneous praise flows out from them.

Spontaneous praise is the language of those who are thrilled and excited about something or someone, all around the world people get excited about all kinds of things.

We're used to public displays of excitement, just perhaps not in church. But actually, when you think about it, why not?! Surely, if God does exist then he is worthy of our worship, if his love is real then that is something to get excited about! So our worship involves our minds, our hearts, everything: including our emotions.

Not only is there nothing wrong with expressing emotions, you know, there's nothing wrong even with raising your hands in church – it's perfectly all right. It might seem a little bit weird, but in fact that was the way in which the early Christians prayed.

In 1 Timothy, it speaks about 'lifting up holy hands in prayer.' There's absolutely nothing wrong with that – that's the traditional form of prayer and prayer as our Life Groups have been looking at with the Prayer Course is more than just petition and intercession but includes adoration.

Praise is something for us all the time. Yet here, when the Spirit falls on them, there is a release in praise as well.

So, 1. They ***experienced the Spirit, his power,***
2. They were ***released in praise for God*** , and 3. ***Spiritual Gifts*** were given.

Paul in Romans takes much time to explain the theology around what God has done in Christ. That is chapters 1-8. And chapters 9-11, he teaches through about God is doing for many in the Jewish nation had not received Christ as Messiah. Then chapters 12-the end are very practical statements about how to live as a Christian. "Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship." He says be transformed and then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will. He then goes on to share about God's will about how to live. He talks about sincere love, about enthusiasm or zeal for the Lord, about the importance of harmony among our relationships with others, to be generous, prayerful, hospitable, and how to treat those who hurt us, anger us, those who persecute us. Within this chapter of teaching he also says:

⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your ^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, ^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Paul here assumes that the Christians in Rome, whom he has not met – he has never been to this city or church – that they will have spiritual gifts, natural and supernatural in orientation. He assumes that everyone will not have the same gift. But he assumes that all will have at least one gift and he encourages them to use what they have – whether teaching, giving or prophesying. So to offer your body as a living sacrifice, in seeking to live a Jesus shaped life, marked by generosity, sincere love,

prayer, forgiveness, it includes using the gift or gifts the Holy Spirit – the grace God has given to each member of the Body, the church.

And, using these gifts, we're in it together. The church is not meant to be a kind of oneman show. Too often churches have become like this. I am a football fan. It's been said, the church can be like a football match. You have '22 people desperately in need of a rest being watched by 40,000 desperately in need of exercise!'

The church only truly works – if everybody's involved, because the Holy Spirit gives gifts to all the children. So all get to play, as a pastor once said.

'For they heard them speaking in **tongues** and praising God.'
Now what is THIS all about?!

Tongues is a supernatural gift, a gift I believe God still gives today to some individuals. As I said, different people have a different gift or gifts.

On the day of Pentecost they received the gift of speaking in other languages.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians, 13 that it could be earthly, human languages, or it could be heavenly, angelic languages.

Sometimes, people have received the gift of speaking in another tongue, another language, which is a human language. When I was a missionary working in Hungary, I met a lady from the YWAM Missionary organization. They were praying in a team and one of them prayed in a language that they did not know and someone in the church gathering recognized it.

Tongues is mostly a very private thing

Does a Christian need to speak in tongues? The answer is, no.

- Not all Christians speak in tongues.
- It's not the mark of being a Christian / being filled with the Spirit.
- It's not the most important gift.

But it's perfectly biblical .

But what exactly is it? 1 Corinthians, chapter 14:

Paul writes, 'For those who speak in a tongue, do not speak to people, but to God.'it's speaking to God: i.e., prayer.

....'Those who speak in a tongue edify themselves.'

So it builds up the individual Christian.

Paul goes on to say that it transcends the limits of human language: 'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.'

And all he means is that the mind is not having to go through the process of formulating requests and expressions into the eloquent sentences of a human language.

There is simply this sense of your heart directly connecting with God's in a number of ways:

1. It helps us praise

All of us are limited by human language.

Do you ever get frustrated that you cannot express yourself? You want to praise the limitlessness of God's love and power –yet you find you run out of words or don't know where to begin. Through tongues your heart is expressed without the limitation of words. Paul says "if you praising God with your spirit."

2. It helps us pray under pressure

People have found that when they don't know what to pray – I know one person, he was in a very difficult situation with someone, he really didn't know what to do or say. He prayed in tongues for a while and an idea came into mind. He tried it and it really helped his friend to become free.

3. it helps us pray for others

Sometimes it's hard to pray for others, particularly if you haven't seen them for a long time. You know, the best prayer we can manage is: 'Lord bless them!' But the gift of tongues can help us in praying for other people.

Revd, now Bishop, Sandy Millar – often when praying for people, he would pray in tongues, until a theme or idea would come to mind, then he would continue praying that theme etc.

Another testimony is from Jackie Pullinger, a heroine of the faith, who has given her life to rescuing those caught in addiction and gang culture and helping prostitutes in the back streets of Hong Kong.

She writes that there was a transformation in her ministry as she began to use this gift of tongues. After Jackie became aware of the gift of speaking in tongues, every day she spent 15 minutes praying in the Spirit. Before praying in the Spirit, she told God she didn't know how to pray and asked God to pray through her and to lead her people who want God.

“By the clock, I prayed 15 minutes a day in the language of the Spirit, and still felt nothing as I asked the Spirit to help me intercede for those he wanted to reach.”

It is interesting. It wasn't a feeling, it was something that she chose to do, it wasn't some trance that she fell into, it was simply a decision to pray.

While she honestly admits finding this a struggle initially, the results – in her own words – were “remarkable”:

“After about six weeks I noticed something remarkable. Those I talked to about Christ believed... This time I was talking about Jesus to people who **wanted** to hear. I had let God have a hand in my prayers and it produced a direct result. Instead of my deciding what I wanted to do for God and

asking His blessing, I was asking Him to do His will through me as I prayed in the language He gave me.”

And the New Testament approves of this gift. But there are restrictions. Private use mainly.

Public use, only if the words can be translated -/ that is the interpretation of tongues, in order to build up the church.

How do we receive the gift? Just ask. Paul says ‘follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts...’

The Spirit is the one who gives but we can ask him.

The Spirit gives gifts. But what is important is that our focus is on the Giver not the Gift. The spiritual gifts – whichever one are one thing - but it’s all about God, that’s the main thing.

Conclusion.

Acts 10. Experienced the power of God. Expressed their praise to God. Received gifts from God.

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
give us the gifts of the Spirit,
help us to fan into flame those that have gone dormant
and
revive your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.