

We have a guest blogger this week, none other than Revd. Mark Wakelin, a former President of the Methodist Conference. Mark has prepared for us a challenging piece on the theme of Pentecost...

Notes 'The Gifts of the Spirit'

23rd May 2021

Challenging and Painful

A generation after the renewal movement with some challenging and painful lessons. How can we remain open to God's renewing and creative Spirit?

These thoughts are in many ways personal to my own journey. You will have your own. In a sense they are half a conversation, my response to what I feel I have heard over the last fifty years. You may well have your own questions and responses! However, I can only speak personally, and look at Scriptures, the early Church, and our more recent story. My own desire is to remain open to God.

What is your own experience of the renewal movement and the Church's response to it?

First, they are only a sign not a proof nor a destination:

Read Acts 2:42-47

The first Christians had healthy habits. What would the healthy habits in Acts 2:41 look like for us today?

The Signs and Wonders in Acts 2:43 are a consequence of their discipleship. They are the result of 'abiding in Christ' as we have been reading about in the last few weeks (John 15:4). The 'healthy habits' are some practical ways for this 'abiding'

We should move to where the signs are pointing not get stuck on the roadside with the signs themselves.

Second, they are a gift not a certificate of achievement:

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

What is the significance of the Holy Spirit 'as a gift' for you? Can you identify any particular gifts that you have, or people you know have?

A gift is not earned, but you have to be willing to receive it and be in the right place to do so! It is like catching the wind on a yacht.

Third, they are 'of the light' not 'of the occult':

Jesus 'I am the light of the world' John 8:12

Occult means hidden; the early Church struggled with this idea. The *Gnostics* believed in hidden truth revealed to a select few and were a threat to Christianity. Jesus came for everyone, not just a special few.

Receiving the Holy Spirit is not a way of having 'inside knowledge of God'. It doesn't set you apart from 'ordinary Christians', having special gifts and knowledge. It is part of the whole work of God's revelation in creation, in human beings made in God's image, and above all in Jesus who is 'the light of the world'. There is no room for 'Christian superiority' in God's gracious giving!

What have you learned of God through the Holy Spirit?

Fourth, they are natural and not supernatural:

They are part of the created order and therefore 'a normal response' to certain experiences, not special proof of God's presence. We long for 'proof' (see Matthew 12:38) but don't need that proof, for all creation speaks of God, and we can all understand everything we will ever need to know about God through Jesus who was 'the image of the invisible God.' (Colossians 1:15). Speaking in tongues, for example, is not just a Christian phenomenon, it is a bit like laughing; a gift that happens when you experience God in a particular way. It is a happy gift! But like laughter, you can speak in tongues but not have love. 1 Corinthians 13:1. Not all Christians speak in tongues and not all people who speak in tongues follow Christ.

Why might God want to give these particular gifts?

Fifth, they are given to help:

Not to boast about or divide but to encourage and empower; to help in speaking to God (tongues) or building the Church (prophecy) 1 Corinthians 14:1-40

We may learn from the Church's story!

The Holy Spirit wasn't given once a long time ago but is poured out on all who have been baptised, 'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Wesley's story of assurance.

Julian of Norwich's revelation of divine love.

What other stories have you found helpful? What questions do they raise in your Christian journey?

Receive the Holy Spirit

Jesus 'breathed on them' John 20:22.

How do Christians catch the wind, or receive the gift? It is a journey of prayer, fellowship, action and celebration. Holy habits! See Acts 2:42 again.

Think of one or two things that you have found challenging in the Scriptures today.

Jesus still says to us - 'Receive the Holy Spirit'

What might be a next step for you?