

SERMON – 6/6/21
“The Anointing Spirit”

1 John 2:18-29

“Christ has poured out His Spirit on you... Obey the Spirit's teaching, then, and remain in union with Christ.” (1 John 2:27)

This morning we continue to look at the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost Sunday we encountered the Holy Spirit as the *Advocate*, the One who comes alongside us, the Helper, the Comforter, the Counsellor, the Friend; and last Sunday we considered how by the Holy Spirit we may be *adopted* into God's family and given the privilege and security of knowing God as a perfectly loving parent.

This morning's A-word is 'anointing' and we'll come in a moment to think about what that means, but I want to start today with an ancient prayer, words from a hymn written in the 9th century, a hymn which is often used at services of ordination and also just before the moment of anointing at the coronation of a monarch.

Let's pray: “Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire and lighten with celestial fire; Thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart. Thy blessed unction from above is comfort, life, and fire of love; enable with perpetual light the dullness of our mortal sight.” Amen

We are perhaps familiar with the biblical accounts of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism – heaven is torn open and like a dove the Spirit comes down upon Him. We are probably also familiar with the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first disciples at Pentecost – there is a sound like the blowing of a violent wind and what appear to be tongues of fire settling upon each of them and they are filled, we're told, with the Holy Spirit. There are other accounts in the Book of Acts where the Holy Spirit comes upon those who believe, in some cases *before* they are baptised in water, in other cases after, and in his Letters the apostle Paul teaches about manifestations of the Spirit for the common good – gifts of the Spirit (everything from teaching, prophetic gifts and the gift of discernment, from miraculous powers of healing and speaking in tongues to the gift of administration, the greatest gift (love) and the sevenfold gifts that Isaiah writes about (and that were referenced in that prayer) – wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and

fear of the Lord). Of course there is also the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We shouldn't ever imagine that the influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people can be reduced to a list, or neatly packaged. Throughout the Christian centuries the manifestations of the Spirit have been evident in different ways and have been expressed and explained in different ways, and that should not surprise us because Jesus Himself spoke about those who are born of the Spirit being blown as by the wind, unable to tell where that wind has come from or where it is going. So it is with the Spirit.

Sometimes, olive oil has been poured as a sign of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The Letter of James speaks about anointing with oil for healing and of course from ancient Israel to our own land, oil is used to anoint the monarch as he or she is crowned – it's not insignificant that the word for anointing in OT Hebrew is *mashiach* (from which our word Messiah comes) and in NT Greek it is *christos* (from which we get Christ). Jesus was *the* Anointed One, set apart and touched by the Holy Spirit for the supreme and unique role He had to fulfil in the eternal purposes of God, but God's anointing did not begin with Jesus and it did not end with Him. Over the centuries the Holy Spirit has anointed and set apart countless individuals for countless different tasks, each according to the gifts imparted by that anointing, from Old Testament prophets, shepherds, kings, priests and musicians to folk like you and me, ordinary followers of Jesus who are made extraordinary by the fact that by the Spirit of God we are brought to a new birth and commissioned for the royal service of the King of kings.

“Lord, Thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.”
Come, Holy Spirit, anoint us and set us apart for the tasks you have for each one of us.

Sometimes, heaven has been torn open as at Jesus' baptism and on the Day of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has been tangible, even visible. At times, for individuals, for churches, for communities and whole nations there may be a wonderful, almost physical anointing of the Holy Spirit when heaven opens and spiritual fire burns. From the end of 1949 right through until 1952 during what is known as the Lewis Revival, the very presence of God was known not only in church meetings on the island

but everywhere from dance halls and police stations to people's homes and open fields. Sometimes inexplicably and even in the middle of the night people would gather seeking God with their whole heart, and in that period perhaps upwards of 20,000 people came to a living faith in Christ, most of them being converted before they ever entered a church building.

Sometimes it is less dramatic. Sometimes an individual will be bathed in the certainty that God is near, invigorated by the enlivening Breath of Christ. Sometimes individuals are given an other-worldly ability to bring blessing to others in a way they had never dreamed or thought possible. Sometimes the Holy Spirit anoints words – prayer and the reading and preaching of God's Word and those words touch people deeply to heal or to transform. Sometimes it is in the midst of a Spirit-anointed silence that God is made known and that peace which passes all understanding descends in the hush.

Lord, enable with perpetual light the dullness of our mortal sight. Come, Holy Spirit, revive us again that your people may rejoice in you.

Sometimes, as in the situation we read of from the 1st Letter of John earlier, the Church was in danger of being led astray – there were individuals and groups who were well in with the church life of the day but who were actually, John describes them here, 'enemies of Christ' because they said that Jesus was not the Messiah and they rejected both the Father and the Son. Situations like that can arise in the church in any age and cause immense damage. In this case, somehow by the grace of God, these people sensed that they did not belong to the fellowship and they left, but in other situations their influence might have led the congregation down the wrong path. What is it that makes the difference? John writes to those remaining in the church: “As for you, you have had the Holy Spirit poured out on you and so all of you know the truth... No lie ever comes from the truth.” At a time when the church faces many challenges from many different sides and people are looking for leadership, for clarity as to the direction that must be taken, how we need to pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit, upon us all but especially upon our leaders at every level in the local church, at Presbytery and nationally in the General Assembly. Notwithstanding the challenges, there are times of great opportunity for us in the church in our land at this time, but how careful we need to be not simply to follow the sweetest-sounding siren voice, but to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

Lord, Thy blessed unction from above is comfort, life, and fire of love. Come, Holy Spirit, and move among us at this time.

So let me invite each one of you this week to pray for the Spirit's anointing – pray it for yourself, that you may know the hand of God upon you at this time, being confident of the way you should take in these days and the service you are called and appointed to give.

– pray it for one another, those with whom you have to do most frequently in the church and those you admire and are inspired by, that as we fellowship we may be impelled and driven forward by the wind of the Spirit and fulfil the purpose God has for us in our community.

– pray it for me and for others who lead in different capacities in our church, that we may be protected from deceit and lies and shame and instead lead the church forward in the truth, in eternal life as children of God.

And may it be said of us as a congregation as John wrote of another fellowship of God's people in this morning's reading: “Christ has poured out His Spirit on you. His Spirit teaches you about everything and what he teaches you is true, not false. Obey the Spirit's teaching, then, and remain in union with Christ.”

“Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire and lighten with celestial fire; Thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart. Thy blessed unction from above is comfort, life, and fire of love; enable with perpetual light the dullness of our mortal sight.” Amen