

John 20:19-23

Jesus and the Disciples

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Judaeans. Jesus came and stood in the middle of them.

“Peace be with you”, he said.

With these words, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Master.

“Peace be with you”, he said to them again. As the Father has sent me, so I’m sending you.

With that, he breathed on them.

“Receive the Holy Spirit”, he said. If you forgive anyone’s sins they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them they are not forgiven.

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ.

Acts2:1-21

John 20:19-23

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I am just going to repeat verse 22-23 of John chapter 20

With that, he breathed on them,
“Receive the Holy Spirit”, he said.

If you forgive anyone’s sins they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them they are not forgiven.

Well, at this moment in time, we are not advising you to go out and breathe on people – unless you want to become very unpopular that is.

“Receive the Holy Spirit, he said. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you refuse to forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Do you cringe, as I do, at the thought that we have the authority to forgive other people their sins; and so release them by forgiving them or refusing forgiveness and so keeping them bound?

Well, if you don’t – you should.

And, of course, **we** do not have this authority.
The authority belongs to Jesus.

When we first prayed the prayer of commitment to Jesus, as part of that, we were all given a new purpose in life; to share the Good News of Jesus in as many ways as we were able.

It is so easy to lose that sense of purpose in life, especially in times like we are experiencing just now. It's easy for us to take the advice of "one day at a time" to begin to mean this is all there is. Because, eventually of course, tomorrow will come and some of us will look back at this time with thanksgiving and sadly some will look back with sorrow. It is a time that will pass as time does.

The purpose in life that we were given, when we first asked to become a follower of Jesus, was to continue the work Jesus had begun during his time on earth by spreading the Good News of salvation as far and as wide as we are able.

At the moment that may be in conversations via various apps or telephone conversations, by simply being there for someone, posting a card of encouragement to someone who is lonely or even beginning to despair; or just random acts of kindness as and when we can.

We can do all these things, in the name of Jesus, even in lockdown.

The Good News of Jesus Risen is the promise of eternal love and forgiveness for all.

The Good News comes from God and because of the Holy Spirit in us we are given the authority to speak in the name of Jesus.

So, it doesn't really matter if we, as weak human beings, actually want to forgive the sins of others; and we know people can be capable of many unthinkable and seemingly unforgivable acts.

If people confide in us and we are horrified by their confession – it really makes no difference, because if that person genuinely wants to repent we are obliged to offer forgiveness in the name of Jesus because Jesus forgives all who repent and turn to him.

We are not acting in our own authority we are acting in the authority of the power of the Holy Spirit at work through us.

That does not mean that wrong doing can be overlooked, by simply confessing. The sin/wrong doing has got to be answered for, morally or legally or both. There are consequences to every act, but, if a person is serving time in prison – this does not mean that are not forgiven by God.

As Christians, we will all have been in that place of seeking forgiveness for things we have thought or done and so we can identify with the sense of lightness that comes through

knowing Jesus forgives us and loves us no matter, what our past history.

The Holy Spirit is the cleansing, strengthening power of God at work in us and in all who believe, and Pentecost is the traditional time for the church to celebrate that.

We pray, come Holy Spirit, come.

And we rejoice, because we don't have to strive or barter or beg. We pray, come Holy Spirit, come and we are confident in the knowledge that he does.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is experienced differently in every person. Sometimes it will be in a very dramatic way, sometimes it will be in a quiet gently comforting way. Sometimes we don't feel any different.

I have never seen tongues of fire descend as described in Acts, but I have seen people weeping in repentance, or laughing with unconfined joy, speaking out in an unknown language or tongue, or just simply sitting or standing quietly and "being" in the presence of God.

These are all very different, personal and authentic ways of our encountering God by his Spirit.

I want to spend a short time thinking about the gift of "speaking in tongues."

I have known people who deny the presence of the Holy Spirit if the gift of tongues is not experienced. I have known this wrong thinking to cause much pain and in some cases actually block the work of the spirit in that person's life.

I have known people who are afraid of others who practise this gift, or not afraid of the person but wary of the gift, because it's out of our understanding. But all gifts of the Spirit are out of our understanding because they are not of us, they are of God. The gifts of the Spirit are spiritual gifts not human talents. Of course, God does sometimes take a human talent and give a spiritual power to it when we offer it in service.

Whether that be music, admin., hospitality etc.

Speaking in tongues is a useful gift to be able to use in prayer when we cannot know how else to pray, or to praise when our words run out. "Speaking in tongues" is very often, a way of getting in touch with deeply buried emotions and bringing them to the surface in praise, celebration, grief or sorrow, and it is a blessing, so its right to ask for the gift.

However, it becomes dangerous when we believe that it's one of the most important gifts and essential, in fact Paul sees it as a minor gift.

Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 12 and the three first in line are Wisdom, Knowledge (which I interpret, rightly or wrongly, as understanding) and thirdly Faith.

These are the gifts of the Spirit we should be praying for if we are serious in fulfilling the purpose we were given, when we committed our lives to following Jesus.

Spiritual gifts are not rewards to be enjoyed, like sweets, for good behaviour, but tools in order to spread the word of salvation to all who are open to receiving it.

Just because we are blessed with an insight of wisdom one day, does not mean that overnight we have become very wise people; people who offer their wisdom to all and sundry, unasked for, can be very annoying.....so I am told!!

We may be given wisdom for someone one day and another be given it on different day. Once we begin to think of ourselves as wise or the only person God can possibly use in a particular situation, it can be a bit of a leveller when God points our failings to us, through someone else...as in my experience he invariably does.

1 Cor. 12:11

All the gifts are produced by one and the same Spirit. He gives gifts to each person, just as he decides.

Come Holy Spirit come. Amen.

