

Trinity 13: Evensong 2020 – Carol Shepherd: *Ezekiel 12:21-13:16, Acts 19:1-20*

*Father, so that we all may be inspired to share our faith in the power of the Spirit, I pray for you to speak through me words of wisdom and truth. Amen*

Being a Christian without the Holy Spirit is like having a puzzle and finding piece missing. It can never be completed, neither can we be completely Christian. The key element is the living presence of God in the life all believers.

It took Ezekiel time and effort to convince the Israelites that they were rebellious and going against God. He was telling the false prophets to stop prophesying. They proclaimed they were giving a true message and claimed they had authority. But whose authority did they have? It was what they thought, ideas made up by themselves. It was from their own hearts and speech. They were only men filled with false confidence. They said what they thought people wanted to hear. They said peace when there was not peace.

Ezekiel was warning the Israelites that their Prophets were not from God. The walls; the ideas, were not godly, but were to make people feel that 'all is ok'. They 'whitewashed' everything so as to be liked and respected, they said, 'Says the Lord' but they weren't sent by God.

So much today is said to cover up situations, decisions, ungodly ways of living that are totally against God's ways. Nations have been deceived and wars caused by greed and power struggles, family breakdowns, even what the world is going through with the pandemic is caused by unrighteous living. Ezekiel was sent to warn them -repent and turn away from sin and return to the one and only God. Otherwise they would feel God's wrath. John the Baptist was sent to warn people of the coming Messiah. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I have baptised you with water but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit'

This is why, when Paul arrived in Ephesus and asked some disciples had they received the Holy Spirit, they said they hadn't heard of it. Paul's first question to the believers is not "How were you baptized?" (although he does get around to that). His first question is whether they have received the Holy Spirit Do they live their lives aware of, open to, filled with, and guided by the Spirit of God? That really is the key question of this passage, and a question worth directing to ourselves and our own communities of faith today. Regardless of how or where we were baptized, how is our life in the Spirit now? How are we living out our baptism now?

Paul stayed two years in Ephesus teaching and preaching to the people from Asia, both Jews and Greeks. Some accepted that the truth of Jesus Christ was the only Way to be right with God. Even, some false Prophets, sorcerers like in the OT times, believed and gave up their evil practises and burned all their valuable books to follow Jesus. They turned from being sinful to being righteous and filled with the Holy Spirit.

It's really only in the last few decades that the modern church has preached on the Holy Spirit in a more profound way. When I was a child, I was taught about the baby Jesus and I

had heard the story of the crucifixion in my RE lessons, but they didn't mean anything to me, they were just stories. Unfortunately, today, many people don't even know the story. Yes, I had been baptised as a baby. Promises were made to bring me up in the Christian faith, but it didn't happen. If any official paperwork that needed there was always the question about faith and it was put down as C of E, Church of England. But I now know that this didn't make me a Christian. It was a denomination, not a faith. I didn't even go to church. It took God 40 years to prepare me and start me seeking the real story and ask Jesus into my life.

I believe there are many people who know the story of Jesus and many can quote word for word the Gospel, but do they truly, personally know Jesus, the Christ? Are they complete like a jigsaw, filled with the Holy Spirit, set on fire for God? If I were to ask anyone 'Do you believe you will go to heaven when you die?', what do you think the reply would be? Or if God said 'why should I let you in to heaven?' I wonder what the answer would be?

To be living completely in the faith, there has to be no doubt about Jesus. He took our sins upon himself on the cross, died and was raised on the third day. We are totally forgiven and loved and have eternal life, all through the grace and forgiveness of a loving Father. We are given the gift of faith when we repent of our sins and personally accept Jesus as our Saviour. When we claim with our mouth and believe in our hearts, that Jesus died for us, rose again and that God loves us, then we can truly say we are Christians. But it doesn't end there. Being baptised into the Christian faith starts us off on our Christian journey, but it's what we do with our new lives that is important. As children, our Godparents and parents made the decision to bring us up in the Christian faith. But that doesn't make us Christians. It's a choice we want to make when we realize that we need to follow Jesus Christ and accept Him as our own Saviour.

It may mean giving up some things we think we need or 'we've always done it that way.' But don't be like the pharisees or the false prophets or those who follow other ways because they have been deceived or go where 'the grass is always greener on the other side'. Knowing Jesus changes us, or at least it should. With the power of the Holy Spirit alive in us, we are called to share with others and not keep the Good News to ourselves. I know that it doesn't guarantee a life with no problems, but with Christ beside us, and the gifts of the Spirit within us, and the love of our heavenly Father, we should be attracting people-like magnets attract. We need to step out of our comfort zones, be proud of our faith, even if it's easier to say nothing.

As it says in Matt 10v19, *'Don't worry about how you are to speak, or what you will say, for what you are about to say will be given to you at that time. For it not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.'*

So be complete in the Lord. Live for Him, with Him and in Him, and all things will be added unto you.

Let us pray: *Father, thank you that we aren't on our own. Through Your Son Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit to inspire and enable us to share our faith in thought word and deed. May we be seen to be people alive in the faith of Christ Jesus. Amen.*