

Given by Grace

SLIDE 1:

During the service earlier this month, Avril shared with us how she is hungry and wants MORE:

- More of the experience of the work of the Spirit in her and through her;
- More boldness to speak;
- More of the Gifts of the Spirit – that she might experience and use the awesome power of the Holy Spirit for the good of others
- More of God.

The following week, Pam talked about the need to keep our lamps filled with oil. To be ready for the day of the Lord's coming. She reminded us that the infilling of the Spirit when first we accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and accepted the gift of forgiveness and salvation – was not the end, but rather the beginning of our journey with the Lord.

Pam's message was clear and timely, I suggest. We need to keep seeking to renew, refresh, and strengthen our relationship with God, with Jesus, through the work of the Spirit in us.

At the end of that second service, Avril stood and said that she felt that these two messages – back-to-back as they were – may be the prompting of the Spirit for our church, for Mangawhai Baptist, to seek out more of the Spirit in our lives and the life and ministry of the church in our community.

This got me to thinking (a challenge at the best of times) – I was thinking about:

- The gifts of the Spirit
- The fruits of the Spirit
- And what work does the Spirit do in us and
- What is it intended to produce.

The English word "spirit" comes from the Latin word *spiritus*, which means "breath," "breathing," or "wind".

In Genesis we read: “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” So, is this spirit, this breath of life, actually the very life we have within us? That part of us that is spirit and can therefore experience, even know, God's Holy Spirit.

I know, as I'm sure you do, what the Bible says about the Spirit. But I don't claim to really understand it, or to have experienced it as fully as I believe God intends. I am heartened by the passage that Avril shared from Paul's letter to the Philippians, when he wrote:

SLIDE 2:

Philippians 3: 12-15:

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.”

To think that Paul:

- after his close encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus
- after all his years of service – spreading the Good News
- after all the trials, hardships, and suffering – in which he experienced the supernatural working of the Spirit in his life and through him to others
- after all that, he still acknowledged that he had not yet arrived, had not yet attained the goal, that he had a way to go.

We can take heart from this, I suggest.

What then is the work of the Spirit in us? Why have we been given this greatest of all gifts – the Spirit of God, the Spirit that was there at the very beginning of creation itself:

SLIDE 3:

Genesis 1: 1-2:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”

And this same Spirit we have been given – to dwell in us and to work in us and through us.

Through both the old and new testaments, we see reference to the many attributes of the Spirit, and ways in which the Holy Spirit works and reveals for us the very nature of God.

During the Last Supper, Jesus promised:

SLIDE 4:

John 14: 16-17:

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate (*parakletos*) to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth."

The Greek word *parakletos* means many things including comforter, helper, counsellor, advocate.

Also, in John 16: 7 we read:

SLIDE 5:

"But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

And again, just before His ascension into heaven, He said:

SLIDE 6:

Luke 24: 49:

"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

So, we see, the Holy Spirit is many things:

Comforter, helper, counsellor, advocate, empowerer ...

But wait – there's more:

SLIDE 7:

Ephesians 1: 13 -14:

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory."

So, the Spirit is the SEAL of our salvation – our GUARANTEE of eternal life, the PROMISE that we belong to God.

In John 16:8 we read:

SLIDE 8:

"When He comes, He will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment"

So now we see that the Holy Spirit works in this world to convict people of their sin and their need for God's righteousness. It is this, as much as anything, that led us to Christ – conviction of sin and our desperate need for redemption.

When we repented and accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we received the Holy Spirit – and the work of spiritual rebirth and cleansing began. The work of the Spirit then is also TRANSFORMATION.

But wait, there is still more:

SLIDE 9:

John 14: 26:

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will **teach** you all things and will **remind** you of everything I have said to you"

So the Spirit will teach us, and remind us of what Christ did, said, promised – the Spirit will guide us to the TRUTH.

When I was preparing the message I gave a few months back about prayer, one of the most amazing things I learned was that the Holy Spirit **intercedes** for us, **reveals** to us what to pray for, how to pray, and even **prays to the Father on our behalf** – **groaning** with us, sharing in our pain, as we seek help, comfort, answers.

SLIDE 10:

Romans 8:26-27:

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."

I don't know about you, but I find all this staggering, mind-boggling, beyond comprehension. No wonder Avril's heart-felt plea for MORE resonated so strongly with many of us.

This leads me then to consider what is the result of this most incredible, generous, incomprehensible gift from God, through His son Jesus Christ.

