**8th May 2016**

**Acts 1.1-11**

The silverware is being handed out at the end of the football season. Capturing all the headlines has been Leicester city: most people’s tip for relegation at the start of the season but now crowned Premier League champions. They have had something as a team. The whole has been more than the individual parts. Their togetherness and team spirit have got them through in a remarkable achievement.

Likewise, it would be remiss of me not to mention the exploits of my own team, Burnley. Who having been relegated from the Premier League last season have just returned to it as champions of the Championship. Since the turn of the year we have ben unbeaten in 23 games – a run that has carried us to promotion. That run coincided with Burnley signing Julie Perrin’s nephew, James Tarkowski. Although he has only played a few games I’m sure Julie’s prayers have given us the extra boost.

We talk about team spirit. That undefinable yet obvious element that makes all the difference between winning and losing. Some teams have the gift and some teams don’t.

Next week the church celebrates Pentecost when we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit. Like team spirit it is hard to quantify: spirit is after all invisible. Yet you know it when you see it. The spirit makes the difference.

As Jesus left this earth and ascended to heaven he told his disciples to wait for the gift that his father promised them, the gift of the Holy Spirit. ‘He said ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses’.

I’m sure we all love to receive gifts. A gift is a lovely thing. A gift usually brings us pleasure, something that costs the receiver nothing. So many people are fearful of the work of the Holy Spirit. That somehow the Holy Spirit may cause harm or embarrassment. Jesus talked elsewhere about how if you asked your father for a fish would he give you a snake instead. If earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

The important thing here is that a gift needs to be received, otherwise the purpose of it is redundant. Think of someone giving you a huge box of chocolates. Your body language and everything about you would reflect an attitude of receiving, not grabbing. To receive a gift well there needs to be humility, anticipation, waiting, thankfulness, wonder and joy. All these were evident in those disciples as they waited those ten days between Jesus ascending to heaven and Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them.

When we first become Christians the Holy Spirit dwells in us and we become a temple, or a house in which He can live. He begins to change us from the inside pout. We take on literally a new spirit. Our values and attitudes begin to change. However if we are to serve Christ fully we need our own time of Pentecost. We ne the Hoy Spirit to come upon us. If this doesn’t happen, it is like a kettle plugged into a source of power but not switched on, so the power cannot flow to heat the water. Similarly if a glove has no hand to fill it, it is useless and does not fulfil the purpose for which it was made. The Holy Spirit gives us power to be witnesses for Jesus. That is the promise.

The Christian year reminds us of the key Christian beliefs. Haves: that god is our creator. Christmas that God came as flesh to be part of this creation alongside us. Easter that god loves and forgives us and seeks to bring hope and redemption. Pentecost that Christianity is not about words and rules and empty morality. But the Holy Spirit is given to empower us to live for Christ.

If you look at some of the attributes and activities of the Holy Spirit in scripture you will find that the Holy Spirit comforts (john 14.26), counsels (jn14.26). He is the spirit of truth (Jn16.13-14), he teaches (Jn 14.26), he speaks (jn 16.13, Acs 1.2). He anoints (KLk4.18, Acs 10.38), empowers (acs 20 gives gifts (1 cor 12). He convicts people of sin and wrongdoing (jn16.8). He delivers, (Roms 8.2) gives birth Jn3, gives life Jn6.63), prophecies (Acs 11.28), intercedes (Rom 8.26), works signs and miracles (Roms 15.19); makes people whole and holy (Rom 15.16). He declares and hears (John 16.13-14), and bears fruit (Gal 5.22).

He is not confined to this list, of course. He does much, much more, but you do not need to take my word for it. Look for yourself in the Bible and you will discover more truth. We must expect the Holy Spirit to do all of the above and more for us and through us for others as the Holt Spirit comes upon us and others. All for God’s glory.

Pray for the Holy Spirt to heal, to deliver, to convict, to bear fruit, to comforts, to send, to guide into truth. Remember we have a gift: use the gift. Be empowered.

