

The Opposite of Self-Help!

Acts 2¹⁻²¹; Psalm 104^{2-end}; 1 Corinthians 12^{3b-13}; John 20¹⁹⁻²³

Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'are not all these speaking Galilean?' (Acts 2⁷)

Does your faith still have the element of surprise?

You could be forgiven, if you were a disciple, for thinking you had been part of all the surprises you wanted to be part of by the time the day of Pentecost had arrived: you had left home and family to be Jesus' disciples, something that responsible family men didn't do; as disciples you had experienced the three year roller-coaster of teaching, miracles and challenges; the death of Jesus wasn't at all how you saw things working out; the resurrection really wasn't what you expected; the ascension, still fresh in your mind after only 10 days, was remarkable; yet on this day of Pentecost there were more surprises!

How do we get from that dynamic experience of God to the monotonous and boring 'thing' that the Church has, too often, become?

You probably know that the modern Pentecostal movement began in the Azusa Street revival in 1905 where the one-eyed son of slaves, William J Seymour, simply took Scripture at face value and expected that if the Bible said people should speak in tongues, then that is what should happen. In 1906, whilst segregation was at its height, men and women, black and white, educated and illiterate came together to be part of this movement. One observer wrote:

No instruments of music are used. None are needed. No collections are taken. No bills have been posted to advertise the meetings. No Church organisation is at the back of it. All who are in touch with God realise as soon as they enter the meetings that the Holy Ghost is the leader.

God was there in the Holy Spirit - that made a difference.

Are you up for the same risk? What do you want from God?

In the passage that has come to be known as the Johanne Pentecost, Jesus offers two things:

- ✦ **Peace** - mentioned twice and the real antidote to the **fear*** that **locked...the doors of the house**. It is *shalom* so being at peace with God, the world, neighbours and yourself.
- ✦ **Forgiveness** - not just being forgiven but the ability to forgive others.

Paul begins his famous list of gifts by pointing out the main point - **no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit**. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit - it is the confession of faith that proves this! Whatever else you may or may not have, this is universal for Christians.

- ✦ **Wisdom** and **knowledge** are quiet gifts, but necessary for the maturity of the Church.
- ✦ **Faith, healing** and **miracles** make a difference to others.
- ✦ **Prophecy, discernment, tongues** and **interpretation** serve the Church and show that God can intervene (and often has a sense of humour).

These gifts are meant to unify the Church - **for in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and were all made to drink of one Spirit**.

The Holy Spirit isn't a divine approach to self-help: it is a dynamic gift for the Church and for Christians that reminds us - if we have the faith to ask - that God can still surprise us.

- * Following the terrorist attack in Manchester and London the refusal to be afraid is the result of peace and a faith grounded on God. Remember Luther's great hymn 'A safe stronghold our God is still,' which says:

*And though they take my life,
Goods, honour, children, wife,
yet is their profit small - these things shall vanish all:
the city of God remaineth*