

“Wait, there is more”, a sermon based on Isaiah 43:1-7, Acts 8:14-17 and Luke 3:15-22 preached on 13 January 2019 in Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright.

This sermon is in the genre of those television advertisements where a product is displayed, and then the words come – “... but wait there is more.” This is a “But wait, there is more” sermon.

It is there in the reading from Isaiah, which begins, but now, an invitation for the people of Judah who had been in captivity to experience the more of their new freedom.

It is there in the reading from Acts as Peter and John prayed that the people in Samaria who had accepted the word of God might receive the Holy Spirit.

This morning I want to reflect on the gospel reading.

There were people who thought John the Baptist was enough, enough to be the Messiah, the one to liberate Israel.

We can understand why.

- He was a moral man, a person of integrity, good ethically. An inspiring example.
- He was faithful to the faith, a prophet, sadly subject to the consequences of being a prophet.
- He was a person of conviction, he put his life on the line for what he believed in. Courageous.
- He stood up to Herod. He stood against the oppressive power of the time. He acted on his convictions even when it put his life at risk, to the point of death. A courageous, faithful leader.
- Humble ... he pointed away from himself, to the one who he said was greater than himself.
- He gathered a significant movement of followers, including Jesus himself. Jesus must have recognised John as a persuasive, compelling leader worth following.

He had, it seems, the qualities of a Messiah - one to lead, one to redeem Israel.

There are people who see Jesus as like John. For them that kind of Jesus is enough.

The ethics. The standing against the oppressive rulers of our age. The acting with conviction and courage. An example who established a movement.

But wait ... John believed there was something more.

He was a step on the way.

“I baptise you with water, but one more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Now there is a lot going for water baptism.

You can see it, feel it, experience it.

Its tangible, tactile.

People know what water is.

Spirit though, less tangible.

Despite that, John points beyond water to us being immersed with the Holy Spirit.

Christ will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

With the spirit who broods over the waters in creation

With the wind who blows from the far corners of the universe

With the breath filling the prophets who speak truth to power and people

With the spirit who descends on disciples gathered in a room at Pentecost propelling them into the streets

With the spirit who is God with us now and always, here and everywhere.

The Spirit who is the air of the coming realm of God, near at hand.

Christ will immerse you in Holy Spirit.

Empowering us to live towards the coming realm of God.

In just over a week, the United States marks Martin Luther King day, on the anniversary of his birth. We know King as an eloquent speaker for civil rights. We know him as a courageous, positive figure, proclaiming non-violence in the face of provocation, hope in the face of fear, who told people that things could change, that freedom would come. But what was seen in public was not always how it was for King in private. There were times when the stress and pressure overwhelmed him. One night, sitting at the kitchen table, his head buried in his hands, he felt at the end of his resources. And in desperation, exhausted, alone, he called to God. At that moment, he said, a peace took hold of my soul, a confidence that with God I had the resources to face what was ahead. He did not know that the following day his house would be bombed putting at risk his family inside.

Christ immersed Martin Luther King in Holy Spirit to live and lead towards the coming realm of God.

And what of the fire? Fire is associated with judgement. Winnowing fork. Gathering the wheat into the granary. Burning the chaff with unquenchable flames. And judgement is about putting things right, overturning injustice, exposing falsehood, revealing truth.

The name of Charles Colson is known to people who lived through the years of the Watergate scandal of 1974. Colson was White House Counsel, a key advisor to Richard Nixon, then President of the United States. Colson was associated with others in a dirty tricks campaign against Presidential opponents, including the infamous break-in of the Democratic Headquarters in the Watergate building. Along with many others, Colson was sentenced to imprisonment. Before the scandal broke, Colson saw himself as above others, impervious, protected by the President. As truth began to emerge, Colson experienced judgement, not just through the judicial process, but in his heart, in his way of being. A close friend of Colson challenged what he had done and the mindset that led to it in a way Colson could not dismiss. At one point, his friend said directly to him, Watergate was plain wrong. You made a serious mistake. You had to make opponents enemies and then you had to destroy your enemies. It was wrong.

Initially Colson resisted the criticism. Its Washington politics, he said. Dog eat dog. Everyone does it. And as he talked, he began to sense how hollow those words were. His friend read a part of CS Lewis's Mere Christianity about pride. Colson said that he recognised himself in the words. He felt exposed and unclean, his defences crumbling. Then his friend prayed. And although the outward Colson seemed untouched, inside change had begun.

As his friend prayed, Colson felt an energy flowing over him, disarming him. Undermining the pride and arrogance, the hollowness and the self-centredness. And so began a journey, his reimagining of himself. Not the top of the pile, or the go to person, or the President's counsel.

The fire of intense love in which we experience truth. Judgement.

Christ baptises with fire. Living towards the realm of God involves searing truthfulness.

Now there is more to Holy Spirit and Fire than I have described. It is more than personal experience, but it is not less than personal experience.

This Holy Spirit, this fire, is God's sustaining available everyday everyplace power, waiting to be engaged, if we would risk praying.

The Spirit of Christ is available to us, for us to be immersed in, as we seek to live towards the coming realm of God.

This year our readings are from the gospel of Luke.

One of the themes of Luke is prayer. Through the year we will keep hearing about people praying.

When Jesus had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened.

The Holy Spirit descended.

And a voice came from heaven.

Malcolm Guite:

Beginning here we glimpse the Three-in-one;
The river runs, the clouds are torn apart,
The Father speaks, the Spirit and the Son
Reveal to us the single loving heart
That beats behind the being of all things
And calls and keeps and kindles us to light.
The dove descends, the spirit soars and sings
'You are beloved, you are my delight!'

“The single loving heart that beats behind the being of all things and calls and keeps and kindles us to light ... “

Wait, there is more – immersion in Holy Spirit and fire.

KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN *alive to God's Spirit*



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