

Pentecost: linked up to the power!



Fifty days on from Easter Sunday the Church celebrates Pentecost. It marks the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples and believers who were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. The event is recorded in Acts 2 and it tells of the Spirit coming with dramatic signs; a sound like a rushing wind, the appearance of flames of fire and the ability given to the apostles to preach the Good News in languages they had not learned.

When Jesus had earlier spoken to his disciples about the coming of the Spirit, he emphasised spiritual power. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8). And that promise was marvellously fulfilled. When the Spirit came on that Pentecost morning, the apostles began to witness boldly. They preached salvation in the name of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus (Acts 2:37-42). On that day some three thousand men and women believed in Jesus as Lord and Messiah and were baptised (v.41).

Later it is recorded that the apostles gave testimony to Christ’s resurrection ‘with great power’ (Acts 4:33). All through the book of Acts we see the Christian church preaching and witnessing, suffering and serving with great spiritual power. Even their enemies spoke of them as ‘turning the world upside down’ (Acts 17:6).

At this Pentecost season we need to recapture the power of the Spirit. Perhaps our lack of power is because something has gone wrong with our spiritual connections. Maybe we are not ‘linked up’ to the Spirit as those early Christians were. I recall an event of many years ago that illustrates the importance of being ‘linked up.’ I had returned home from college during the summer holidays to the farm in Northern Ireland where I had grown up. Some months earlier electrical power had come to that part of the country for the first time.

One evening in late August, I visited one of our neighbours. His farm lay next to ours and I was talking with him in one of his fields. Across his farm and ours there had been installed a line of wooden poles. These poles supported the electric cables. We were standing near one of these poles and it carried a notice stamped into an aluminium plate. It warned that some 33,000 volts of electric power were running through the wires. As we stood there that summer evening, we could hear the current humming in the wires. An hour later I was in my neighbour’s home – and it was lit with oil lamps! He had 33,000 volts of electric power passing over his farm but he had none in his house. He was not ‘linked up’ to the supply.

Often in the church we are like that. We have the services, the programmes, the plans, the personnel – but not the power of the Spirit that convicts sinners and brings them to faith in Jesus. There is little danger that we will turn even the parish upside down, much less the world! This Pentecost celebration is a time to get ‘linked up’ to the Holy Spirit.

The Revd Dr Herbert McGonigle, Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology and Church History at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, England.