

337 Pentecost and PLUTO

Things would never be the same again after Jesus' death and resurrection. After the seven-year ministry in their midst, first of John the Baptist, and then of the Lord Himself, the Jews blatantly rejected Jesus their Messiah: with terrible words – “Crucify! ... We have no king but Caesar! ... His blood be upon us and on our children!” (John 19.6,15 / Matthew 27.25, and on that latter point, how right they proved to be); and then with terrible deeds, carried out by Roman, Gentile hands.

So the time had come for God the Father to pass the “baton” of His Truth from the Jews, His original covenant people, to something wholly new – to “the Church”, the “ekklesia”, literally, the “called-out ones”. This was a wholly new thing, unforeseen by the Old Testament prophets and unexpected by Jesus' disciples, and as such is described by the Holy Spirit through Paul as being “a mystery” (eg., Ephesians 3.1-12).

Jesus thus prepared His disciples for the new realities. First, to come in Jesus' place after His ascension He promised them – “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth ... ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14.16-18, KJV). What deep words of comfort are these, for Jesus' disciples of then, and now!

Second, in Acts 1.4, Jesus told them to remain in Jerusalem, and to wait “for the promise of the Father” regarding the giving of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were not to concern themselves at that time with questions over the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (vv 6-7), but to focus on their new mission - “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1.8, KJV).

In Acts 2 we have the well-known passage of the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost on all who were gathered in Christ's name “with one accord in one place” (2.1). God the Father and God the Son had kept their promise – no surprise there – as “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (v 4).

Here then is the birth of “the Church”, whose members at this point were still only Jewish. It took another three years before the Holy Spirit was

outpoured in similar fashion on the Gentiles, gathered in the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, an event which caused “they of the circumcision”, that is the Jewish believers in Jesus, jaw-dropping astonishment (Acts 10.44-48)!

The “other tongues” of Acts 2 were known languages of the Mediterranean area, (rather than the ecstatic, unknown “tongues of praise to God” as spoken of in I Corinthians 14 for example), whose content was very straightforward - “we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (2.11). As the crowds gathered enquiring what all this racket was about, Peter stood up and “got stuck in” (2.14-40)!

So straightaway the now-indwelling Holy Spirit made all the difference. Until then, the disciples had already possessed all the knowledge and confidence they needed to proclaim “Jesus Christ as Lord”. But crucially they still needed the Holy Spirit to be not only WITH them, but IN them, both corporately and individually, to enable their witnessing to be effective.

The 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy has just been solemnly marked. After gaining that vital bridgehead in 1944, by the grace of God and at terrible cost, the Allies then had to move across Europe into Germany itself. They had everything they needed for that long task but relied completely on one thing more – abundant fuel. Much of that fuel came, remarkably, via PLUTO – Pipe-Line-Under-The-Ocean – a system of 3-inch diameter lead-lined pipes laid on the seabed of the English Channel through which fuel was pumped from southern England across to the fighting forces in France and beyond.

PLUTO is not a bad picture of the Holy Spirit being given at Pentecost – the provision of the vital, life-giving, mission-enabling “oomf” which we, the members of “the ekklesia”, need to keep fuelling our witnessing, until all the Father’s prophecies have come gloriously to pass in Christ.

Each morning we can humbly ask God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, to fill us afresh with His Holy Spirit as He sees fit, that our discipleship may remain effective as we witness to the crucified, risen, ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ “unto the uttermost part of the earth”.