We have all heard of the Fruits of the Spirit as well as the Gifts of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit – the Gift that keeps on Giving !! Is there no end to the generosity poured out upon us by and through the Love of God, the sacrifice of the Messiah (our

Lord Jesus Christs), and the gift that is the Holy Spirit? In truth – the answer plainly is No – there is no limit.

SLIDE 11:

We are all familiar with Galatians 5:22-23:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

These are the things we experience through the work of the Holy Spirit in us – but also, and more importantly, what we show through lives well lived.

SLIDE 12:

- Unconditional Love for others.
- A deep sense of Joy.
- Peace – regardless of our circumstances
- Restraint (forbearance) – the ability not to retaliate, not to seek revenge
- Being kind, considerate, empathetic, generous
- Goodness – a life lived well
- Faithfulness – an abiding faith in God and His promises. Staying true and holding fast to all the Spirit reveals
- Gentleness – care for others, a quiet disposition (slow to anger)
- Self-Control – resisting temptation

And also, prayerfulness and the power of the Spirit in us – working for the good of others and sharing the Good News.

In the words of Shakespeare _ “a consummation devoutly to be wished”. Little wonder Avril, and we with her, crave MORE.

If I am honest, I know this in my head – and absolutely believe it to be true.

But I cannot claim to have experienced the true depth of God’s love – or to sense the working of the Spirit – in my heart, in my very soul, to the extent that I believe God wishes for me. Certainly not as I believe many of you do. So, like Avril, I want MORE.

From 1 Corinthians 12, we see that, when we are filled – truly filled – we may be given other gifts. What the Bible calls the Gifts of the Spirit.

SLIDE 13:

1 Corinthians 12: 4 –11:

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of **wisdom**, to another a message of **knowledge** by means of the same Spirit,

SLIDE 14:

to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another gifts of **healing** by that one Spirit, to another miraculous **powers**, to another **prophecy**, to another **distinguishing between spirits**, to another **speaking in different kinds of tongues**, and to still another the **interpretation of tongues**. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”

And in Romans 12: 6 – 8, we read:

SLIDE 15:

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is **prophesying**, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is **serving**, then serve; if it is **teaching**, then teach; if it is to **encourage**, then give encouragement; if it is **giving**, then give generously; if it is to **lead**, do it diligently; if it is to **show mercy**, do it cheerfully.”

As with the Fruit of the Spirit, the list of Gifts seem endless:

SLIDE 16:

- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Discerning spirits
- Tongues
- Interpretation
- Prophesying
- Serving
- Teaching
- Encouraging
- Giving
- Leading
- Showing Mercy

Even our declaration of faith is a gift:

SLIDE 17:

1 Corinthians 12: 3:

“no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit”.

So where am I going with all this?

Faith is a mystery – revealed to us, bit by bit, day by day, by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us when first we accepted Christ and, when, by that same Spirit, we declared that “I believe, Jesus is the Christ, Lord and Saviour”.

And that, because we believe, and because we have the Spirit of God living in us, we have each been given gifts, talents, abilities, and a purpose. As part of the one body – the body of believers - the Church, we should ask the Spirit to reveal to us what we have been given and why.

If you had said to me even a year ago that I would be giving the message in church, I would have said you're nuts. I'm not knowledgeable enough, I'm not spiritual enough, I'm certainly not good enough, my life is hardly the shining example of discipleship. My prayer life feels rather pathetic – far from eloquent, hardly inspirational.

And yet, now that I have done this a few times, I realise that I don't need to be any of those things. I just need to be open to the prompting of the Spirit and willing to put in the time and effort to learn. And learning I most certainly am. The Holy Spirit will do the rest.

God can and does use ordinary people, through the working of the Holy Spirit, to do extraordinary things – if we let Him.

If I consider all that we have shared today, I would say the greatest Gift and the most profound Fruit of the Holy Spirit is Love. If we love, many of these other things will come naturally – according to the talents or skills given to us.

I am reminded of what those of us who read the daily devotional “Our Daily Bread” will have read a week or so ago, under the heading “Faithfully Serving Others”:

Paul, writing to encourage Timothy in his calling, wrote:

SLIDE 18:

2 Timothy 4: 6-8:

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

To quote from the Insight section that followed the daily devotional on this passage that day:

“As the apostle anticipated his departure from labour to reward, he was conscious of what really mattered in life. Each believer in Jesus has been given different tasks to do on this earth. With the Spirit’s help, we can strive to do them faithfully. We all long to hear the voice of Christ, our Saviour, say ‘Well done good and faithful servant’ ”.

So, let us therefore step out boldly, trusting that God, through His Spirit will enable us for whatever purpose He has mapped out for us.

So, my prayer for us all is:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us all the fire of your love. **Amen**