**15th June 2014 Father’s Day**

**John 14.15-21,**

It is Father’s Day. Today we remember fathers - We have our use - Dads usually get blamed for most things.

Two boys were walking home from Sunday school after hearing a strong sermon about the devil. One said to the other, ‘what do you think about all this Satan stuff?’

The other boy replied, ‘well, you know how Santa Claus turned out. It’s probably just your dad.’

Tony Campolo tells the story of how at his University, Eastern University in the United States, there is at graduation the opportunity for a student to give an address to share appreciation for all that has been done to make this student’s education possible.

One year a bright young woman had this honour and, as she mounted the rostrum, there was great expectation that her words would give an affirmation to many, especially her parents who had sacrificed much for her scholarly pursuits.

As her speech progressed, the crowd became uneasy as she revealed that every time she had gone home to visit, she had found that she and her politically conservative father had moved farther apart in their thinking. Whereas once they had agreed on everything, it reached a pint where, when it came to political and economic issues, they agreed on almost nothing. Every time they talked, she and her father fund themselves more and more ideologically estranged.

She started off the speech: ‘Dad!’ there isn’t, much we agree on these days when it comes to politics, or when it comes to what our government should be doing for the poor and the oppressed of the world.

A sense of anger arose in the graduation crowd. Graduation Day was not the time to publicly pick on your father. This was not the time to embarrass and hurt him. Then suddenly there was a reversal as she said:

‘But Dad, all that I think and all that I do with the rest of my life is your fault. You taught me compassion, and all my political beliefs and all of my life commitments are a result of the compassion that you installed in me from the time I was a child. Though we may not agree to live our compassion in the same ways, here’s to you, Dad! Here’s to you! Anything worthwhile I do in my life is your fault. You taught me compassion and all else in my life flows from that.’

Tony Campolo says there were few without tears in their eyes that day, as a daughter and a father who had great ideological differences were, nevertheless, unified in their love for humanity in the name of Christ.

Our main Bible reading this week speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus and the Heavenly Father. Jesus talks about how h is in the father and the father is in him and if we are in him we are also in him and the Spirit weaves all this together! We are a chip off the old block. We know the Son through his spirit and together we are related to the Father.

If you have accepted Christ into your life – if you have consciously decide to follow Jesus Christ and asked for his Spirit to fill you and come into your life then there is this close bond and growing influence. You will love the things Christ loves and want to do the things Christ does – ‘if you love me you will obey my commands; Jesus starts this section by saying.

Last week the church celebrated the day of Pentecost, the day the church was born, the day the spirit came; Jesus has risen from the dead and has ascended to heaven and said to his disciples – go and be my witnesses – but don’t be afraid I will be with you. But wait until my Spirit comes on you to give you power for all these tasks. The da of Pentecost is the day when all the disciples, who have been waiting and preparing themselves in prayer and in unity, receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Onlookers thought the followers of Jesus had had a bit too much to drink –. They were all merry with the Holy Spirit. The story of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles is an ecstatic and weird experience, beyond the comprehension of onlookers who can only conclude that the disciples are drunk.

It is frightening what one little misprint can do. A Pentecostal church in London was advertising a celebration service and accidentally miss-spelt the word ‘begin’ on its promotional leaflets by putting a space in the middle of it. So the leaflet read:

The service will be Spirit led. It will be gin with prayer!

I’m sure that service would be a real tonic for all who attended!

Even today people don’t understand. They would prefer to get drunk on wine or gin or whatever substance they can, rather than get drunk on the Holy Spirit. Don’t get me wrong – I like a beer myself – it’s just that thank God and by God’s grace – I don’t need a drink to get me through the day, make me happy, prove my masculinity or drown my guilt and sorrows.

Binge drinking is a worrying trend today especially among the young. It’s always been seen for a long time as a cool thing to drink, and drinking alcohol is society’s conformed pattern for ‘having a good time’ and even the Bible says wine gladdens the soul. But peace and happiness is much deeper and more soulful.

Universities have always had a drinking culture. When I was at Nottingham University I stayed in an all-male hall of residence. We had a Christian Fellowship in the Hall and about a dozen or more of us would meet regularly for worship, prayer bible study and having a laugh. You can imagine we got a load of abuse from our fellow students. We still went down the Union Bar with them, and still went out with them. But we had something else – something that made all the difference, that gave us the security and peace that we didn’t need to prove ourselves by downing ten pints or more in an evening, nor getting out of our mind so we could get certain things out of our minds. Quite a few lads became Christians in that Hall because the Christians were happier and more together than they were. We had more joy and laughter at our prayer meetings and our bible studies – than they did going down the boozer. They exchanged the spirits of the world for the Holy Spirit of God.

