

The Promised Gift.

Pentecost Sunday

May 24, 2026

Nelson Cathedral

First reading Acts 2:1-21

Second reading 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Gospel John 7:37-39&20:19-23

Introduction

As we are now six months away from our general elections, we are used to the idea of election promises. Promises made - that our elected officials will make something good happen, put an end to some injustice, or improve our economy. All in the hope of getting your vote. And we know how we feel when election promises are delayed or broken.

But the same is true in all relationships:

- As children we make pinky-promises as a sign of the most important promise in the world at that time.
- As parents we make promises so our kids will do the very thing we have asked them to.
- And as yesterday was our 34th wedding anniversary, we can even think of the important promises we make – the vows we state during marriage.

Today as we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, we remember the promise that Jesus made to his disciples, that Jesus made to us, that even though he was leaving, he is still with us by His Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, will “**abide in you**” (14:17 and 23).

The coming of the Holy Spirit was Jesus’ promise, it was God’s plan all along so that the work of Jesus in our world would continue. So, what does that mean for us in terms of our intimacy with God and our empowerment from God?

Jesus and the Spirit

Throughout John's Gospel, more than any other Gospel, there is a close association between Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

- In chapter 1 as John the Baptist testified, Jesus was the one on whom the spirit descended and remained, and Jesus is the one whom then gives the Holy Spirit.
- In our reading from Chapter 7, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles when seven water ceremonies were held to remember God's gift of water from the rock while the Israelites were in the dessert, Jesus now describes himself as the source of living water – meaning the source of the Holy Spirit.

And remember when Jesus had died and his side pierced, both blood and water flowed. His death, his being lifted up in glory, made

possible the giving of life-giving water - his Spirit - for the world.

- And in Chapter 20, in the upper room as Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, he fulfilled that promise and breathed on them saying "receive the Holy Spirit".

In both Greek and Hebrew the word for wind, breath and spirit is the same, and so Jesus' breathing on them recalls God's life-giving breath, his spirit -the same spirit - in Genesis 2. The earthly mission of Jesus is now complete, the promise fulfilled and the Spirit is given.

- And if we recall the appearance of Jesus to Mary in the garden after the resurrection and her desire to hold onto him. Now the permanent presence of Jesus that Mary so desperately wanted in the garden has been granted.

- So at the end of John's Gospel, the eternal Word as John describes Jesus in chapter 1, is giving power to those who received him to become children of God, born from God himself. Here Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit. This is the moment of new birth from the Spirit - the streams of living water are now flowing.

The giving of the Holy Spirit

John's Gospel paints a very specific picture of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but maybe we are more familiar with the Pentecost account from Acts chapter 2, which is the second volume of Luke's Gospel.

After Jesus' ascension - his glorification - the Holy Spirit was given as tongues of fire and the sound of rushing wind, and the disciples spoke in different languages about Jesus and the salvation to be found only through him.

At first glance John and Acts seem like two very different accounts of the Spirit's coming. But I do not think we have to try and reconcile them into one consistent timeline or event.

- Both focus on Jesus as the giver of his Spirit and the fulfilment of His promise. In John Jesus is lifted up on the cross in glory. In Matthew, Mark and Luke the glorification of Jesus is at the ascension as he returns to the Father. And in both the Spirit, symbolised by water, breath or flame is given.
- Both point to the Spirit's empowerment of Jesus' disciples to continue the work of Jesus in the world.
- And in both, the Holy Spirit reveals the truth about Jesus.

That the first disciples would be empowered again, in a different way on Pentecost, does not eliminate the possibility they were filled with the

Spirit earlier, in fulfilment of all of Jesus' promises as recorded by John.

The Holy Spirit in our Lives.

So what about us, how is the promise of Jesus to be with us always by His Spirit a reality in our lives?

1. **Intimacy:** A couple of weeks ago as we looked at John 14, I mentioned several aspects of the Spirit's presence with us.
 - The Spirit as advocate, helper and comforter
 - But today I want to return to the idea in John 14, now fulfilled in John 20 of the Holy Spirit abiding in you and me. God through the Spirit of Jesus now lives in us.

Because Jesus has sent us His Spirit, we have received the sheer gift of unexpected intimacy with God.

The God who created everything, is not far and distant, but is right here with us and in us. As we say when we celebrate Holy communion:

- Kei konei te Ariki: The Lord is Here
- God's Spirit is with us.

It is amazing to realise the close and intimate relationship we can now have with God. As John wrote in his first letter:

By this we know that we abide in Him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit" (1Jn 4:13)

Our intimacy with Jesus is now experienced through the agency of the Holy Spirit. So to receive Christ is to obtain the Spirit – we cannot separate the two. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to experience the living presence of Jesus Christ within us.

2. **Power:** The second feature of Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit is to empower his disciples, to empower us, to be God's people, God's agents in this world.

What Jesus had achieved by his death and resurrection, the disciples were now

empowered to implement in the world through the Holy Spirit in them.

This is further emphasised by Paul as he talks to the Corinthians about the gifts of the Spirit for the common good, for building up the body of Christ. It is the Spirit that makes us one and binds us together.

To quote Bp Tom Wright:

The point of receiving the Holy Spirit, it's clear, is not to give the disciples 'new spiritual experiences' though to be sure they will have plenty. Nor is it to set them apart from ordinary people a sort of holier-than-thou-club, though to be sure they are called to live the rich full life of devotion and dedication that is modelled on Jesus' own. The point is so that they can do, in and for the world, what Jesus had been doing in Israel. "As the Father has sent me so I am sending you" (20:21).

It is through his disciples that the achievement of Jesus – his good news which occurred in one time and place, now affects all other times and places as the message of salvation moves from the Jewish world to the whole world. And the disciples of Jesus – including you and me – are empowered to take it and share it.

Their life and ours, are now lived in response to what Jesus is prompting through His Spirit in the world.

Conclusion

As we celebrate Pentecost Sunday today, let us not forget this event fulfils all that Jesus promised. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' Spirit, offering us the intimate and powerful presence of our Lord.

To experience the Holy Spirit is to experience Jesus himself - Jesus is always with us, which sustains us and gives us hope as we look forward in the fulness of God's time to Jesus' return.

I want to close with a quote from Gary Burge in the NIV Application Commentary (some of which I used a few weeks ago):

The Spirit is not an independent agent sent on a mission to equip and inspire us. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit ushers to us the presence of the Father and the Son to indwell us and to share fellowship with us... God is on our side. He is at work renewing us and loving us. This is the gospel.

May we let the Holy Spirit fall upon us, fill us, dwell in us, and renew us, so that as individuals and as God's Church we can be all that God intends us to be.

Amen.