I read the story of Jeanie Morgan the other day which shows how the Holy Spirit can be at work.

She had suffered the tragedy of the death of her youngest daughter Joanna, who drowned in their swimming pool. At that time neither she nor her husband were Christians. In fact she says she was very anti God because their first child was still born and she had blamed God for that.

After Joanna died, one of her earliest visitors to her house was the local vicar, David Pytches. She writes: If I am honest, I really didn’t feel very welcoming towards him, but he had come to offer his condolences and leave a bible with us. I decided to take him into our kitchen rather than making him more comfortable in the lounge. After some conversation and while we still standing in the kitchen, he asked if he could pray before he left. We agreed to it and as he prayed he asked Jesus to come into the kitchen by the power of the Holy Spirit. ‘How Odd!’ I thought. ‘Surely Jesus is in the church and He doesn’t come into kitchens!’ as David left I thanked him for coming and explained that I thought that as vicars go, he was a nice enough man, but I didn’t want anything he had to offer!

After David left us I noticed that every time I went into the kitchen I experienced a warmth that was nothing to do with wither the oven of the central heating. It soon became a place in which I wanted to spend time, which was quite unusual for me. I found myself drawn by something that I had no explanation for. I felt safe there.

Added to this, I was also experiencing something strange in the house. It was as if there were two hands suspended in space that were drawing me forward, and if I closed my eyes I could clearly see them. If I had my eyes I just had this impression of something or someone drawing me somewhere that was safe. I realised that if I mentioned this to anyone they would probably sedate me, thinking that the shock had finally made me flip! If only I could have spoken to a Christian, they would probably have explained that one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to lead us safely into truth – to lead us to Jesus.

My husband and I were aware that something was happening to us for which we had no language. We seemed to be able to offer peace and comfort to there without really trying. Friends and relations visited us in great distress and seemed to go away feeling comforted. We were obviously grieving in ourselves, but it felt as though in our pain we were being comforted on a whole new level. We couldn’t work out how that could be happening. Again we had no idea that the Holy Spirit is spoken of in the bible as the comforter.

My husband said one day, ‘I think it’s all those Christians down the road at the church. I think they are praying for us and some sort of electricity is being released upon us that is affecting us’. I agreed, as there seemed to be no other explanation. Little did we know that a far greater power was a work than electricity!

As I started to arrange details regarding Joanna’s funeral, I began to see pictures in my head. Once I saw a lovely white dress like a wedding dress and knew without a doubt that all those invited to the funeral should come as if they were coming to Joanna’s wedding. I had no idea at that point that in the Bible Jesus is spoken of as the bridegroom and the church as is bride.[[1]](#endnote-1)

To cut a long story short Jeannie Morgan then found exactly the white dress she had seen in her vision. The funeral was beautiful. She describes how the chapel was full of light and packed with people. She writes: ‘The Holy Spirit was present, comforting us and others through us. It will stay in my memory as Joanna’s wedding day because it was the day we ‘gave her’ to Jesus. Of course, we did then go through a long grieving process, but every step of the way the Holy Spirit did not leave me, leading me lovingly into the arms of Jesus so that I started to get to know him as my healer and later on as my saviour and my Lord. I started to read the Bible, learning truths from scripture, and began to go to the local church.

Jeannie Morgan now has a national ministry in helping people be empowered by the Holy Spirit

Next week we will talk more about the gift of the Holy Spirit and his power in our lives.

Friends we have a gift: the gift of the Spirit, who makes all the difference. We don’t just have a religion of words but also of power. The ability to change, to do and to make a difference. Whether it is the comfort and hope we needs in times of tragedy to the compassion and determination to change the world and fit poverty and injustice, lie what we will be focusing on next week in the Christian Aid Week: the gift is there to help us.

Receive the gift. Ask for the Holy Spirit to come upon you and empower you. Pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work in the lives and situations that concern you. We have a gift. We have been empowered.

1. Jeannie Morgan, Encounter the Holy Spirit, Monarch, 2011 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)