But who is the Holy Spirit and why does the spirit matter? We are hosting a Conference in October, 17/18 to help us consider this in more depth. Details in Wots On.

Let’s look at this passage in John’s gospel. Most scholars believe that John’s gospel is a meditation on the life of Jesus and his ongoing presence with the believing community. John helps us to think of the Spirit in ways other than sheer excitement or emotional agitation.

In John’s gospel are a number of reflections on the work of the Holy Spirit in believers which are found in what is called the farewell discourse in chapters 14-17 of his gospel where Jesus gives his instructions to the disciples before his death. Here Jesus anticipates the coming of the Spirit immediately following his departure. This is where the terms Advocate and Spirit of truth are used.

Four features of the Spirit stand out in the selection of verses from John 14 in our reading today. First is the term parakletos, rendered in our Bible as advocate. An alternative translation of this word is counsellor. Advocate perhaps gives the impression of legal overtones pleading your case – and elsewhere in scripture Paul describes how the Spirit pleads to God in our prayers of intercessions. The text however defines parakletos by adding ‘to be with you forever’. The Spirit as parakletos is God’s powerful and nurturing presence, given to the disciples in the wake of Jesus’ departure.

It literally means ‘co-pilot’. How many of you have a sat nav? I did geography as my first degree – I think its heretical to have someone tell me where to go – I always feel I should know the way! But having been in someone else's car where they have a sat nav – I can see their use. It is like having someone alongside you helping you with directions. The co-pilot. Part of Christian life in the Spirit is tuning in to the Spirit who is our co-pilot.

The other translation of parakletos is comforter or counsellor.

Comfort/ or counsel is a strange and wonderful thing. Have you noticed when someone is deeply distressed, say after a bereavement or a tragedy? The fact of having other people with them, hugging them and being alongside them, gives them strength for the next moment, then the one after that, then the one after that? Outwardly nothing has changed. The tragedy is still a tragedy. The dead person won’t be coming back. But other human support changes our ability to cope with disaster. It gives us strength. When the spirit is spoken of as the ‘comforter’, this kind of extra strength to meet special need is in mind. When in need, pray for the work of the comforter.

Second we encounter in 14.17 the term ‘Spirit of truth, which recurs later in 15.26 and 16.13/14. The Spirit teaches. The Spirit enables the community to remember its link with Jesus.

The phrase is a promise that embodies both a threat and a hope. On the one hand, the Spirit will keep the Church’s feet to the fire when it wanders into accommodating paths in search of an easier way. The Spirit of truth forces a reality check, prodding, needling, and cajoling the community to embrace its distinctiveness as the people of God. The Spirit does not make things easier only harder:

Is this the way of Christ? Is this what Jesus would do?

Your inner voice will be at work – activated through the power of the Spirit – the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of Jesus – the magnet in the compass, which if you pay attention to it will lead you to be truly yourself – truly what God would want for you – at truth with yourself and at truth before God – not running away, nor hiding , nor denying – but true – and when you can be in the truth then you are on the way to find real peace and happiness.

On the other hand, the words Jesus taught contain commitments about resurrection, life, a secure dwelling place, a meaningful present and a hopeful tomorrow. The Spirit prevents the Church from forgetting that it has a future and helps it translate the message of Jesus so that the future is not simply endless time but rich with promise.

Truth is always a battleground in our multicultural, postmodern word, where all values and truths are relative and not absolute. The concern about the Trojan Horse effect in the schools in Birmingham are because there are concerns they are offering an education that is too Islamic and biased and potentially divisive and aggressive towards the host community of Britain. This episode has also turned the attention on other faith schools and whether what they teach is acceptable to the wider community.

Ofsted, who try to maintain standards in our schools, said it

"All independent schools - - must ensure that pupils are taught respect for others of different cultures and beliefs, and are "expected to teach a broad and balanced curriculum".

The Humanist Association thinks that all faith schools are wrong and that no faith influenced teaching should be allowed – only the truth of science.

There are course different types of truth. Scientific truth is one – although that is always open to change as new evidence emerges and theories are tested and found to be wanting.

Personal truth is more subjective about relationships and meaning, values and morality. Faith makes claims over all these areas.

I think the truth Jesus is talking about here has to do with our own personal revelation of ourselves and our relationship to God.

The spirit of truth reveals truth about God and Jesus and the scriptures. Under the guidance of the \Holy Spirit we will find answers to some of the ultimate questions of our time – such as why we are here, what is our relationship to God that connect within ourselves so we can say this is my truth – whilst hopefully respecting others whose truth may be different.

The spirit is the one who helps us apply and understand the Bible for example. Some people will read this book and b unmoved and it’s just a story, words on a piece of paper. For others, influenced by the Spirit, the words become personally addressed to them, they take on new significance. It’s like having a conversation with the author.

Third the Spirit is sent by the Father – a divine gift. Twice in these five passages in John, the Father is specified as the sender (14.16, 26), and twice Jesus is the sender (15.26; 16.7).The stress is not coincidental. All the stratagems in the world cannot entice of force the Spirit’s hand. No manipulation of a group, no set form of prayer, no outstretched hands. The promise to the Church of God’s presence always remains at God’s initiative, and yet it is a promise of God, and one on which the church can rely. If the Spirit is like the wind – it blows where he wants – the spirit is elusive and not controllable. All you can do is wait, wait for the wind, then have the courage to hoist your sails and go with the flow. Resisting the wind takes a lot of hard work and ends up breaking you.

In this passage Jesus stresses the resppnse of love. If you love me you will obey my commands. The Christian life is more about desire than obedience.

I rather like the story Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick once related from his own childhood days. His father had said to his mother, upon leaving the house one Saturday in the morning hours: "Tell Harry that he can cut the grass today, if he feels like it."

Then, halfway down the walk, his father turned once more to add: "And tell Harry that he had better feel like it."

Well, in its own rather humorous way, there is something essential about life wrapped up in that. For there is a difference between knowing we are supposed to do something, and 'feeling like" doing it. There is a difference between a sense of obligation and a sense of generosity. There is a difference between obedience and desire. And the one of those weighs us down, while the other lifts us up.

Christianity says to us, you do not know God, if you know Him only as a sense of authority over your life. Furthermore, you do not know God, if you merely believe intellectually that God is a God who cares and loves.

You do not know God somehow at all, unless the same spirit of His authority and His love captivates you from within, so that you live knowing the spirit of it for yourself. You do not know God, unless all this that we have been saying about Him becomes for you your own way of life and not an obligation imposed on you by the Church, or by the fear of death, or by anything else.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Finally, the Spirit distinguishes the disciples from the world. The Church becomes a peculiar community, set apart by being indwelt by the Spirit. That carries some interesting implications. For one thing, the Church cannot take its cues for its life and mission from the culture, as if the culture posed all the right questions. As the text puts it, ‘the world cannot receive’ the Spirit, ‘because it neither sees him nor knows him’ (14.17). Without taking a superior stance toward the world (after all, the Spirit is a gift), the Church follows a script that seems to the world no more than an impossible jumble of letters. Let’s not get too upset when the world doesn’t understand us, the Christian faith, nor the joy of being part of Christ’s church. The world cannot receive the Spirit – because the world neither sees nor knows him. It is not always our fault!

For another thing, the peace that the church seeks and receives is distinctive (14.27). All those peaceful scenes thrust on us by advertisers, enticing as they may be, turn out to be mirages, false promises that haunt us in the seeking. A common marketing ploy today seems to be to promise peace of mind. Take out a pension plan or an insurance policy and you can put your worries behind you. Buy a place in the sun and get away from it all. Buy a new car and take the stress out of life. Peace, like happiness, cannot be bought; indeed the quest for money, possessions and status is often what destroys the little peace we have and gets our lives out of balance.

The peace given the Church is nothing other than the promise of the divine presence, the assurance of people not orphaned and destitute; from an awareness of God’s love made real through the inner presence of his Holy Spirit. We cannot create such peace ourselves, but we can cultivate it through making time for God, creating space in our lives for worship, prayer and reflection and being open to what the Spirit would do within us. Such peace involves letting go and seeing life from another perspective.

The gospel of John confronts us with sobering and penetrating words for Pentecost.

If we are feeling lost and defeated and needing the power of God to help us – pray for the coming of the Spirit

If we need comfort and strength – pray for the coming of the Spirit

If we have lost our way in the Christian faith – needing new direction, needing reassurance – pray for the coming of the Spirit.

If we are concerned for our friends and family and the people in the world who live lives of unease, or ignorance – pray for the coming of the Spirit.

If we need the peace that the world cannot give –pray for the coming of the Spirit.

1. Paul van Dine, Not the Nature, But the Character of God - Trinity!, Cathedral Publishers. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)